

AETA WOMEN INDIGENOUS HEALERS IN THE PHILIPPINES:  
LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Graduate Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education  
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**Abstract**

This study investigates two central research problems. These are: What are the healing practices of Aeta women? What are the implications of the healing practices of Aeta women in the academic discourse?

This inquiry is important for the following reasons: (a) it focuses a reconsidered gaze and empirical lens on the healing practices of Aeta women healers as well as the lessons, insights and perspectives which may have been previously missed; (b) my research attempts not to be 'neutral' but instead be an exercise in participatory action research and as such hopefully brings a new space of decolonization by documenting Aeta women healers' contributions in the political and academic arena; and (c) it is an original contribution to postcolonial, anti-colonial and Indigenous feminist theories particularly through its demonstration the utility of these theories in understanding the health of Indigenous peoples and global health.

There are 12 Aeta women healers who participated in the Talking Circle. This study is significant in grounding both the theory and the methodology while comparatively

evaluating claims calibrated against the benchmark of the actual narratives of Aeta women healers. These evaluations subsequently categorized my findings into three themes: namely, identity, agency and representation.

This work is also important in illustrating the Indigenous communities' commonalities on resistance, accommodation, evolution and devolution of social institutions and leadership through empirical example. The work also sheds light on how the members of our Circle and their communities' experiences with outsider intrusion and imposed changes intentionally structured to dominate them as Indigenous people altered our participants and their communities. Though the reactions of the Aeta were and are unique in this adaptive process they join a growing comparative scholarly discussion on how contexts for colonization were the same or different. This thesis therefore joins a growing comparative educational literature on the contextual variations among global experiences with colonization. This is important since Indigenous Peoples' experiences are almost always portrayed as unique or "exotic". I can now understand through comparison that many of the processes from military to pedagogical impositions bore striking similarities across various colonial, geographical and cultural locations.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **Background**

Much of what I gloss in academic literature as the "History" of Aeta people mirrors the tactical abuses and Eurocentric gaze found in accounts constructed from stern perspectives which were, I argue, Eurocentric and frequently explicitly or tacitly racist. Aeta people are surely not unique in this experience. Thus it may be argued to be a modal category of experience when describing the effects of Western colonization on the Indigenous People. It is difficult, for example, to read the 10,000 some pages of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples or RCAP (1996) that gives testimony of the experiences of personal and collective brutalization, residential schools, and theft of children, appropriation and destruction of lands and customs and other inhumanities without emotion. Similar experiences occurred across the globe, from Africa to Asia, South America and beyond, to virtually all of what I now call the inhabited world (Olson 2012). The experiences are always unique to the people experiencing them but they are scarcely "unique" when considered in their entirety. In "World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability" Amy Chua (2003) comparatively illustrates how importing 'market democracy' has too often resulted in 'ethnic hatred' and 'social instability'. The changes are often multi-dimensional; Arthur Crosby, in "The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492" (1972) persuasively argues that the main effects of the European invasion and subsequent "Columbian Exchange" were as profoundly biological and ecological as social, political, pedagogical, theological, linguistic and institutional

impositions and transformations. The ideas of Fanon (1963) and so many others in the growing literature on critical discourse on Indigenous people, lead to what Genovese (1965) in describing the experiences of American Blacks with slavery, says were variations and permutations in which he labeled “accommodations and resistances” in evolving and episodic strategies to reclaim culture (and self determination). The Aeta in general, including their women healers, who participated in the Talking Circle are a case study in the interactive dynamics between oppression and liberation, inhumanity and irrepressible parts of humanity which resist this form of repression. I shall argue that they are a classic case study in these processes regarding the dynamics of colonization and resistance. Our understanding of Aeta history commence from Western scholarly records where “beginning” means not the beginning but rather the point of European intervention. I shall begin our review (appropriately enough for those dealing with healing) with accounts of the outbreak of disease.

There was an outbreak of cholera in the Philippines from 1899-1903 (Illeto 1995; Sullivan 1988). “It was the beginning of one of the most terrible epidemics of modern times, lasting until February 1904 and, taking by official estimate 109,461 lives, 4, 386 in Manila” (Sullivan 1988, p. 284). People from all walks of life were affected and concerned by the way this epidemic decimated the population and left many wondering whether it was an act of God or just another human error. The Secretary of the Interior, Dean Worcester, and the Commissioner of Public Health, Dr. Victor Heiser, both American citizens, were charged with finding ways to stop the spread of cholera

among the Filipino people. Iletto (1995) describes the therapy that individuals afflicted with cholera received:

The cholera war proceeded along familiar military lines. Army surgeons, for one, were armed with trial 'magic bullets' with which to shoot down the bacillus. One widely used drug was benzozone, the ingestion of which was found to burn the mouth and stomach linings. It eventually was diluted and mixed in with solutions used to irrigate the bowels and small intestines. Routine treatment involved the use of benzoyl-acetyl-peroxide, guiacol carbonate, calomel, potassium permanganate, two percent tannic acid, and dilutes sulphuric acid. These treatments were really experimental in nature, based on the assumption that some drug ought to be able to attack and destroy the cholera vibrio within the patient. The American doctors' use of such and other, unfamiliar, methods of treatment only brought about an aversion in Filipino cholera patients so marked in many instances as to necessitate the use of force in the administering of medicine. In the end none of the medicine, at least in Heifer's experience in the Philippines, proved of any value. (p. 61)

Nevertheless, despite assurances from the colonial government that Western trained doctors had the solution to this epidemic, the Filipinos continued to seek the help of Indigenous healers (Iletto 1995; Rafael 1995; Sullivan 1988). Among the Indigenous groups whose knowledge and healing practices were sought were Aeta women healers (Krober 1919). Aeta are one of the Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines who resisted

colonialism and “ensured the preservation of their customs and character as a people” (Shimizu 1989, p. 11). According to Coloma (2004) “colonialism is the conquest and direct control of other people’s land and resources” (p.2), however, Dei (2006) argues that “the colonial in anti-colonial refers to anything imposed and dominating rather than that which is simply foreign and alien” (p. 3). In this study, the word colonizer will be used to identify anybody who dominates and controls (or attempts to control) Aeta people.

The Aeta healers use herbal medicine and offer prayers to the God or *Apo Dios* in healing the sick. To the colonial government, this was unacceptable because it was considered devoid of scientific rigor. For example, when one of the Aeta falls ill a culturally normal response is to offer food to the ancestor to seek forgiveness. Scientific authenticity was a way to eliminate the self sought directive prescriptions that Indigenous healers had proffered to Filipinos. This entered in to direct conflict with Eurocentric beliefs centered on Euro cultural and historical supremacy as a means of taking control of the population and, in doing so, damaged the identity of the Indigenous People (Illeto 1995). In this context, if the colonial government had allowed the Aeta women healers to heal, it would have demolished the claim by Dean Worcester that the war against cholera was a manifestation of American heroism and military skill (Illeto 1995). Since one of the goals of the colonial government was to portray that Filipinos needed help, “at times, [the] proscribed healer was the center of attention and [was] promptly suppressed; in other cases, the normal ritual life of the people was disrupted” (Illeto 1995, p. 72).

This American jingoism followed a well-established set of colonial governance tactics: when Spain established the Philippine as its colony, “the minorization of the Indigenous People started” (Asian Development Bank (ADB) 2002, p. 9). The ADB (2002) describes how the Indigenous Peoples were treated:

They were labeled as barbarians, pagans, and all sorts of derogatory names. Soon, even the assimilated *indios* internalized these prejudices against Indigenous Peoples. (p. 10)

However, Jocano (2000) explains that none of these labels characterizes their real lives (p. 17):

They are not savage, primitive, or backward people. They only have different cultural ways of thinking, believing, feeling, and acting. They have complex social institutions and elaborate cultural traditions. The idea of their primitiveness has become deeply rooted in the consciousness of many lowland Filipinos because past writers, including scholars, have unnecessarily and negatively exaggerated many of the ethnic beliefs and practices...In fact, many of the past and the present conflicts between and among the different ethnic groups (hinterland and rural) in the country are largely due to ignorance of one another’s cultural or sub cultural orientation. (p. 17)

The consequence of colonization is too often the superimposition of foreign ideology and what Marx labeled as “superstructure”, and foreign institutions which change our understandings of the world, refocus our gaze and negate competing world views,

institutions and sets of practices for self governance and ruling (Fanon 1963; Memmi 1965). Colonization prescriptive bromide is that if I do not practice the Eurocentric way of living and knowing, we are not “normal”, “intelligent”, or “civilized”. From this perspective, the Filipinos who were assimilated through colonialism started to perceive the backwardness of these Indigenous healers as truth that was "taken for granted" (ADB 2002). This culminated into considerable elements of the Filipino population identifying with the Eurocentric cultures, ending with recognition by the dominant discourse (Constantino 1978). Despite the internalization of these exogenous oppressive forces resistances persisted. Rang-ay, one of the Aeta women healers, said in Ikolano, one of the dialects that they speak, in which I am also fluent, “*ti kinapudno isu iti agballigi*”, which translates to “the truth shall prevail”. This is stenographic shorthand testimony to the fact that their resilience, belief in them-their culture and healing powers - and steadfast fortitude cannot be demonized, characterized, or defined by ignorance and oppression. Their standards for intercultural evaluation and interaction are simple, and in their own way 'Universal': They want justice to prevail and they lament cultural violence and lack of reciprocal cultural recognition. The attrition toll to their culture's data bases by these forces of domination is measurable in their memories: the women, as keepers of this shared knowledge, attest that much of the richness of the knowledge has been forgotten and coupled with the failure to replenish and to remake these practices in cultural teaching, have culminated in their invisibility in the Philippine history (Pecson-Fernandez 1989). The concept of ideational hegemony is again hardly unique in geo-politics, state and ethnic formation, migration, and warfare,

in terms of both the destructive forces of colonization and neo-colonialism on knowledge loss and metamorphous of self-identification. V. Y. Mudimbe in his opus magnum "The Invention of African Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge African Systems of Thought" (Mudimbe 1988) using Levi-Strauss, Foucault and others as intellectual guides argues that the creation of Africa in its current form is a result of the dialectical interplay of both colonial impositions (warfare, state, economic, education, religion, politics and so on) between the ebb and flow of Euro-colonialism and resistances that emerge (and wane) among various ethnic groups, the states imposed on them and the various media and mediations that govern them. Afro-American scholars, such as Jacob H. Carruthers argue in a similar vein that both in Africa and in African places of significance African Diaspora including the United States and Caribbean, these forces of ordination and resistance have formed what he labels' "The Invention of Africa and Neocolonialism" and what amounts to intellectual warfare (Carruthers 2009). These arguments mirror the ones I am presenting around the testimony of the Aeta women healers and how the Aeta have been processed, patronized and paternalized in the dynamics of Philippine state history (including "education").

Labels are another colonial tactic used to marginalize Aeta women healers. "As women we had been living in an intellectual, cultural, and political world, from whose making we had been almost entirely excluded and in which we had been recognized as no more than marginal voices" (Smith 1987, p. 1). The impact of expansionist doctrine on our lives and on the lives of the Indigenous People is suspect at best, if the goal of

education (and as such, cultural transmission) can be seen as the enabling of what Carlyle (1843) sets as education's goal: to "let each be all they may" and, at worst, despicable in its inhumanity to others. What is again so tragic, as I look in a transnational context, is that this is hardly historically unique. The ironic part is that these ideational practices, as much as any army or invasion, may be used as instruments to implement unequal ordination between cultures and peoples. This intrusion was no accident and the ground level practitioners were hardly street bullies of the colonizing classes; instead they were the pillar institutions, such as the churches, schools and anthropological and scholarly discourses that hypothetically were to be agencies of liberation and humanity. Instead, the operational modal reality was one which categorized the oppressed as "high and low", civilized and uncivilized, barbaric (versus Western scientific). This clearly exposes that many institutions were used as instruments of acculturation, marginalization, oppression, and other forms of violence. They were what some British working class labeled in the vernacular as "soft cops" -the State's way of imposing ordinate order and curriculum. Again, it is striking how universal this phenomenon can be manifested. For example, de Landa, the priest who literally burned books among the Maya so that libraries of knowledge in the thousands were reduced to the three codexes's (de Landa 1978). The dependence of residential schools across the British Empire on ideational tools, such as those employed against the Aeta women healers and their communities (Silvina and Beech 2008; Block 2004; Arruda 2003; Kuokkanen 2003; Smith and Simon 2001; Daes 2000; Matthews, Morris and Jenkins 1999; Ananda 1994; Bliss 1990) are similarly well-documented. Fanon (1996)



states that the nature of colonialism is such that it “is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content; by a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it” (p. 238). The colonized are inundated with skewed curricular models and made to believe that what they have, in terms of beliefs and culture, is nonexistent, has no basis, and that those not of hegemonic (European White) classes should thus disengage from ancestral ways of life and adopt the settler culture. This leads to a dismantling of Indigenous communities and also of children's knowledge bases. Functionally, this is spiritual warfare and cultural genocide.

Self identity cannot be realized without the presence of a cultural background. Culture stands out as a shield and helps defend one from attack; based on the fact that culture is the definition of one’s identity, it is important that I become “aware of power, the power of colonialism” (Caicedo 1997, p. 3). Caicedo argues that this power can subjugate our existence in society, in the sense that our voice will be marginalized or never be heard at all, and our identity totally will be negated. Power can be used to destroy or to build. Power was used as part of our regal history as an implement to destroy the identity of Indigenous People through defacing their reputations and creating images of “menacing portraits” among the rest of the Filipino population. These patterns of domination become metamorphosed: for contemporary Aeta women healers, instrumental oppressors are not the Spaniards or Americans, although the legacies of these colonizers still exists, but instead the primary engine of minority oppression is the Philippines government which continues the colonial legacy by

implementing policies such as the Mining Act of 1995 (ADB 2002) that destroyed the ancestral land of the Aeta people (Tauli-Corpuz 2006). These governmental policies are aided and conjoined by the non-Aeta people in the Philippines who internalized the ideology of colonization, thereby, in effect, themselves becoming colonizers. The post-colonial society has been used in transmitting seemingly educational curricular plans and alien lessons in a mandatory way. This has an effect in the breaking of the knowledge transmission linkages and traditions in native communities, affecting socializing agencies as wide ranging as family, community sharing and traditions. Through this mechanism, cultural belief systems of Aeta People are deemed outdated and instead, Western educational beliefs and cultures permeate their lives. Again this was hardly an unintentional goal of the colonizers. The goal of residential schools in Canada and elsewhere in the British Empire was that a "successful" school was one in which the child ceased to identify with their Indigenous heritage and instead declared they were to be "Canadian". This meant giving up claim to land, exemption from taxation, right to education in one language. In Canada, such schools were not only State sponsored indeed State mandated. Residential schools where students succumbed were administered by the four dominant Christian sects which operationally and legally administered them on behalf of the Canadian State. It is not slanderous to see the goals of this operation by settler institutions to be land appropriation and cultural genocide aided at eliminating Indigenous claims of Souvenir against the Empire. If this seems a bold claim consider the empirical results such as the highest youth suicide rates among any ethnic group globally; the violations of agreed Treaty Rights; land poaching;

introduction of alcohol and unscrupulous and usurious relations; child kid napping; illegal use of police to commit human rights abuses such as leaving children in freezing conditions in remote areas with no transportation; use of torture instruments such as pins through tongues on children who spoke in Native languages in schools. The list goes on beyond what is 'civilized' to read (RCAP, 1996). It was the purported “helping” and “educational” formal social sectors of Canadian and British foreign society which administered this State violence towards children and their communities.

Analogously Aeta do not consider themselves Filipinos because of the anguish and distress that they have endured from the Filipinos (Shimizu 1989). Shimizu (1989) describes the experiences of the Aeta People in the hands of Filipinos<sup>1</sup>:

...Angeles City, where Clark Air Base is located, used to be a forest inhabited by Ayta (Aeta). A man named Don Angel Pantaleon was able to drive the Aytas away, and he developed the area which is now Angeles City...Ayta territory and kidnappings for slavery were still going on even during the early years of the twentieth century. (p. 12)

Reed (1904) narrates the desolation dished to Aeta people by the Filipinos as follows:

This is a story of our ancestors about the land at Santa Marta. The owner of this land at Santa Marta was the ancestor of Aytas. But this land of Santa Marta was alienated, leaving the Aytas poor. They sold a piece of land for one bundle of tobacco leaves, a piece of land for one bolo, a piece

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<sup>1</sup> Filipinos are non-Aeta People who belong to the 'brown race' and live in lowland.

of land for a bundle of rice plant. Another person sold a piece of land for a blanket. That is why this land at Santa Marta was taken away and that is why the Aytas became poor. This is because Ilocanos and Filipinos fooled us and bought the land with very low cost. That is why the Aytas started to suffer. For a bundle of tobacco leaves, for one bolo, for one bundle of rice, for one blanket, they paid a piece of land. That is why the Aytas are suffering poverty up to today. (p. 70)

The above statement was taken from Reed's 1904 research. To demonstrate that the maltreatment persists today, Rang-ay narrates in the Talking Circle with the 12 Aeta women healers, her personal experience with the Filipinos:

*My experience with the Filipinos is bad. One day, I went to the market in town to sell fruits and vegetable. A man and a woman approached me and asked the price of saging or banana. I told them the price, instead of buying, they took two pieces and peeled them right in front of me and ate them. I was happy to see that they enjoyed my banana and hoped in my heart that they would pay me. Instead, after eating, they left without paying me. They did not even thank me. I was sad because it was very apparent that they did not respect me. This is one example of my experience from these Filipinos, there were more and they were even worse.*

The negative experiences of the Aeta People with Filipinos, as described above, have contributed to the many reasons why the Aeta do not want to consider themselves Filipinos. "Their antagonistic feeling towards the lowlanders made the Aytas preserves their own cultural heritage. While it is true that they have experienced various changes

in their language, culture, and society, still the Aytas are distinct from the culture that influenced them" (Shimizu 1989, p. 14).

Western processes of assimilation and domination, as we have argued, constitute an array of mutually supportive socializing processes with varying modalities. One such tactic is to assign, as the measures and instrumental datum points of "authenticity", standards which are their own and devalue Indigenous culture. Defining the criteria, units, goals and standards, in other words, acting as arbiter of the measuring rod-creates an in-built cultural bias to the process, which is far from being open as it does not open its own judgments and measures to counter argument or to counter discourse (Giroux 1997; McLaren 1987). Aeta women healers again offer a textbook instance of these spurious intellectual processes of knowledge evaluation and epistemology: the colonizers dictate standards and practice in all but absolute disregard of the Aeta and their cultural existence. Eurocentric school rules are self-referencing and fail to engage in discourse, exchange or respectful co-learning (Tauli-Corpuz 2006). The technocratic and ideological inflexibility is an implementer of this indoctrination, as the exact counter point to Aeta women's practices, which are community-based and dialogical as described by Freire (1973). This is evident even in the smallest detail, including the canonical ordering pedagogy in their discourse and presentation. For instance, the Aeta women healers commence cultural healing vocation by acknowledging the existence of their Creator (despite the alleged backwardness or "superstition", this is very different from the homage and pledge of allegiance given to the State and often God by any parochial school of any Euro-Christian demonization as

was mandated in Ontario School Act until late in the 20th century (Wotherspoon 2009). They believed that their healing knowledge was an endowment from their Creator, who also aided in the healing process. Spirituality is thus embedded in their healing practices.

Spirituality for the Aeta, as is commonly practiced by many cultural groups globally, entails giving thanks to their Creator for life and for the knowledge and wisdom that they possess. It is also a way of giving thanks to all other creations, dead or alive. Spirituality is, in addition, a means of respecting and abiding by their worldview that has existed for generations and has historically been embraced by their ancestors. From the Aeta perspective, worldview is about the values and morals to which they have to adhere in order to be in harmony with both the material and spirit worlds. These worldviews encompass respect, love, forgiveness, and looking at things in a cyclical and non-linear manner. Aeta women healers accept true equality among all creations. Their credence is that each one of us is purposely ordained with a celestial purpose.

Aeta women healers conceptualize that their purpose is to disseminate their knowledge of healing to those who need it. Healing is not seen as a means of attaining wealth but rather a way of sustaining their society. It is a way of sharing a talent and bringing about change in the Aeta community. It is a way to give back to both the Aeta and the non-Aeta community.

Goldin-Rosenberg (2002) explains the position of women healers in the community:

...most cultures, Indigenous knowledge in women's... hands were integral to the maintenance of health. Caring, midwifery, herbalist, and other modalities included the interplay of body, mind, spirit and the Earth...indigenous healing practices maintained by lay women for thousands of years remain among the most important healing practices in most rural parts of the world. (p. 139 &147)

Aeta women healers, like other Indigenous women with special knowledge in other communities, have been playing an integral part in maintaining the well-being of their people. For Aeta women healers, well-being is a form of decolonization. Aeta women healers discuss are aware and they "know" that colonization was an endemic etiological agent in their suffering from different illnesses brought about by the immense degradation of their ecology. Again, the practice and assumptions are neither the value system nor the methodological standard practices of Western trained healers; instead, they bear remarkably similar insights to those of many other Indigenous cultures. The American South West Navaho have the concept of Koyaanisqatdi or "life out of balance". The concept speaks about the violation of nature and imbalance leading to 'illness' or absence of wellness. These are ideas now embraced by many, arguing for an ecological and environmental approach to health and life. Aeta women healers systemically argue that is deleterious for the body because it creates imbalances in the system that result in headaches and body pains, among other ailments. Their explanation is that the Philippines has now become the dumping zone for used machines from First World countries. They also equate the change in weather to the

cutting of trees and mining which has been taking place in the Philippines. They explain that the world is changing and that they are worried because people are suffering from increased levels and greater numbers of diseases. Their healing practice therefore is to counter the work of colonization and, more recently, the work of global capitalism, whose aims are to generate profits. These women probably have not read Amy Chua's "World on Fire" (despite the fact that she is Chinese-Filipino/American) yet their life- and cultural experiences material reality and ontological insights lead them to similar conclusions about the pejorative effects of exporting "global democracy" and its resulting racism, environmental degradation and acrogenic consequences. Aeta women healers also know that while colonizers from Britain or Spain may no longer be present in the Philippines, but their presence on ontological curricular models, informal learning and "taken for granted truths", and cultural prejudice continues to be felt.

Capitalism for Aeta women is about gaining wealth at the expense of others, especially those people who do not have control over their resources. Aeta healers have maintained the healing practices that their ancestors employed as a way of resisting these oppressive forces. They work in the possibility of hope, a hope that gives them the strength to carry on their culture and tradition. They know that their identity has been damaged; they have been essentialized on the basis of their gender, and have been ridiculed on the basis of their culture, and incorrectly characterized as "primitive" women. They have endured ridicule about their culture (ironically) on the cultural filching of their artifacts without seeking their permission (based on the ludicrous cultural conjecture which is without documentation or counter argument offered as



“evidence” and the bromide that labeled them as “stupid”). Even though the colonizer defines them as backward they nonetheless appropriated from their insights when there was wealth and profit to be garnered. Colonists, for instance, ended up patenting their knowledge and claiming that it was theirs. For example, “corporations are prospecting throughout native lands for seeds...they take our seeds and our knowledge home usually without our permission-and patent our plants” (Tauli-Corpuz 2006). This clearly shows how the Transnational National Companies (TNCs) have been taking Indigenous knowledge and using it for their own gain, yet turning back and claiming that Indigenous People are barbaric (Tauli-Corpuz 2006; Mander 2006).

Further, Sterling (2002) talks about her grandmothers who are the cultural professors:

The story of Yetko, Sophie, and the fishtrap provides a model for examining the goals, processes, content, and outcomes of traditional Nlakapamux education and helps to identify some criteria for success, the most important being the presence of the grandmothers who are cultural professors...Their teachings go beyond the acquisition of skills to the deeper philosophical transmissions of Nlakapamux values through oral traditions. Through the genre of spilaxam, or personal narrative, the grandmothers demonstrate what it means to live successfully and happily as Nlakapamux people. (p. 5)

Sterling documents that her grandmothers possess the knowledge we need in order to live a successful life. The story of Yetko and Sophie and the fish trap is similar to that of

Aeta women healers. They have the experience and knowledge about how to heal. They are the cultural professors. They know what it takes to be healthy. Their healing practices go beyond making the physical body strong, instead adopting a holistic focus on ensuring that the social, emotional and spiritual well-being of a person is also taken care of. They can communicate with the terrestrial world as well as the celestial world. They believe that everything is related and interconnected. We cannot live without the presence of the “other”. They believe, like many African tribes, and Indigenous groups in both North and South America and across the globe, that it is a circle of interrelationship in which a break can be the cause of the loss of social, cultural and political, as well as economic, well-being. To Aeta women healers, their environment should be respected if they are to live in harmony.

This study is aimed at providing historical evidence of the healing power of Aeta women healers in the Philippines and how they use their healing practices as a form of resistance against imperialism. Aeta women healers have been employing their oral tradition to transmit their culture and healing practices. Aeta women healers know that society is changing and that they need to start having written materials that relate to their culture and healing practices, as both a means of reaching out to the people outside of their community, and a means of sustaining their knowledge. They know that non-Aeta people need to get to know them in order to change their perceptions of the Aeta people and that of other Indigenous Peoples in the world.

Aeta People, as is expressed verbally in the interviews in subsequent chapters, also deconstruct how they have been labeled in text. This, however, does not mean that

they are leaving behind their oral tradition, but instead illustrates that culture and traditions are fluid. They still practice their oral tradition within their community. It is also important to have a written record of the Aeta healing practices as a means of raising awareness among the Aeta community in both the Philippines and globally. A written record will bring one of the “multiple and collective readings of the world...” (Dei 2002, p. 70). While foregrounding the historical legacy of Aeta women’s healing power in the Philippines, this thesis endeavors to campaign for the maintenance and sustenance of the knowledge of these women. As the colonizer used education as a tool in the dilapidation of their culture and practices, Aeta women healers seek to use the same instrument to counter the work of colonialism.

### ***The research problem and purpose of the research***

The central research problems of this study were:

- What are the healing practices of Aeta women?
- What are the implications of the healing practices of Aeta women in the academic discourse?

The purpose of this research was to explore the healing practices of Aeta women. It was also to document the resiliency and agency elements that have contributed to the continuity of this knowledge. The Aeta women healers’ agency is related to economic, spiritual, social, political and cultural factors. The research examined the different forms of resistance against the imposition of colonized knowledge, and how Aeta women healers negotiated their positions in a society that valued the knowledge of men over

women. This research is important for the following reasons: (a) it focuses on the healing practices of Aeta women healers and the lessons that we can learn from them; and (b) it brings a new space of decolonization. Aeta women healers' contributions in the political and academic arena are thus highlighted.

Even though there has been a growing number of scholarly works on the Aeta people (e.g. Vanoverbergh 1937; Gravan 1964; Nicolaisen 1974 & 1975; Bennagen 1977; Estioko-Griffin & Griffin 1981a, 1981b; Brian 1981; Navin 1982; Rosaldo 1983; Estioko-Griffin 1984; Bion 1984; Hurtado, Hawkes, Hill & Kaplan 1985), a study of Aeta women healing practice and its implications for academic discourse is missing, and this study addresses that gap. Finally, this study shows how anti-colonial, postcolonial, and Indigenous feminism theories can be used to understand the Aeta and Filipino relations and how the themes of identity, agency and representation inform the narratives of Aeta women healers.

***My Personal Location***

I was born in the Philippines during the dictatorship of the late President Ferdinand Marcos. I belong to one of the Indigenous groups of the Philippines, called Ilokano. During the dictatorship, my family was displaced from our own ancestral land. My parents became servants of Filipinos who were engrossed in the capitalist system. These bourgeois exploited my parents by letting them work in the field on meager payment that was not commensurate to their hard work. It was in this context of desperation that I was forced to work at a very tender age of four.

I grew up in a location close to the Aeta community in Cagayan. I remember the times when my mother would take me to the Aeta community to play with their children. We really enjoyed eating together, sharing stories and, most of all, exchanging different kinds of food. My parents taught me how to respect my Aeta friends. I had the privilege of seeing most of their healing practices and traditions. I knew that they possessed great knowledge and wisdom. When there was somebody who was sick in my family, my mother would consult the Aeta Elders on what should be done to heal such a sickness. I saw how they helped my mother in such circumstances. They would explain to her what to do. Because I was very young, I did not understand some aspects, but I knew that the Elders were teaching her how to heal. After telling her what to do, they would give her a bark of a tree, dried leaves and bones of wild animals. My mother would boil them and then she would ask the sick person to drink the concoction. I was amazed because, after a while, the sick member of the family would get well.

I also remember when one of our water buffalo got lost. My parents were very worried because the water buffalo is one of the most important animals in the Philippines. To us, it is one of the members of the family. It helps us plow the field and carry heavy objects. My father went out to the forest in search of the water buffalo. Unfortunately, he could not find it. He went to one of the Aeta Elders to seek help on the whereabouts of this animal. The Elder performed a ritual, and in that ritual the good spirit told the Elder where the water buffalo was. My father went to the spot where they had told him to go, and, to his shock, he found the water buffalo lying there.

These were some of my personal experiences with the Aeta community. I have endearing and enduring memories of them. I grew up fully respecting the Aeta People. However, I had to leave our village to go to school. I stayed with my grandmother in another town, while my parents stayed in the village to work on our farm. Years later, I realized that poverty was the reason for our separation. Our situation was very difficult because the capitalist system dictated the price of rice. The fluctuations of rice prices were everyday occurrences which were unfair to the farmers. The entrepreneurs following "maximize profit" dictums would set prices that did not take into account the costs of growing the rice. Because of this, my parents were functionally marginalized in classic "company store" conditions which rendered them all but prisoners of the capitalist system. The merchants bought agricultural products from the farmers at a very low price and sold other goods (i.e. farm equipment and other factory made goods) to these poor farmers at an inflated cost. Most farmers, including my parents, lived a "hand to mouth" existence, wondering if they would have enough money to

meet the needs of their families. The farmers in the Philippines formed/belonged to an exploited and oppressed community.

I completed my grade school while living with my grandmother. When I was in elementary school, I started reading a history book. In this book, the Indigenous People of the Philippines were depicted as savage people. It was implied that, because they were savage, we had to be careful with them because they could kill people just as they killed wild animals. I was very surprised because I knew that what the author had written was wrong. My friends were Aeta but they never killed us. I told my elementary teacher that I did not believe what had been written in that book. However, my teacher told me that the book was published and that, therefore, it should be correct, and that I did not have any reason to question it. I was sad and, at the back of my mind, I knew who my Aeta friends were. I said to my teacher that we needed to change what was written in the book. I was told that, instead of complaining, I should study hard.

I knew that I needed to study hard because I could see how hard my parents had worked, just to send me to school. I wanted to write a book about my Aeta friends. I wanted to make something out of myself, to do something about the oppression that my parents and the Aeta people were facing each day. I had to leave my town to go to high school. It was hard to leave my family and live in an impersonal dormitory where no one knew who I was. The most discouraging part of school was being bombarded with information that I knew was untrue, especially about the Aeta people. Each passing year in high school increased my anxiety. I felt a lot of pressure to do well because I felt that I was the only hope that my family had to improve our lives. I felt I

was also the only hope with regard to changing how different people looked at Indigenous People. It was difficult to challenge what had been written in books. I was very surprised because I could see that my teachers truly believed that Aeta people were primitive and illiterate.

I attended university as a result of the hard work of my parents. The education system that I went through was not exhaustive enough in explaining the real source of oppression. This was due to the fact that the system itself was an institution of the colonizers who were the oppressors. In this context, how could an oppressor disseminate a contrivance that could be used to bring down his empire? In essence, I did not know the oppressor and it was in this sense that sometimes I was fighting a ghost oppressor—an oppressor that I did not even understand. The education system gave the impression that the Filipino man was the oppressor. However, based on my experience, I knew that my father had never oppressed my mother, my sister or me. I had also observed how the Aeta people respected their women.

I began my university studies in the Bachelor of Arts, Political Science program at University of the Philippines in 1992. At the end of my program, I wrote a thesis on the “Assessment of the Role of the National Alliance of Advocates of Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines in the Popularization of the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples to their Ancestral Land in Camachiles Floridablanca, Philippines”. In this work, I focused on: 1) Filipino Indigenous Peoples’ way of life; 2) their displacement from their ancestral land; and 3) their resiliency and agency. I lived in their community for three months. During this time, I learnt a lot about their culture and practices. They accepted



me in their community as if I were one of their own. They allowed me to be part of their healing rituals. They showed me how to gather and plant different kinds of vegetables. They taught me how to catch fish and hunt wild animals. At night, we would gather in a circle and listen to stories from the Elders. They taught me about their worldviews. They shared their concerns regarding the government of the Philippines. They also shared their experiences interacting with Filipino and Western people and spoke of how they had treated. Some experiences mentioned were positive, but most were negative. They explained to me the reason they did not consider themselves Filipino, and assured me they did not hate the Filipinos.

The work that I had done for my thesis had given me insight into the issues of colonization and appropriation of Indigenous knowledge. I gave them a copy of my thesis. After my Bachelors' degree, I continued my advocacy work in the community. I worked as a writer for 'Legislative Alert', the journal for the Centre for Legislative Development in the Philippines. I published articles on education, environment and Indigenous Peoples' rights to their ancestral lands. However, I realized that I needed to further my education in order for me to understand the complexities surrounding the issues of education and Indigenous Peoples.

It was at this time that I became an active member of a feminist organization. I maintained my involvement in the group throughout my time at the University. After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in 1996, I started coursework for an M.A. in Women and Development Studies. There were many women, especially the Indigenous women, who were in unsafe conditions. Some were being raped by non-Aeta people.

I came to Canada in 2003. Living in a new country without any relatives was very difficult. I was not able to get a job for several months because my educational attainment was not recognized in the Canadian job market. After a few months, I was hired to work in a community centre. The president of the organization gave me a title of "Director". I did not know what it meant. I worked 12 hours a day at a rate of less than a minimum wage. I worked for almost a year in the same organization. I was very aware of my situation and, especially, how they treated me. However, I had no choice at that time because I needed to pay my bills. Here I was, a woman who had fought to free others from oppression, forced to live the life of an oppressed woman. It did not make sense.

I left the centre and accepted a job as a health care teacher. It sounded like a better option, though, in the end, I experienced the same kind of oppression. When people looked at me, they saw an immigrant woman and they saw someone who they could exploit. The owner of the school argued that I did not have a Canadian education and so I had no right to ask him to pay me minimum wage. Before I left the school, I knew I had to do something for my students who were working as nannies because I could see how the system was so exploitative and oppressive to them. I made sure that all of them passed their exams in order to ensure that they had options of getting better jobs.

I applied to attend graduate school and was accepted at OISE. I was back in school. What good does schooling do? My mother knows that education is one of the apparatus of colonialism. I cannot blame her for taking this stand, but I knew one day

she would come to understand that her daughter went this far and took the risk in order to reclaim the power that had been taken away by the colonizer.

Why and how can my life story be relevant to my thesis? The use of the life story is to show that this thesis is not the beginning of my involvement with the different issues relating to Indigenous women in the Philippines. I feel that there is urgent need to continue the journey from where I left, and to not lose the vision while I am in the West. I acknowledge my privilege, though I also recognize that I am connected to Indigenous women, not only through my roots, but also through the fact that I got my very first healing and cultural lessons from them. I am also hoping that I can intervene in the issue of their exclusion from the knowledge production arena.

### ***Significance of the Study***

#### **Significance in terms of Findings of the Research**

The results of this research can be described as significant from the perspective of the theory and the methodology which encompass use of the actual narratives of Aeta women healers, categorized into three themes: namely identity, agency, and representation.

The theoretical framework employs anti-colonial, postcolonial and Indigenous/Aboriginal feminism theories. In employing these theories, I look at how they highlight identity, agency and representation. Despite the debates and tensions among these theories, I argue that they converge on the notion that the identity of

Indigenous Peoples is demonized by the colonizer (Dei & Asgharzadeh 2001; Griffiths & Tiffin 1995). These frameworks also acknowledge that Indigenous People possess agency and that Indigenous People are represented in written texts in a negative way (Dei, Hall & Rosenberg 2002; Smith 1999; Landry & Maclean 1996; Spivak 1990). The postcolonial theory helped me analyze the identity, agency and representation of Aeta women healers in a more complex manner. The postcolonial theory taught me how to analyze the narratives of women by employing the Subaltern agency, the “in-between” and “beyond” spaces, and to look at differences as power (Spivak 1995; Bhabha 1995).

The Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism theory helped me theorize the lived experiences of women in knowledge production, and also to get highlights of the contributions of Aeta women healers in the political, economic, social, cultural and spiritual arenas (Green 2007; Kuokkanen 2007). The Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism framework also helped me realize the implications of the work of Aeta women healers for the discourse in the academy and for engagement in the local, national and global public health arenas (Green 2007; Tauli-Corpuz 2006; Shiva 1991).

Anti-colonial theory helped me critically analyze how colonization impacted the lives of the Aeta women healers and also to investigate their stories of resistance and agency. However, despite the rich knowledge that has been offered by postcolonial, anti-colonial and Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism theories, I found a gap in the area of “*ayat*”, which means love in Aeta language. *Ayat* has stood out through all the narratives of the Aeta women healers. This means that they are able to continue healing Aeta or non-Aeta people, despite different locations, and despite the fact that they

needed to resist colonization and to work for the betterment of their community by reducing the impact of colonization, all because of their belief in the principles of love that they embrace. According to Aeta women healers, no matter how hard we work, without love, our endeavors are ephemeral. The Aeta women healers consequently contend that the sustainability of their culture, traditions and way of life calls for giving more priority to the concept of "*ayat*". Subsequently, throughout this study, I recommended "*ayat*" as an "open-discourse" and as one of the wedges in the process of decolonization. "*Ayat*" must be considered as an academic discourse which enables us to sustain our indigeneity.

In my methodology I intended to employ both individual and group interviews. However, as I embarked on the research in the community of Aeta women healers, this methodology was changed. The 12 Aeta women healers who participated in the study recommended that we use the Talking Circle, because it is a part of their culture, and having a conversation in a circle was considered a much fairer way of obtaining information. The methodology was thus reframed and the Talking Circle was used as a key methodological tool. Three Talking Circles were held. There were four Aeta women healers in each Talking Circle. I was able to build a strong relationship with the Aeta women healers. They taught me that talking in a circle connotes respect for everybody within it, and that respect, with regard to the material and spirit world, is part of their worldview.

In the actual narratives of Aeta women healers, the themes identity, agency and representation were the focus of the Talking Circles. For identity, Aeta women healers

shared their names, age, and how they had acquired healing knowledge. They discussed racial identity and their race as a form of empowerment. They showed different ways of looking at oppression on the basis of race, class, gender, culture and spirituality. They shared information about their ways of understanding healing and they explained how it became their identity. They also talked about gender as an identity and how this became a form of agency. Finally, they explained their worldview and how their worldview can be considered as their identity.

In their narratives on agency, the following sub-topics were brought to light: 1) I am the light of my family and my community; 2) I heal because I want to improve the health of my people; 3) Healing is a means of resisting the modern way of life; and 4) My ancestors taught me how to honour other human beings. Within these topics their forms of agency emerged. Agency for Aeta women healers is about making a change in their community which has been impacted through the work of colonization. For them, colonization is the greatest challenge that they have faced in their lives because it continues to bring fragmentation into their lives and community. However, they believe that, through the knowledge, wisdom, strength and spirituality that they possess, they have been able to resist colonization.

Aeta women healers also talked about representation. In these talks, they explained how their identity has been misrepresented in written texts. They believe that, because of this negative representation, they are facing stereotypes which continuously harms them. They explained that they wanted to dismantle these stereotypes regarding their identity which have been perpetuated by explaining their

real identity. All of the 12 Aeta women healers felt the same way. They stated that they were hoping that through these narratives, they would achieve change. They also shared their thoughts on their spirituality. They were aware that, through the work of Western religious exponents, their spirituality has been described as paganism or not believing in the Supreme Being.

In their narratives, they described their spirituality and how their spirituality has been a source of strength in countering the work of colonization. Finally, they also discussed the differences between their healing practices and those practiced by public health practitioners. They made clear that this was not because they wanted to dismiss other ways of healing, but rather because they wanted to show that they also have their unique and effective ways of healing. Their goal in discussing this was also to change how they have been described as uneducated in written text. The Aeta women healers want to reclaim their position as key players in the production of knowledge in the academy and at the local, national and global public health levels.

### **Chapter Overviews**

This thesis consists of the following chapters: Chapter one is an introduction of the study, research problem and purpose of the research, study limitation, personal location in the study, significance of research and of research findings, particularly from the theoretical framework and from the methodology perspectives.

Chapter two focuses on the history of the Aeta people and how colonization has impacted their lives. Chapter three focuses on the framework and literature review. It discusses anti-colonial, postcolonial and Indigenous feminism theories. Chapter three discusses how these frameworks helped in data analysis and gathering. The literature review discusses the healing practices of the Igorot, Isneg and Aeta Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines. Chapter four is a discussion of the Talking Circle methodology. It discusses how this methodology was instrumental in answering the central thesis research question. The chapter also examines how the Talking Circle methodology facilitated deeper analysis of representations from both the Indigenous perspective and my own standpoint.

Chapters five, six and seven contain the results of the data gathered in Cagayan. Chapter five focuses on the discussion of identity by the Aeta women healers. It highlights how Aeta women healers talk about their identity in different categories and how they have been treated in a manner that betrays their cultural identity. Chapter six focuses on the agency of Aeta women healers and how they intend to make a change in both their community and the non-Aeta people community. Chapter seven focuses on representation. It discusses how Aeta women talked about how they are being



misrepresented in different aspects of life. It is within this scope that they shed light on how they want to be represented. Chapter eight includes the conclusion, an outline of implications of the study, and recommendations.

## **Chapter II: Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines**

### ***Introduction***

This chapter discusses the pre-colonial history of the Philippines. This can give us a background on how the Aeta and other Indigenous People in the Philippines lived. The chapter goes on to discuss how and when Spain and America established their colonies in the Philippines. This is important to know, as we are able to see how colonization had and continues to have a great effect on the lives of the Aeta People. The chapter explores the different forms that colonization of the Indigenous People in the Philippines took. Lastly, the chapter discusses the Aeta People in Cagayan, where the Aeta women healers live.

### ***An Overview of the Philippines during the Pre-colonial Era***

“Philippines is an archipelago that is located a little above the equator and bounded by the Pacific Ocean, the China Sea and Celebes Sea (Guerrero 1971, p. 1)”. It consists of “7,100 islands and islets with a total land area of 115,000 square miles” (ibid). The three largest islands are Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. The Philippines has “a total population of 75 million, the country is home to around 42 [groups of] Indigenous Peoples who make up approximately 10-12 percent of the population” (Gobrin and Andin 2008, p. 2). One of these groups is the Aeta people.

Guerrero (1971) describes the wealth of the Philippines:

It has forest, mineral, marine and power resources. Its forests cover a little over one third of the land. Its mineral resources include iron, gold, copper,

nickel, oil, coal, chrome and so many others. Its principal rivers can be controlled to irrigate the fields continuously and also to provide electricity to every part of the country. It has rich inland and sea fishing grounds. Numerous fine harbors and landlocked straits are available for building up the maritime industry. (pp. 2-3)

In addition to the natural resource of the Philippines, Guerrero describes the racial composition of the Filipino people:

The main racial stock is Malay, which accounts for more than 85 percent. Other significant factors in the racial composition of the people are Indonesian and Chinese. The Aboriginal inhabitants of the Philippines were the Aetas or Negritos, small black people, who first came to the Philippines on land bridges about 25,000 to 30,000 years ago in the Pleistocene era. (p. 4)

The Aeta have been called different names, depending on their geographical locations. For example: Ata (in Zambales), Batak (in Palawan), Dumagat (in Sierra Madre), Mamanua (in Mindanao), Negrito (in Panay) (Shimizu 1989, p. 9), Agta (in northeastern Luzon).

In most of the Philippine history books, writers like Gagelonia and Zaide refer to Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines as “early Filipinos”.

Gagelonia (1974) makes the following observation about Indigenous peoples and their cultures:

Before the first foreigners landed on our shores our ancestors already lived their own way of life. Even before the first traders from foreign lands came to trade with early Filipinos, we already had our customs and traditions...The early Filipinos had their own unit of government...they helped each other whenever it became necessary. In time of war with other groups, they came to each other's aid. (p. 25)

Presently the Filipino peoples speak 87 dialects or languages. Our ancestors had their language and they had their own system of writing. "All these islanders," related Father Chirino, "are much accustomed to reading and writing, and there is hardly a man, much less a woman, who does not read and write" (Zaide 1957, p. 72). They also "had both oral and written literature" (Zaide 1957, p. 74). They had their education, which was a combination of academic and vocational training. They taught their children reading, writing, arithmetic, music, spirituality, and customs. Their system of education was informal: some parents taught their children while some learned under tribal tutors.

The Aeta and the other Indigenous People greatly valued morals. They possessed a codified and structured epistemologically integrated notion of right and wrong. For instance, "offenses against life, property, honor, and religion were severely punished, as evidenced by the customary laws and by the Code of *Kalantiaw*. They were honest in their commercial transactions and true to their word..." (Zaide 1975, p. 76).

Furthermore, Indigenous People had various art forms. Zaide gives an eloquent description of the various attributes of the Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines.

Long before the arrival of the Spaniards, they knew something of medicine, astronomy, and engineering. Although much of their medical knowledge was associated with religion...they were familiar with the curative powers of many herbs and plants. Their herbalist or physicians cured diseases with these medicinal plants. They also knew certain antidotal herbs for all kinds of poisons. The Filipinos were inspired to learn about astronomy because of the flashing constellations and cosmic mysteries of the sky which intrigued their curious minds...The engineering knowledge was a marvel to modern scientists. Ages before the white men came to the Orient, they were already building their irrigation ditches and water canals. The greatest monument to their engineering genius is the world-famed Ifugao rice terraces of Northern Luzon, which were built before the Christian era. (pp. 77-78)

Concepts of organizational relations of gender, family and community obligation to the group were ontologically systematized and codified. Akin to numerous other Indigenous Peoples (including many pre-Christian era Europeans), they recognized that both male and female qualities were important in performing religious sacrifice, thereby setting a framework for group cohesion and commonality. Aeta in particular did not believe in overpowering one another. Instead, they believed in working together for the betterment of their community. In the area of religious work, gender division of labour did not exist in the value exchange and value extraction of labour which is understood by

Westerners and also the foundation of the twin pillars, capitalism and colonialism. The Aeta believed that the existence of women and men was of equal significance. This corresponds to Western anthropological typologies about the division between *Gemeinschaft and Gesellshaft* whereby the relations and bonds of the community are centered around group and collective values, rather than one's individual achievement and wealth. Ethically this raises, we submit, an interesting question if understanding and respect for others is the sign of emotional maturity, as, for instance, Piaget (1973) argues in developmental psychology, or as Kohlberg (1966) argues in moral values education. Valuing knowledge is a part of virtually all human ethical systems as is an acknowledgement of one's obligations to others. How does colonial schooling and imposition of rules without regard to history, culture or desire, such as in residential schools or as imposed upon the Aeta, measure up by these standards? Even the so called "facts" were frequently flat out wrong in these careless epistemic intrusions. Note for instance that the First Nations in Canada still deal with what is vernacularly called "Indian Affairs". Columbus who never actually stepped in what we now label North America thought he was in India, hence the misnomer that no one from the supposedly "superior" and "fact based" methodology has deemed important enough to correct. Examples of such contradictory and sloppy epistemology abound. In Australia the First Fleet that "discovered" Botany Bay in 1789 (several weeks after their fellow Europeans, the French and Dutch had been in what is now Australia) deemed the land "vacant"

as embodied in the "terra nullius" doctrine. They did not acknowledge the humanity of Aborigines. How then was it that these supposedly invisible non-beings ended up on both British and Australian postage stamps before they were recognized as "persons" in 1944? Bias is a simple charge to lay but it seems hard to see such practices and claims as having any other root in this instance (Connor 2005). Compare these as 'moral' constructions with Aeta values.

Women had economic independence during this time. They were given the responsibility to take charge of the conjugal purse in the family. They had the freedom to buy and spend their own money without the permission of their husbands. They had the ability to make any decision with regard to the economic and financial situation of the household. They could obtain or possess wealth and property, and had the power to manage and to dispose of it whenever they wanted. Zaide (1957) describes women's status during this time as follows:

Tribal laws and customs recognized them as the equal of men. They could own and inherit property. They could engage in trade and industry. If they were daughters of datu who had no sons, they could inherit the chieftaincy and rule the barangays. Moreover, the mother in the family enjoyed the exclusive privilege of naming the children. Quite a number of famous women had appeared, like shooting meteors, across the firmament of Philippine history. Among them were Luluban, legendary Bisayan lawgiver...Princess Urduja, said to be the Amazonic ruler warrior of ancient Pangasinan...and more. (p. 54)

Clearly, Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines had a meaningful life before colonialism. These accounts above are just few examples of the life and culture of the Indigenous Peoples. Countless books would not be enough to fully portray the lives of the Indigenous Peoples. However, all of these positive attributes were dismantled when colonialism started to encroach on the lives of the Indigenous Peoples.

### ***Colonization in the Philippines and its impact on Indigenous Peoples***

Indigenous Peoples began to be apprehensive about the coming of the Spanish colonizers in the Philippines in the sixteenth century because of the enforcement of Regalian Doctrine, which refers to “legality on claims to lands acquired by the Crown through conquest and subjugation” (Gobrin & Andin 2008, p. 3). As a result, the Indigenous Peoples became aliens in their ancestral land where their forefathers had lived and practiced their spirituality and rituals.

Furthermore, while the colonizer’s main goal was to acquire wealth, yet they understood that social integrating forces would make the communities resist. Laws were set up to deny property and religion and to control the spiritual domain. They understood too that healers in Indigenous communities bore organizational and leadership qualities much like the banking, legal and religious sector elites of their own cultures. Undermining them was therefore tactically important. Brute military force was necessary, particularly if control was to be sustained over long periods. Etzioni (1961) argues that societies can be controlled by three means: normative, utilitarian, and coercively. Philippine colonizers, as elsewhere, used a blend of all three but as Etzioni



argues, you can measure the success of a society's organizational control by the proportions of each which is needed to be used. Violence is needed where resistance is high and compliance low. Conversely when normative order and compliance are high, a social order has succeeded. Breaking potential sources of resistance and imposing law, religion, and subscription to an order based on systemic favoring of the ruler arguably relies even *more* on hegemony over symbolic forms and institutions than it does on its ultimate weapon of military coercion. Spain declared that the Indigenous Peoples needed to be saved from their sins, and that, in order to achieve spiritual salvation; the Indigenous People must comply with the colonizer's religion. They called themselves angels who alone can save the Indigenous Peoples. Tauli-Corpuz (2006) states that, "they trained Indigenous Peoples, including my parents and myself, to look at the world through the eyes of the colonizers" (p. 14). Colonizers were determined to change the minds and hearts of the Indigenous Peoples in order to obtain their economic power and control in the Philippines.

Moreover, colonizers established churches and schools in the Philippines, not for the benefit of the Indigenous Peoples, but rather as a strategy to continue indoctrination. The schools that they established were run by Spanish priests who propagated the teachings of Christianity. Guerrero (1974) states that:

In the material base as well as in the superstructure, friar control was total and most oppressive in the towns situated in vast landed estates owned by the religious orders. In the colonial center as well as in every province, the friars exercised vast political powers. They supervised such diverse

affairs as taxation, census, statistics, primary schools, health, public works and charities...As a matter of fact, they were so powerful that they could instigate the transfer, suspension or removal from office of colonial officials, from the highest to the lowest, including the governor-general. In line with their feudal interests, they could even murder the governor-general with impunity as they did to Salcedo in 1668 and Bustamante in 1719. As they could be that vicious within their own official ranks, they were even more so in witch-hunting and suppressing native rebels whom they condemned as “heretics’ and “subversives”. (pp. 15-16)

This work of colonizers continued when the Spanish relinquished the Philippines to the United States. Gobrin and Andin (2008) explain:

...through the Treaty of Paris in 1898, a series of laws was enacted that strengthened central government control over all the lands it had claimed.

The Public Land Act of 1902 decreed that the government should issue land titles for all private land holdings. Subsequently, the government appropriated all ‘untitled’ lands for itself...The Forest Law of 1905

resulted in the granting of logging concessions to private corporations while banning hunting and other traditional uses of forest resources. The

Mining Act of 1906 granted mining permits to private entities, resulting in the further encroachment of corporate enterprises into the ancestral lands

of the indigenous peoples...The Tydings McDuffie Law and the Laurel-

Langley Agreement compelled the Philippines to provide the USA with

raw materials for its industry while opening up the Philippine market to American goods. The Mutual Defense Treaty (1951)...The Military Bases Agreement (1947)...National Development is prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. (p. 3)

All of the treaties referred to above continue to have a detrimental effect on the lives of Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines. These treaties were all established to perpetuate the political and economic power and dominance of the vested interests of the colonial and strategic elite in the Philippines. The Spanish and American colonizers are no longer formally present in the Philippines, but the postcolonial administration continues the work of subordination and inequality. The ADB (2002) report elaborates:

Postcolonial administrations of the Republic of the Philippines did not veer away from the Western concepts of land use and ownership. The 1935 Constitution stated that all agricultural, timber, and mineral lands of the public domain, waters, minerals, coal, petroleum, and other mineral oils, all forces of potential energy, and other natural resources of the Philippines belong to the State. This constitutional mandate gave rise to a number of laws that continue to deny Indigenous Peoples' customary land use and ownership...Presidential Decree (PD) 705 further delimited landownership among Indigenous Peoples, so that even ownership of rice terraces of the Indigenous Peoples of the Cordillera (for example), became questionable...PD 705 made the Indigenous Peoples of the Cordillera virtually "squatters in their own land," ...The 1987 Philippine Constitution

also retained the Regalian Doctrine...the state's constitutional recognition of Indigenous rights "in the context of national development" did not fundamentally change the situation of the Indigenous population. This could be seen in the implementation of government policies and programs in their territories, like reforestation programs, the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) Act of 1992, Mining Act of 1995, and Official Development Assistance (ODA) projects...Among those affected are the B'laan of North Cotabato, Subanen of Zamboanga del Sur, Aetas of Central Luzon, Igorots of the Cordillera region, and some groups in the Cagayan Valley. (p. 10-11)

Indigenous Peoples were not part of the making of the Regalian Doctrine, the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) Act of 1992, the Mining Act of 1995, nor the Official Development Assistance (ODA) projects. Eviota (1992) writes:

Spain ruled by means of the *encomienda*, an administrative unit established for the purpose of exacting tributes and taxes...American policy in ruling also did not differ much from Spain: the new colonizers used the ruling class as intermediaries as well as Filipino men who already possessed political and economic power. (p. 38 & 63)

In addition, Tauli-Corpuz (2006) explains the nature of government in the Philippines:

Unfortunately, most governments adhere to the dominant worldview of infinite economic growth through a globalized market economy. Even

“sustainable development,” which is supposed to represent the antithesis of economic globalization, has been subsumed under this model. (p. 160)

The Indigenous Peoples have been resisting the above-mentioned Regalian Doctrine, the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) Act of 1992, the Mining Act of 1995, and the Official Development Assistance (ODA) projects (Tauli-Corpuz 2006; ADB 2002). However, they have been displaced from their ancestral land. Some of them have been killed by the military, some women have been raped, and some of them have been damaged psychologically and spiritually, among others (Tauli-Corpuz 2006; Mander 2006). The Indigenous Peoples have been continuously suffering from this colonial violence (ADB 2002). What is happening in the Philippines has also been experienced by other Indigenous Peoples in different countries (Tauli-Corpuz 2006). Mander (2006) explains:

...in the Amazon jungles and the mountains of the Andes; in the tundras of the far north, the forests of Canada, Siberia and Indonesia; the small islands of the Pacific,...Guatemala, Mexico and the United States; and in the grasslands and deserts of Africa, we now find native peoples facing grave threats to their lands, forests, wildlife, minerals, water, and themselves. (p. 4)

This shows that Indigenous Peoples around the world are facing assaults from colonization, or presently neo-colonization. “Neo-colonialism is the continuation of the metropolis’ economic and socio-cultural domination after the colony has gained nominal political independence” (Coloma 2004, p.2). The World Trade Organization,

International Monetary Fund and World Bank, among others, are now continuing the work of colonialism. These entities are determined to create global corporate apparatuses in order to continue taking control of all the natural resources, including resources that belong to Indigenous Peoples in the world. Why is it that Indigenous Peoples are one of the main targets of global corporations? Mander (2006) explains:

...it is no small irony that the very reason that native peoples have become such prime targets for global corporations and their intrinsic drives is exactly because most Indigenous Peoples have been so very successful over millennia at maintaining cultures, economies, worldviews and practices that are not built upon some ideal of economic growth or short-term profit seeking. They do not seek to mine ever more of the natural world they live within for individual benefit, nor do they ship vast mountains of resources, like logs, copper or oil, across oceans to foreign markets.

Mander succinctly explains the why Indigenous Peoples continue to be a target for dehumanization. However, Indigenous Peoples are stronger in reclaiming their land. "...they are fighting for confirmation of their rights to sovereignty, self-governance and collective ownership and processes; they seek protections for their languages, cultural and religious practices and artifacts, and their traditional knowledge and science" (Mander 2006, p. 5).

### ***The Aeta Women Healers***

In Cagayan they call the Indigenous Peoples Aeta or Agay. In this study, the name, Aeta is used. The Aeta people are situated in the northern part of Luzon. They are located at the foothill of the Steep Mountain, on the western side of Sierra Madre. Their houses are made of wood, bamboo and rattan. These houses have no internal rooms because the Aeta live as a close knit family. However, with changing times, the Aeta community has begun to use different construction materials for their houses; for example, the use of iron sheets for roofing and wood for walls and flooring. Even with these changes, however, there is still no internal partitioning. The family usually sleeps on the wooden floor.

Historically, the Aeta were transitory, practicing swindling agriculture. They built temporary shelters that were made of banana leaves. They would stay in such a place, using it as a hunting centre for a week, and then they would leave to go to another area of the forest (Gravan 1964). Peterson (2000), cited by Jocano, has explained why the Aeta chose to live in these locations:

The choice of where to camp is influenced by factors such as desire for food available in a given area, paucity of chosen foods in other areas, attraction of kinsmen, especially favored relatives, and escapes from growing tensions in a previous *pisan*. (p.46)

However, the Aeta group in Cagayan is different because they have been residing in this place longer than other Aeta groups. Their ancestors opted to occupy this place. This traditional territoriality is why the Aeta people have stayed until now and

eschewed peregrination. They believe that Cagayan is where their ancestral terrain is located. This is where their ancestors were buried and where they practiced their culture and traditions. This is also the place where they continue their healing practices, following in the footsteps of their ancestors. It is where the spirits of their ancestors reside. They believe that they will be punished by the spirits of their ancestors if they destabilize the land and the environment. In such a circumstance, they fear catastrophe may befall their community as punishment from their deceased ancestors.

Shimizu (1989) explains:

It is necessary for the Negritos or Aeta to avoid antagonizing any of the spirits for fear that they might take revenge, either by causing illness or death or by causing them natural disaster or misfortune to occur...As a result of their cosmology, the Negritos tend to be conservative in their methods of exploitation of their natural resources. They would prefer not to cut down any trees unless it is necessary. They do not clear an area for their swidden any larger than they are actually able to cultivate. To be wasteful of the natural resources would be insulting to the spirits of the places affected who would punish those responsible. (p.49)

Their spirituality is convergent and focused as a lived practice to such an extent that they exercise environmental stewardship. The Aeta believe that interfering with the well-being of the environment is equal to alienating themselves from their ancestors and, thus, their culture and theology. Holding the fact that their identity is shaped by their culture and spirituality, they are careful not to degrade the environment. In this



respect, we can identify the role of holiness in sustaining the environment. Most of all, however, the Aeta see the land as a gift from the Creator, to whom they equate supernatural power. Consequently, they make sure that the environment is taken care of and that no one can misuse it.

In terms of governance the Aeta people generally do not believe in the notion that “one has control over another person” (Griffin & Griffin, 1999). The Aeta in Cagayan share the same belief. Power is exercised for the well-being of the whole society. Respect for one another is the key to a peaceful community. Although they respect the wisdom of the Elders in the community decision-making platform, this does not mean that other members of the community cannot participate. Everybody is included in every event or decision that needs to be made with regard to their community. They believe in solidarity because they know that when there is a challenge, they need one another. They know that they cannot face their enemy or challenges if they are divided. Personal problems are considered the communities problem.

In terms of economy the Aeta work the land to support their families. They plant vegetables and fruit trees and hunt wild animals. Sometimes they trade with non-Aeta people in exchange for goods that are not available to them. Some also go to the non-Aeta people to work on their farms or in their houses. They also go to the market and sell bananas, potatoes, papaya, wild rice and other fruits and vegetables. Gender inequality does not exist in the lives of the Aeta people. They believe that everyone has the responsibility to work for the benefit of their family and their community.

Aeta healing practices are predicated on the principle that healing the sick is a combination of using medicinal plants and being guided by benign spirits. That is why it is imperative to take good care of nature and to respect both the visible material world and the invisible spiritual world. This way of thinking has enabled the Aeta people to understand the causes of diseases from diverse perspectives, rather than from a single linear viewpoint. This has further enabled them to tackle a cause or a symptom of a disease, thus assisting their people to lead healthy lives. Issues touching on spirituality respect for the environment, proximity to their ancestors and people are fundamental to understanding their health issues and the implications. In his account below, Shimizu (1989) reveals that the Aeta have tremendous skills in healing the sick:

If they think various medicinal plants are efficacious for one symptom, they try one medicinal plant after another. If the sick person does not get well, they try two or three medicinal plants at the same time...When these medicinal plants have no effect and the sickness lasts for a long time, or when the development of the sickness differs from an ordinary case, the Aetas think that there is some other reason behind the sickness. If a spirit's interference with the sickness is very probable, they ask a *manganito* (to communicate with the good spirits) medium to hold a *manganito* séance in order to ask her personal guardian *anito* about the sickness, as well as ask for instruction for removing the cause of the sickness. (p. 51)

What makes the Aeta unique as a community is that they possess a unique and cosmologically integrated agency. Even though there has been intrusion in their

community, perpetrated in the name of “educating” and “civilizing” them, they remain culturally, and spiritually connected, and their familial network has been strong amidst these atrocities. Unity is a useful recipe in ameliorating the effects of colonialism. They understand that they cannot win the war against the arrayed elements that would dominate if they do not speak with their voices. This is the philosophy that they apply when their women healers heal the sick-not only their own people but also non-Aeta people. With their healing practices, they are able to reach out to the rest of the colonized non-Aeta people. Through this, they know that they can withstand the current global capitalism which has its grounding in colonialism. The reconfigurations of these new forms often mirror what Caribbean scholars such as Curtin (1990), Watts (1987), and Mintz (1958, 1953) have labeled 'the new Plantation system'. In this paradigm, formal colonialism is gone but the practices and procedures and many of the same institutions of oppression remain in a reconstituted form. One can argue that these effects and are embodied in many of the so-called “progressive” policies. An instance in the Aeta relations with the dominant Philippine government may be illustrative. The Philippines, in many educational conferences, now touts itself as a world leader in “multi-culturalism”. The lynch pin of this argument is that it is one of the only State orders globally which constitutionally guarantees minorities the right to educational instruction in their own language (Philippine Education for All 2015: Implementation and Challenges). True enough, as this is true legally. However, in practice, most instructors come from colonial and dominant backgrounds and implement pedagogy, curriculum and frequently even language of the dominant order. The law is

progressive, but the practice is too often regressive and repressive. This therefore appears, to the Caribbean scholars arguing for blacks and minorities, as a reconstructed plantation model while seemingly adopting participatory and “entitled” organizational models. Aeta in this context know that they need the help of others to win the war on misrepresentation in Philippines society regarding prejudice about their 'backwardness'. The Aeta are willing to continue this difficult relationship with the non-Aeta community because they know that it is important in vanquishing the work of the colonizer. This exemplifies the power of their love for their community and, as such, their powerful agency at work.

Their extensive healing knowledge is well-known in both their community and in other communities in the province of Cagayan Valley. The Aeta are well-respected by their own people. Their community has been recognized for the work that they have been doing. They are consulted in times of tribulation. They have been called upon to make major decisions for their community. Their healing practices remain in existence, despite the presence of Western style health centers and public health practitioners in their community. They choose to use their own healing practices to cure their people. They share their knowledge of healing with others. They continue to apply their healing practices, despite the dehumanization that they have suffered from the public health community at national level. The Aeta women healers believe in themselves, and their belief is a strong force in the maintenance of their identity. They believe in the efficacy of their healing knowledge, despite the continuing disruption by the non-Aeta people.

The Aeta women healers possess a strong identity that cannot be shaken. They choose to practice their own spirituality, despite the presence of a Christian church in their community. Although the leader of this church continues to give lessons in Christianity, Aeta still practice the spirituality that is their ancestor's legacy. Their spirituality is about believing and having faith in their Creator and respecting all the creations of this world. They believe that they can heal, not because of their own power, but because of the help of God.

They have chosen to be Aeta, despite the challenges and ridicule that they frequently face from non-Aeta people. They choose to stay in their own community and despise the settlement area that the government of Philippines tried to give them. They choose to retain their cultures and traditions despite the existence of capitalism. Cagayan may have continued to adopt the modern way of life, but Aeta people continue to practice their way of life and resist the life of the colonized.

### **Chapter III: Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks**

#### ***Introduction***

In this section our focus is on the Indigenous women in the Philippines and their knowledge of ethno-medicine. They are the Isneg, Igorot and Aeta. This chapter also discusses Indigenous feminism, anti-colonial and postcolonial theories and the importance of these theories in this study.

#### ***Indigenous Women in the Philippines and their Knowledge of Ethno-medicine***

This section contemplates what constitutes Indigenous communities in the Philippines. It also responds to the question, what is Indigenous knowledge? The section also discusses the Isneg, Aeta and Igorot women's knowledge of ethno-medicine. This includes how they practice healing in their own villages. This section is included to shed light on the need to restore their knowledge and to elucidate the different issues that affect them.

Filipinos who did not accept Christianity were called "minority", according to Jocano (2000) and because they were the least acculturated among the rest of the population, they were derogatorily described and classified as primitive, wild (mundos), and savage (p. 14). Jocano also explains that, with time, the term "minority" has changed to "cultural communities". However, Jocano conjectures that the term cultural communities is too general to be useful in his book "Filipino Indigenous Ethnic Communities"; hence uses the term "Indigenous ethnic communities" (p. 18). The term "Indigenous ethnic communities" connotes three things: a) that they are biologically

self-perpetuating, 2) that they share basic values, and 3) that they have membership identity and are identified by others as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order (p. 18). This study agrees with Jocano's use of the term. In this study, the use of "Indigenous ethnic community" is viewed as a form of resistance and as a form of maintenance of the indigeneity of these Indigenous ethnic communities. I am arguing that the self-ascription of the term is an active versus passive or nominal or simple taxonomy. Many of the Indigenous healers we interviewed in practice are the people who maintained their cultures without capitulation to Western "contamination". These are the people who have worked to subvert the work of colonization in their lives: For example, by resisting assimilation or by taking a stand with regard to leave-taking their ancestral lands. They interrogate any and all forms of colonization including conversion to a Eurocentric theology, choosing instead to honor their own culture and cosmological order to maintain cultures and traditions learnt from their ancestors. In Western organizational terms, the Aeta women healers are "Strategic Elites"; in their own terms, they are the custodians of ancestral and community knowledge, language, values and spiritual being.

It is useful to explore the meaning of Indigenous knowledge before the discussion of the Isneg, Aeta and Igorot feminism practices of healing. This is important in establishing the meaning of Indigenous knowledge, as this study looks at how this knowledge can be restored. Models exist; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg (2002) define Indigenous knowledge as follows:

...a body of knowledge associated with the long-term occupancy of a certain place. This knowledge refers to traditional norms and social values, as well as to mental constructs that guide, organize, and regulate the people's way of living and making sense of their world. It is the sum of the experience and knowledge of a given social group, and forms the basis of decision making in the face of challenges both familiar and unfamiliar... Through the process of learning the old, new knowledge is discovered; this is what makes Indigenous knowledge's dynamic rather than static. This body of knowledge is diverse and complex given the histories, cultures, and lived realities of peoples... Indigenous knowledges are largely oral, passed on through the generations by women and men who have the trust of the elders of the community. (pp. 6-7)

Indigenous knowledge has its own teleology, history and knowledge bases and, in this critical respect, holistically integrated in a way that Western paradigms are not. For that reason, this specific and ecologically and community based epistemic knowledge is "organic". This knowledge is thereby so unique that it makes the Indigenous Peoples and their way of life specific and identifiable. The basis of this knowledge, like all knowledge, is a set of shared and transmitted symbolic signs and forms. Not unlike Western science where much of its "wisdom" is based on empirical observation derived from community and collective experience, all knowledge is transmitted within and between generations by teaching. Because the knowledge production happens within the community and local environment, this knowledge reflects specific values and



zeitgeists from the community. This Indigenous knowledge pact is a grounded set of practices of knowledge production and transmission that we deem as the cultural “glue” of the society. The very cohesive power of these relations and cultural transmissions is the keystone in the temple of cultural knowledge. I would like to speculate that it is possible-even probable-that this is the reason why anyone seeking to colonize appropriate exploit and ordinate a people would need to dismantle these forces of cultural cohesion so as to achieve hegemony. Again we would like to offer the hypothesis that this is probably why the criminalization and dehumanization of Indigenous Populations was so central to the method of appropriation. Black American legal scholar Alexander (2010) formulates an analogous argument in her tour de force, “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness”, where she argues that if you do statistical comparisons between the number of Black Americans subjugated under slavery (the numbers excluded under the Jim Crow and other segregation laws) and the number of Blacks, especially Black male youths, incarcerated under drug laws and differential policing practices in the US (under supposedly “level justice”) that they are remarkably similar. Like the arguments for the plantation system discussed earlier the claims of “equality for all” persist in the reconstituted processes of physical, psychological and cultural suppression and are rooted in economic and racist paradigms purporting to be “neutral” despite differing tactics. I am arguing that the practices and prejudices faced by Aeta women healers are analogous and firmly rooted in structural processes and practices aimed at maintenance of inequalities. The Aeta women are the bulwark of the countervailing processes and, as such, are prime targets

for would-be oppressors. It is also one of the reasons, I submit, why they are being criminalized and dehumanized. Indigenous knowledge sets a platform around which the society life and social activities revolve. This knowledge holds the community together. Through storytelling and other forms of transmission this knowledge is passed from one generation to the next. This helps to maintain the very way of life to a given society. Indigenous knowledge helps to create an identity for people who live in certain ancestral areas and thus acts as a source of pride for such communities. Such communities cannot claim a place in this world without Indigenous knowledge.

Indigenous knowledge, like all complex worldviews, operates at multiple and complex levels with many permutations and combinations. Castellano (2002) defines Indigenous knowledge as knowledge valued in Aboriginal societies derived from multiple sources, including traditional teachings, empirical observation, and revelation (pp. 23-25). This Aboriginal knowledge can be personal, oral, experiential, holistic, and conveyed in narrative or metaphorical language (Castellano, 2002). Writers such as Murial (1999), Wangoola (2002), Castellano (2002), Shiva (2002), Wane (2002), and Semali & Kincheloe (1999) describe Indigenous/ Aboriginal knowledge as the knowledge that has been produced by the members of the communities. Thus, through the definition offered by these scholars, it could be conjectured that the healing practices of Isneg, Aeta and Igorot women are a body of knowledge that needs to be recognized and respected since this knowledge carries with it the libraries, procedures, insights, and other verisimilitudes communally gathered over time and by experience.

Indigenous knowledge is accrued as knowledge that has been produced by the Indigenous People. It acknowledges the fact that it does not need to undergo a validation process for it to stand out, and that such knowledge is embedded within the Indigenous peoples' lives as a reciprocal self-defining chain: assimilation and transmission of this shared worldview is generated by the Indigenous community, and as it is learned, it becomes what we now call Indigenous knowledge. This, of course, is true of all worldviews. However, one of prime directives of colonization was the prior invalidation of the idea of the right to knowledge and self-determination of the other (Olson 2011). The operational reality in colonial and neo-colonial education policy is a one-dimensional epistemology reflecting the bias, prejudices, practices, and worldview of the invader. The result is the psychic violence (often physical as well) which is meted out in the name of "enlightenment" and "civilization". The knowledge of "the other" became despised, dismissed and belittled in the academy (Tauli-Corpuz 2006; Torres 2008). In the context of the Philippines, both the above definitions are applicable. In addition, Indigenous knowledge is knowledge that has been a target of exploitation from the "West". In this context, Tauli-Corpuz (2006), an Igorot woman, highlights how corporations are prospecting throughout native lands for the seeds that they have developed and for their knowledge of the cosmetic and pharmaceutical properties of forest plants. "They take their seeds and their knowledge to their home country, usually without their permission, and they then patent drugs from these plants" (Tauli-Corpuz 2006, p. 18). As the researcher in this study it is important for me to stress that the above could not be more emphatically supported by the empirical data we gathered. Indeed,

when I did my undergraduate thesis in the community of the Aeta, the first thing that participants told me was, “you want to take our knowledge, and in the end claim that this knowledge is from you” (Torres 1996). Based on this statement alone, one could feel an intense animosity because of their experiences with the outsiders. It is apparent that Indigenous knowledge has been the target of research, investigation, exploration and appropriation.

This section implicitly gives an overview of the healing practices of the Aeta, Igorot and Isneg women in the Philippines. The labour of others is always easy to underestimate; this is true in the assessment of knowledge production as well as the parallel process of marginalization by overlooking one’s own bias or conceptual lenses. The Aeta women can formulate a principle in their own taxonomy and be ridiculed by external “scholars” and “regal” educators (and those socialized by them) as “ignorant” and “superstitious”. Contrarily, in Western property relations, if the Aeta women were to take my ideas or work from this thesis without my permission (and that of the University of Toronto) and assert this was “their work,” they could be charged with “theft of intellectual property” (see Academic Integrity Handbook). If an anthropologist or other scholar takes their ideas it is deemed not to be theft but providing scholarly evaluation and helping to assess research and conclusions. If another student copies my work, for instance, from this thesis, it is plagiarism and grounds for dismissal. When the converse is true and we appropriate knowledge, expertise and object without permission from Indigenous knowledge bases like that of the Aeta women, it is not seen as plagiarism but as gleaning, evaluating and creating

new knowledge. Power engenders privilege but it also creates inequalities and inconsistencies in “standards and practices”.

The Aeta people acknowledge the presence of *laman nin lota* (spirit of the earth). According to Shimizu (1989), “it is no wonder, therefore, that the Aetas have tremendous knowledge about medicinal plants and their prescriptions” (p.51). Healing the sick for them is a combination of using medicinal plants and asking for help from the benign spirits. This is the endogenous source of the Aeta imperative to respect and care for nature and everything on earth – both living and non-living.

History tells us that the Aeta women performed healing in their community. The Aeta women's healing was diverse, ranging from exorcised illnesses such as dire spirits, and stomach ailments, among many others. Infante (1969) states that, “almost all pre-Hispanic and contemporary non-Christian Filipinos agree in their preference for women religious practitioners” (p. 167). Infante (1969) refers to Chirino and Loarca who state the following about Aeta women:

Whenever an occasion demanded it, such as a sickness, a phase in the agricultural activities, or war, a male or female religious practitioner was summoned to offer a sacrifice. It was more usually a woman religious practitioner, preferably old, who officiated at these ceremonies. At times she was helped in the officiation by young girls being initiated into the office. (p. 168)

In his description of the Aeta healing protocol, Shimizu (1989) explains that they include the use of medicinal plants and *anito* (good spirit). Shimizu (1989) provides an

example of how an Aeta woman healer performs and communicates to the spirit (p. 54-55, qtd. Fox 1952, pp. 317-19):

A man had become sick after burning a slope while clearing a piece of land for planting corn. The symptoms of the sickness, according to his statement, were a heavy body and dizziness. The medium was called, who in this séance was a woman, and the entire village was called upon to attend. As in most cases, this curing séance took place at night, and in this particular instance it was rather festive occasion...In this particular curing-séance, the spirit which had been antagonized and which had caused the man to become ill, had been captured immediately by the spirit-helper of the medium.

In this curing séance, the cure was accomplished by merely removing, and appeasing, the spirit. In other séances, the medium would use medicinal plants, and/or destroy the endogenous source causing the sickness.

*Manganito* medium is not accorded “special” status: She is still required to adhere to their cultural norms and the wishes of the rest of the members of the community. However, she is regarded as a “skillful *manganito*”. She is well respected in the community. Members of the community acknowledge her presence and trust her knowledge on healing. Their form of healing is not only performed by a *manganito* medium but also assisted by other members of the family. In other words, the healing practice in the Aeta community is about collective effort, not just an individual effort. Here, we can discern that healing is a form of power within the Indigenous community

of the Philippines, but that healing cannot be used as a way of asserting oneself in the society. Instead, healing is seen as a form of objectifying and actualizing one's talent for the well-being of the society. Having a talent is not a way of creating class hierarchy within the society, but a way of bringing the society together for collective celebration. It is a route through which other people learn different ways of healing, and an aura through which knowledge is passed to each other within that celebration. Healing is not seen as a way to enrich oneself, but rather as a way to enrich the society's well-being.

The Isneg of Apayao sub-province occupies the cordillera mountain range. The scenery is very handsome and the land is covered with shrubs and trees. Isneg means "upstream". The Isneg possess a very dignified and gracious attitude. When one goes to their village one can feel how gentle they are. Grant et al. (1973, p. 14) states that the "Spaniards made an attempt to colonize the Isneg in 1890 when they succeeded in establishing three forts, however, after a period of Isneg raiding from Spanish punitive action, the Isneg defeated the Spaniards in a decisive battle in 1895". The Spanish did not try to penetrate their community again. This illustrates how they resisted colonization. They stood firm because they realized that if they allowed the invader to enter their village, they would subsequently lose their indigeneity.

According to Grant et al. (1973), "...the people in highland Apayao conducted religious ceremonies. This responsibility was almost exclusively in the hands of women rather than of men. These shamans were called *dururakit*...their service in a society which counted religion as of great importance helped to raise the status of women" (p.64). In addition, if an Isneg woman has been consecrated as a shaman in her

early childhood, she earns the respect not only of the household but of the neighbors as well. "She inspired them with a kind of reverential awe, especially if she is advanced in years" (Grant et al. 1973, cited in Vanoverbergh 1938, p. 214). As such it can be seen that healing was both an inspiration to the society and a way of showcasing one's talent. This kept the society together by bringing forward (the talents of others), of sustaining the community and its pride. Thus, healing was a way of showing ones patriotism to her society. Through these ritualistic practices of unification, the Indigenous community was able to live as a unified entity even after outland intrusion. We can see that healing was seen as a political defensive bulwark meant to sustain the society.

Finally, Igorots' agency comes from the continuous interaction with everything else in the environment, acknowledging the existence of *kabunyan* (Igorot term for God) and that of their ancestors. They return to the songs, stories, rituals, values and beliefs, remembering the oral traditions that as rich reservoirs of the knowledge and wisdom of the Igorots or "mountain people".

In the early colonial days, the Spaniards needed to portray the Igorot as headhunting savages in order to justify their violence towards them. "Later, the U.S. colonizers shipped their ancestors to be displayed in a sort of circus sideshow at the St. Louis Exposition in 1904, to show Americans what heathens they were and to justify President McKinley's "Benevolent Assimilation" policy" (Dacog 2003, p. 4). Christianity in that arena of colonial hegemony was introduced to alter and abate the spiritual life of the Igorot. The settler taught Indigenous pupils that their Native beliefs were ineffectual, and unworthy of being acknowledged. The colonial platitude stressed that



the only way to be saved was to adopt the Christian religion (Tauli-Corpuz 2006; Dacog 2003). The Igorot People were made to believe that their Indigenous knowledge was apparently idiotic and that if they did not embrace the Western way of development, they would be considered backward and ignorant and would, thus, be prone to extinction (Tauli-Corpuz 2006; Dacog 2003). “Igorots produce ten or more traditional rice varieties, and their rice terraces, found high up in the mountains, feature complex irrigation systems, testifying to Igorot expertise in hydraulics and engineering” (Dacog, 2003).

They continue to practice their cultural rituals during the agricultural and life cycles. Igorots do not claim to be the owners of the land, but rather see themselves as caretakers. They believe that they need to tend to the ancestral land because it is sacred ground where their ancestors were buried and it will therefore be the homeland for the future generations. They consider their ancestral land part of their identity. That is where they see the connection between both their material and spiritual well-beings. According to Dacog (2003), at “a very early age their parents and Elders taught them basic values deemed *gawis* (good): respect for nature and ancestors, honesty, collectivity, community solidarity, reciprocity, and love for Mother Earth” (p. 4). This implicit value of the Aeta is shared by many, perhaps even most, Indigenous Peoples. It is generally not framed this way, but acquisition as a central organizational tenant, Western colonization implicitly denies nature and shifts the standard of what is “worthy” from the collective to the self. Nature becomes a resource to be controlled, exploited and dominated rather than a force of creation. Tacitly, this belief in the power

of one's own technological and cultural agency as the locus of control denies both the primacy of nature and our cultural dependence on one other.

Healing is a technical problem yet we must acknowledge that most of what heals us is given to us by the environment, our immune systems, the air, water and other biological and environmental processes. Healing sees its own technology as "Universal" and all else as "unscientific". It is surprising that an epistemology so divorced from the forces of creation and sustenance could, in such short geological and historical time, cause ecological disasters where water, air and land have been unsustainably degraded globally. (Earle 2009). Contrast this approach to health to the Aeta health paradigm.

Igorot acknowledge *in-ina* or "old lady" who usually performs healing. Infante (1969) explains the healing practices in Ifugao which are performed by an Igorot woman as follows:

When a person is very sick, an *in-ina* (old woman), who is a close relative possessing the *sup-ok* (power to heal the sick) is called. The *in-ina* summoned is left alone with the sick. In soft tones, she implores the help of a favorite or very close ancestor to find the *anito* (spirit) who brought the sickness to her family. After this concentrated talk with the supernatural, she discovers the guilty *anito*. She talks to this *anito* and, feeling its presence, she now questions the reason for bringing bad things to the family; and reminds it of the many favors and good things they have given it on earth and that they never neglected to invite it to all their family *canaos* and *mangmangs*. Then she tells the spirit to go away

simultaneously breathing hard at the patient several times. The old lady then departs with good news...or is sad and lingers in the house of the sick to perform the *mangmang* as a sacrifice to the persistent spirit of sickness...The old *in-ina* or woman addresses the *anito* or the spirit of the dead ancestor of the family and tells him the reason for the offering. The dead chicken is placed over a fire; and when all the feathers are burned and removed, it is cut, and the viscera are removed to see the position of the gall bladder. If it shows good omens, the spirit is said to be pleased and all will be well for the family. When it is time to eat, the share of the spirits is set aside, and all dead ancestors are again invited to the feast. (p. 178-179)

Through this method of healing, the sick person's affliction is attenuated and he or she is told to be careful with his or her life. *In-ina* usually gives the sick person advice on how to pay respect both to the environment and to the ancestors. *In-ina* makes sure the infirmed learns not just to respect those things which he or she can see through his or her naked eyes but also non-tangible forces. The healing process is identified as a teaching arena through which societal teachings are passed on to the sick. It serves as a way through which the sick are taught what is right and told to discard that which is considered evil. To that extent, healing is identified as a key to asserting Indigenous well-being in society.

As can be observed, Aeta, Isneg and Igorot have the same way of healing the sick. They believe that the spiritual and physical beings need to be cured before a

person who is sick gets healed. They also believe that a person gets sick because of not respecting other creations and that before the healers can perform healing, they need to consult the spirit. This is the only time they can diagnose the cause of the illness. They also believe that “spirits of the land, water, trees [are] also held to be influential and thus must also be appeased” (Minoritized and Dehumanized 1983, p. 17). This is why they have a great respect for both living and non-living things. Their knowledge of the curing power of plants cannot be disregarded. They have illustrated the utility of this knowledge through the healing of the sick.

According to the report done by the International Study Program on Minorities in the Philippines (1983), the Aeta’s “fate is now determined by the encroaching logging and mining companies that are slowly taking over their forested ancestral lands” (p. 22). Furthermore, the International Study Program on Minorities in the Philippines (1983) also explains the impact of colonization on the lives of Isneg, Igorot and other Indigenous groups of the Philippines:

Where the capitalist and feudal systems become operative...The impingement of capital and capital stocks in agriculture or blatant land grabbing have caused the emergence of land-owning capitalists and corollary of landless peasants and farm concepts. Modern concepts and relations have made the traditions and custom of the tribes in this area superfluous. Christianity and public and sectarian education have also challenged traditional practices and have been instrumental in changing economic, political and cultural structures. (p 17)

This shows that the Aeta, Isneg and Igorot women's knowledge is currently under attack. This has been expounded by Tauli-Corpuz (2006, p. 18) as follows:

Biopiracy reaches is legitimized under the WTO's Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights Agreement (TRIPS), which confirms the rights of individuals and corporations to patent life forms in defiance of our traditional beliefs and practices. The TRIPS agreement is pushing all countries to allow corporate scientific institutions to search for and patent Indigenous plant varieties that have beneficial properties.

The above quote by Tauli-Corpuz has been referenced by Shiva (1991; 1995). It is ironic that Indigenous people cannot use any of these herbs without the permission of the Western corporations. This is a great threat to the Indigenous people because not only can they not perform their healing, but neither can they help their people. This is about life and death to them. It is clear that performing a healing act is not about making a profit, but about sharing love of their people and the environment. Moreover, they have not only been violated, criminalized and dehumanized, but their knowledge has also been appropriated, distorted, falsified and destroyed by colonization and by today's neo-colonization.

Finally, one of the principal tribulations for Indigenous women is racism. This study presents a discourse in which race is essential. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2000) explain:

Race is particularly pertinent to the rise of colonialism, because the division of human society in this way is inextricable from the need of

colonialist powers to establish dominance over subject peoples and hence justify the imperial enterprise. Race thinking and colonialism are imbued with the same impetus to draw a binary distinction between 'civilized' and 'primitive' and the same necessity for the hierarchization of human types. By translating the fact of colonial oppression into a justifying theory, however spurious, European race thinking initiated a hierarchy of human variation that has been difficult to dislodge. Although race is not specifically an invention of imperialism, it quickly became one of imperialism's most supportive ideas, because the idea of superiority that generated the emergence of race as a concept adapted easily to both impulses of the imperial mission: dominance and enlightenment. (pp. 198-199).

Race is an analytical fulcrum for other forms of oppression, connecting the matrix of oppression such that we can converse about class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion and other forms of oppression through the lens of race. From this perspective, issues surrounding the intersectionality of the different marginal identities come to play a pivotal role in the analysis made in this study. When we talk about race, systems of power and domination are embedded. For example, because I am Filipina in Canada, I am often considered a nanny. In Canada, being considered a nanny, I am deemed to be uneducated, submissive, meek and docile. However, if I were a white woman, the narrative would probabilistically be different and, since the interpretive assumptions would be different, I would have been considered privileged, with no question of

whether I could articulate English or whether I was educated. In this context, we can see the “power of white racial identity, whiteness, white supremacy, and their critical linkages” (Dei 2007, p. 56). Race is also materially consequential: statistically, this means that employment is less likely for me than it is for a white. What, then, is racism? This study embraces Battiste’s (1998) explanation:

Racism is the generalized and final assigning of values to real or imaginary differences, to the accuser’s benefit and at his victim’s expense, in order to justify the former’s own privileges or aggression. Memmi has identified four related racist strategies used to maintain colonial power over Indigenous people: (a) stressing real or imaginary differences between the racist and the victim; (b) assigning values to these differences to the advantage of the racist and the detriment of the victim; (c) trying to make these values absolutes by generalizing from them and claiming that they are final; and (d) using these values to justify any present or possible aggression or privilege. All these strategies have been the staple of Eurocentric research on Indigenous peoples that frames much of the discourse on Aboriginal peoples in school text. Through these strategies Eurocentric research has manufactured the physical and cultural inferiority of Indigenous peoples. (p. 21)

Racism is not solely about the imposition of power upon the Indigenous Peoples; it is also about establishing Eurocentric knowledge as the ordinate hegemony and dismissing Indigenous knowledge as inferior and useless. Racism has been used in the

academy to undermine the importance and existence of the Indigenous Peoples, stressing the importance of Eurocentric knowledge. By mainstreaming this Eurocentric knowledge other ways of knowing are excluded. Thomson (2006) states, “racism is not an aberration or tragic flaw, but a systemic way of organizing social relations that privileges whites and then naturalizes that privilege” (p. 13). In this context, whiteness becomes the system of power and it evokes superiority. This domination has the power not only to marginalize other diversities, but also to racialize them. It normalizes “White” as a dominant race and legitimizes racist acts. Indigenous women’s knowledge of ethno-medicine is facing extinction because it does not conform to the Eurocentric way of knowing. When science is used as a way to alienate that which is Indigenous, its use is not to generate knowledge but rather to generate racism. What is forgotten is that Indigenous healing had demonstrated its efficacy even before the arrival of the “enlighteners” from the other side of the globe. The fact that the Indigenous community could survive with this healing practice attests to its efficacy. Prejudices become the principle rather than share and compare knowledge base. Western medical schools have chosen an anti-intellectual path; instead of using inquiry and subjecting the knowledge scheme to comparative re-evaluation they have elected prima-facie to dismiss and demonize Indigenous knowledge. Is this type of suspect scholarly what we should accept as “rigor” or “objective inquiry”?

### ***Theoretical Frameworks***

This section discusses the nature of postcolonial, anti-colonial and Indigenous feminism theories and their relevance to the study. These frameworks are important to



the research questions because they serve as apparatus in the data gathering and analysis processes. They expose the denied and alienated subjectivity and agency; hence they facilitate decolonizing interventions (Kuokkanen 2007). The frameworks illuminate the important attributes of Aeta healers that have been excluded by historiographies. Moreover, they uncover the implications of the Aeta women healing practices with respect to the academy.

This study acknowledges the debates within postcolonial, anti-colonial and Indigenous feminist theories surrounding the use of language, theorizing Indigenous Peoples' lived experiences politics and structure (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995; Loomba 1998; Smith 1999; Young 2001; Coloma 2004; Angod 2006; Green 2007). There is a heavy dependence on textuality and idealism and academic power and authority with respect to language (Smith 1999, Ahmad 1995, Green 2007).

This study, however, highlights the presence of the Aeta women healers in the political, social, economic, cultural and spiritual arenas. The study recognizes the crucial importance of both race and the history of colonialism in both an international feminist project an engagement with the contemporary socio-political, economic and cultural issues (Spivak 1996; Smith 1999; Green 2007). The description of each theory is outlined in the next section which explores the nature of Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism, and which also examines the nature of anti-colonial theory, connecting it to the history of Aeta women healers. The following section also looks at postcolonial theory and discusses the three main proponents of this theory and their importance in this study.

### ***Indigenous Feminism***

When we talk about feminism, we assume the empowerment of women and we consider how women are portrayed in society. The Aeta women healers' phenomenological incision and formulation is different and in Aeta, the word feminism does not exist. What exists as their orienting compass is the directing coordinate that women are the cohesive elements of their community and that they have a role in acting as the social molecular bond of the society. It is understood that without these adhesive properties, their culture is at risk of extinction. Their work is to weave, knot, bond and add colour and pattern to the social cloth. The Aeta women's role as healer in their social order is as significant as that of the Aeta men; each gender plays instrumental roles which are fundamental to the community's social, political, economic, cultural and spiritual survival.

The Aeta women and men do not see each other as "different", although each uniquely holds a different social role. The Aeta men (like all men) are incapable of child birth, but this does not connote the inferiority of the men. Men and women comprehend that they are both instruments of the Supreme Being, who has preordained joint procreation. Child rearing is hence understood as conjoint coalescence to insure that their child grows healthily and learns culture and traditions. Both women and men understand that it is imperative to be instrumental in instilling their community's cultural values in their children (Torres 2008) as this process actualizes both the character and the well-being of their children. Parents are meant to give guidelines to

their children as agents of cultural transmission on social norms including traditional healing practices. This is done by both the men and the women since unity of the sexes is pivotal in the maintenance and sustenance of their beliefs.

This kind of practice existed prior to the advent of settler immigration (Martin & Sunseri 2011; Agoncillo 1960; Smith 1997; Oyewumi 1997). Both women and men needed to facilitate each other for the betterment of their people. The Aeta women healers recognize that there have been changes in their community and assert that this started when colonizers established **THEIR** rule in the Aeta community. Smith (1999) explains how colonization had a tremendous impact on gender relations:

Colonization is recognized as having had a destructive effect on Indigenous gender relations which reached out across all spheres of Indigenous society. Family organization, child rearing, political and spiritual life, work and social activities were all disordered by a colonial system which positioned its own women as the property of men with roles which were primarily domestic...indigenous women hold an analysis of colonialism as a central tenet of an indigenous feminism...colonialism has influenced indigenous men and had a detrimental effect on indigenous gender relations. (pp. 151-152)

The Aeta healers must incessantly remind their people, especially the Aeta men, that their culture affirms the equality of women and men. Subsequently, women emerge as agents of decolonization detaching their men from patriarchal beliefs that have been codified as part of the "hidden curriculum" through modeled experience of colonial

subordination. They are diligent in refreshing the Aeta men's consciousness; going beyond the underlying colonial dynamics of occupation of mental space to remind their kin that such luminal division is a divisive practice meant to control all the Aeta through gender polarization. Hence countering this would be a fundamental part of the resistance work against oppression.

The Aeta "feminist" healers posit that abandoning this culture is a form of enslavement. The Aeta women are aware that if they start to agree on the notion of "gender differences", then it would be too easy for them to assimilate into the culture of non-Aeta people, based on colonialist ideology. Our interviewees as both healers and de facto feminist activists are lucid about the impact of colonization on their community. They also form the vanguard community defense response through continuous cultural education. This kind of activism is done not only by Aeta women healers in their community but also by other Indigenous communities around the world, such as the First Nations Peoples in Canada, the Maori Peoples in New Zealand and Aboriginals in Australia, and the Maasai Peoples in Kenya, among others.

This kind of work has been theorized by Aboriginal/Indigenous Women in the West. While this study does not claim that Aeta women healers have exactly the same issues and challenges, it underlines that there are common issues facing these communities. For example, colonization, imperialism, racism, land expropriation/swindling, assimilation, sexism, and classism, among others, have been major impediments to their survival. These are some of the issues that the Aeta women healers face, which are different from those faced by the non-Aeta. The Aeta healers

know how to strategically fight and apply precise tactical instruments in specific combat situations as feminist activists. They want to be seen as distinct from others and, as such, to be treated based on their unique lived experiences (Torres 1996).

It is in this context that the Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism framework was used in this study to theorize the thematic guiding issues of the Aeta women healers. It is argued in this study that “feminism” does not exist as a concept in their community rather than the nature of their activism conforms to the definition of Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism described by Green (2007), in which it is stated that Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism:

...seeks an Aboriginal liberation that includes women, and not just the conforming woman, but also the marginal and excluded, and especially the woman who has been excluded from her community by virtue of colonial legislation and socio-historical forces. Thus, Aboriginal feminism is a theoretical engagement with history and politics, as well as a practical engagement with contemporary social, economic, cultural and political issues. It is an ideological framework not only of intellectuals but also of activists. It is an authentic expression of political analysis and political will by those who express it, who are self-consciously aware of their identities as Aboriginal women - with emphasis on the unity of both words.

Aboriginal feminism interrogates power structures and practices between and among Aboriginal and dominant institutions. It leads to praxis-theoretically informed, politically self-conscious activism. (p. 25)

Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism is important in framing the Aeta women healers' lives because they are marginalized women as a consequence of colonial policies and historical forces. The voices and representational forms have been silenced, slandered and misrepresented. They also face very real economic issues; as well as issues of land appropriation posed by the non-Aeta people (which one may conjecture, using a materialist frame, may be the root of their other issues of colonial marginalization). This concept of "land ownership" has acted as the legal basis for expropriation; territorial claims by colonization continue and pose multiple menaces for the Aeta integrity, land and continuity. Illustrating a typical such scenario may assist comprehension: an "official" property owner lays "claim" to an ancestral land and dispossesses people. The result is that the non-propertied population regards each other with a mutual suspicion. This patronizing doctrine governed the Aeta community. By driving a wedge between settlers and natives suspicion is established against those seeking to appropriate land and extract surplus value from land, and labor. Oppressive policies are often implemented in this process. Again, this tactic is hardly unique. In the British historian John Keay's insightful work; *The Great Arc: the Dramatic Story of How India Was Mapped and How Everest Was Named* (Keay 2000), he lays out how, under the nominal pretext of determining the precise arch and curvature of earth for science, British survey teams would impinge on varying and subsequent jurisdictions of what would become India. When the officials and officers of these lands attempted to assert territorial claims, the British army (conveniently) was waiting to "save" the poor scholars from the "terrorists". The result was a patchwork system of accommodations

which (were later) integrated into the colonial State of India. Besides expropriated wealth proprietary in markets, the English colonial administration was able to extract considerable taxes on lands and then export, and resell (and re-tax) the extractive capital, agricultural products and goods in England, around her Empire and the rest of the world. Britain was surpassed in 1865 as the leading *industrial power* by the United States owing to industrialization of the mills and ordinance factories of the Northern US States bolstered in order to execute and support the US Civil War. Britain remained the title of world's richest country until it lost it to the United States in another war which changed colonial and other boundaries as well as national power dynamics: the First World War in 1917. The basis by which Britain retained its advantage in wealth was the extractive wealth from her Empire, most especially India and the lands which were expropriated through de facto land swindling fronted by "scientific work" (of mapping the arc). Rhodes did much the same in the well-documented Anglo-American operations in Africa through the establishment of Anglo-American and British control of Southern Africa. Look globally and the pattern is the same through the forms vary slightly based on the corresponding successes of resistances. The Aeta's skirmish in this global warfare and gamesmanship of group power was, and is, spear-headed on the resistance side by unifying efforts among the Aeta community. Their women healers' inoculate their men and children against the maladies brought by this colonial mentality which has become engrained through schooling media misrepresentation. To eliminate this media misrepresentation is a primary objective of this wellbeing

campaign. The Aeta people who live in other parts of the Philippines have been displaced because the non-Aeta people took their ancestral land.

Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism is focused on the emancipation of women, and Aeta women healers can be a part of this liberation. Evidently, Aeta women healers have been fighting strenuously against the repressive legislations and historical forces. Policy making that was laid down by the colonial regimes continues to be applied by current governments, consequently wreaking havoc and despair. Aludig, an Aeta participant in the Talking Circle elucidates:

*One of our biggest problems is that when our community members complain about a non-Aeta people who come and claim that our ancestral land belongs to them, the municipal government usually tells us that, according to Act number...you Aeta People do not have that land. What I would like to say is that the person who works in the municipal hall uses this Act or legislation to oppress us. Again, most of the people in the municipal hall are the ones who make the law, interpret the law and implement the law. So, they use it for their own benefit and for violation of Aeta community. But you know, Rose...we believe that there is an end to this oppression. We, Aeta women healers, fight back by means of healing our people. We also sometimes explain to the person at the municipal office our notion of ancestral land, our way of life, and our culture and traditions, because, we want this person to be educated. Sometimes, we go to the municipal hall to rally against this legislation that exists to violate our very existence, however,*



*nobody listens to us. So, we have tried to use different means to counteract this oppressive treatment that we experience from non-Aeta people.*

The Aeta women healers are also excluded by default and disinformation from knowledge production: they face misrepresentation and exclusion in school textbooks and other academic resources. What mention is made of them is objectified and seemingly clinical. One can read about them as the people who traveled by land bridges who were the first people in the Philippine, yet when one wants to animate them from this “dead history” file, one cannot find information about them as people who contributed to the rich cultural background of the Philippines. This exclusion and reification of them as object versus subject deprives their community of self-reference or the opportunity to see their potential come alive in official texts: Aeta children who go to school hence start questioning the authenticity of their culture because they cannot find their stories and legends in assigned literature in government schools.

Language can also be used to understand the strength of a particular culture, and its curricular exclusion tends to consign the Indigenous language, such as that of Aeta to a marginal position. The languages that are permitted in those schools are not the Indigenous ones. The Aeta women healers have been reclaiming their position in knowledge production by educating the Aeta youth in their community about their culture. Shimizu (1989) states:

This process of selective assimilation contributed to the stability and continuity of the Aytas’ culture. Their antagonistic feeling towards the lowlanders made the Aytas preserve their own culture. While it is true

that they have experienced various changes in their language, culture and society, still the Aytas are distinctly different from the culture that influenced them...Within their own micro cosmos, they have maintained their own autonomous society, especially because their village was seldom visited by the lowlanders who feared the Aytas as savages. (pp. 14-15)

It is important for the Aeta people to maintain their own culture and to continue with the traditions that have been passed down to them by their ancestors. They know that if they allow other people to invade their culture and their land, it could destroy their identity. The Aeta people do not want to be assimilated. They see assimilation as a "violation of cultural values" (Headland 1985, p. 108). That is why the Aeta in the Philippines opted not to abandon their ancestral land and live in the settlement area where there is a clinic, a school and a church (Shimizu 1989; Barbosa 1985; Headland 1985). Aeta people acutely comprehend "the life that is best for them". The Aeta people make the conscious choice to lead a life that has been associated with their ancestors.

In addition liberation from marginalization and exclusion which Aboriginal/Feminism theory is advocating for, the activism of the Aeta women healers combats the colonial processes by striving to adhere to their Aeta women's healing identity. This cultural connection chamber amplifies the voices of liberation and creates a ground for activism. It is the transmission junction and switchyard at which ideational resistance and power is transmitted from the Aeta women healers. This central juncture is the political base through which the Aeta women healers discuss the way forward to

overcome oppressive social structures. It is a healing space meant to activate their agency and activism. It is a circle through which their identity is revisited and recognized as a pivotal element of their survival.

The identities of the Indigenous People are affected by reconstructive history which has been used to commodify the Indigenous People (Smith 1999). When the colonizers learnt about the culture of the Indigenous People, they used their identities to make profits. They saw it as a product through which profit could be realized. The colonizers immersed themselves in the community to study the identity of the Indigenous People, masquerading -the Aeta's friends (Torres 1996). After gathering and extracting data which the researchers deemed useful to themselves (and colonial audiences) they produced books about the lives of the Indigenous People. This was a source of income for the researcher becomes in fact the "intellectual property" wing of colonization. What "royalties" were distributed? The answer is none. Standard practice is to not share information that is retained, codified and classified with the Indigenous People, upon whom all research had been fully dependent. A reader who does not know the real identity of the Indigenous People who were being represented in the book denies interrogation and the possibility of counter discourse; the reader is silently expected to believe whatever is written.

The truth is that colonialism has to maintain and has preserved its identity by destroying the factual nature of Indigenous People. In other words, the Indigenous People's identity has been stolen, patented and copied (Smith 1999). Smith talks about how one can learn about the identity of the Indigenous People without commodifying.

In their practice and interactions with outsiders the Aeta women healers have learned to be vigilant with regard to this non-Aeta activity. They understand that their identity has been used to earn profit and to portray their culture as defiant and devoid of wisdom. They are aware that their identity has been stereotyped.

Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism theory states that it has a continuous engagement in fighting this problem of misrepresentation. Many of our participants in the circle have found their identities constantly under attack from the propagandizes. This stream of uncontested stereotypes leads many non-Aeta to conclude that the Aeta are “uncivilized” (Rai 1990). The Aeta carry an image of self that is quite the contrary: they envision themselves as a People who are strong enough to carry on with their culture even in such adverse circumstances.

As Green (2007) writes, Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism:

... provides a philosophical and political way of conceptualizing, and or resisting, the oppressions that many Aboriginal people experience. It provides analysis of Aboriginal women’s particular experiences of oppression, and it offers some prescriptions for a post-colonial future for Aboriginal people. It is anti-oppressive in its intellectual and political foundations. It is not only the only way of understanding the world, but it is a valuable, valid conceptual tool, whose practitioners should not be dismissed. (Green 2007, p. 26)

Through the Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism lens, we can reclaim the Aeta women’s position in the community, documenting its palliative and emotionally hygienic social

space. This allows individual members and the collective community to learn from their collective knowledge base and recuperate from the toxic agents that have sprouted in the soil of the colonial legacy. As much as we bring out their experiences of oppression, Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism also celebrates the resiliency and agency of the Aeta women. Agency is one of the important elements in Indigenous/Aboriginal feminism and in the lives of the Indigenous women. Their agency was trampled down by colonialism and subsequently by neo imperialism. According to Coloma (2004), [imperialism] “is a process of domination and control emanating from the metropolis for ideological and financial reasons that generates practices of colonialism and neo-colonialism” (p.2).

The Aeta women healers have historically been branded as having a barbaric form of agency based on the benchmark that it allegedly does not possess Eurocentric scientific rigor. Indigenous/Aboriginal feminism centres its theorizing on the agency of Indigenous women. It concurs that Indigenous women possess agency that can be used to address the challenges in our contemporary society. That is why, despite colonialism, assimilation, domination and enfranchisement, among others, Indigenous women continue to be strong in practicing their agency and practicing knowledge which has survived the rigors of such community disruption.

Indigenous/Aboriginal feminism centres its work on bringing out the agency of Indigenous women. The agency of Indigenous women as a form of resistance sees power as both a way to make changes and a responsibility to overcome oppression (Smith 1999; Bhabha 1995; Green 2007; Kuokkanen 2007). Power is thus exercised

among the population but it is not imposed over them. It is constructed under the premise that power is everywhere and that it can be used constructively for the betterment of the whole society. Power is not commoditized but shared amongst the people.

Agency is not possessed solely by the colonizer; both the colonized and the Indigenous People own power and discourse as well (Dei et al. 2002). Smith (1999) believes that agency resides in the lives of Indigenous Peoples and that this is why they are able to resist colonization. The power necessitated by agency needs to be celebrated. The powerful legacy around the female deity, Mattarahkka is an example culturally of such agency in action (“Ancestral Mother”), (Kuokkanen 2007) deserves celebration/recognition. Smith (1999) also discusses one of the ways to deconstruct the Eurocentric research, which is to do research that highlights the agency of the Indigenous People. In addition, wa Thiongo (1987), Bhabha (1995), Dei (2002b), Fanon (1963), Foucault (1980), Memmi (1965), Salazar (1989) all focus on agencies and resistance-techniques that are practiced by Indigenous Peoples, and recognize marginalized groups as the subjects of their own histories, knowledge and experience.

The Aeta women healers have shown their agency in terms of using their healing practices and medicine, spite of the existence of Western medicine in the Philippines (Shimizu 1989; Rai 1985; Bennagen 1976). For the Aeta women healers’, healing is both the responsibility and the power to make a change in their community. It is also as a form of agency by which they continue to practice the healing ritual, marriage practices

and other Indigenous traditions (Shimizu 1989) so as to counter Eurocentric thoughts and practices.

Finally, Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism is also “about building bridges to their movements working for social justice” (Green 2007, p. 23). The Aeta women healers believe in unity, not just among themselves, but also unity that extends to non-Aeta people. They believe that they need to reach out to their allies and through that they can win the war against repression, brought about by colonization. That is why they do not choose who to heal or who to educate. They know that unity brings power with regard to fighting against the process of colonization. This power has been used to dismantle their community and, so, to retaliate, they also need the power of collaboration.

Power is the ability to influence individuals to take a certain direction with or without opposition or resistance. They know that they are going to face resistance in their quest for change, but the power brought about by their agency keeps them resilient and focused on the prize. They do not see others as enemies but rather as allies that they need in order to attain their wishes. That is why when I went to their community and asked if I could listen to them and learn about their healing practices, they saw this as an opportunity to bridge the gap that had been created by colonization. The Aeta women healers welcomed me because they believe that this is now the beginning of collaboration and unity, despite our differences. These issues of colonization, racism, sexism and global capitalism, among others, have had a robust foundation and, therefore, need a strong force to dismantle them. The Aeta women healers opt for collaboration and unity as one of the most effective weapons of

suppressing colonization. Amay, one of the Aeta women healers who participated in the Talking Circle, states:

*When we, Aeta women healers, gather at night to sing a song and tell a story we also talk about issues in the society. There are so many, like the issue of the color of our skin, the notion that women like us are submissive to our husband, mining, our government who do not really protect us, companies that come and take our plants and ask us the use of them and afterwards use them to make money and many more issues. These issues have been there, so the question is, what do we do now? We realize that we need friends to help us fight against these problems. So, you...Rose, we take you as one of our daughters who has gone to educate herself and decided to do something for the Aeta community. You may not be an Aeta, but we believe that what you are going to write about us will educate those people who will read your thesis.*

The Aeta women healers were aware of my privilege as a student in the West but they were not threatened by it because they understand that we need to know how colonization, and now global capitalism, works so we can fight back. These women understand that knowledge is power, and they know that combining their ways of knowing with the knowledge from the Eurocentric academy is the beginning of the victory against culturally-attrition forces. Aboriginal/Indigenous feminism has thus helped me, as a researcher, to explain where the Aeta women healers are coming from and how they are moving forward by employing their healing practices. They are proud of the Aboriginal/Indigenous feminists in the West who developed Aboriginal



feminism thought because it paves a way for them to voice out their concerns. It is also a way for them to reach out to other people who believe and acknowledge their healing practices and existence.

### ***Anti-colonial Theory***

Anti-colonialism is as old as colonialism (Young, 2001). Resistance from the Indigenous Peoples had existed because of the nature of colonialism which entailed direct control and domination over them and their land. For example, “the Maori cleverly repulsed an army that was far better equipped than its own during the years 1845 to 1869” (Onsterhammel 1997, p. 45).

Anti-colonial theory discusses how to rupture the colonial infliction on the lives of Indigenous Peoples. This field of study employed Anti-colonial frameworks to dismantle the arresting imposition in the lives of the Aeta and their healers. One of the main reasons why the Aeta and other Indigenous peoples have been discounted in the academy is because of the misplaced and undocumented settler notion that Indigenous peoples lack cognitive rigor and have little or no substantive and intellectually verifiable contributions to offer. Anti-colonial theory is subverting the influence of this colonization paradigmatic assumption. Young (2001) states that anti-colonials “were not preoccupied by worries about positions of detachment or secularity, but they were organic intellectuals, who lived and fought for the political issues around which they organized their lives and with which they were involved at a practical level on a daily basis” (p. 427). In just this material and intellectual understanding the Aeta women

healers form part of the vanguard of organic intellectuals who have been utilizing their healing knowledge to reclaim their political, social, cultural and spiritual power outside of their community. They actively participate in reclaiming their indigeneity in a practical sense. These “intellectuals” fully understand that societies houses machinations and encoded rules as well as patterns of governance, and they are ready to make changes that suit the well-being of the whole society. They are experienced and knowledgeable in their endogenous and external cultural practices, laws and norms and are ready to overcome oppression as engaged activists (Rima, Aeta healer).

In addition, Jose Rizal and Andres Bonifacio, among others, were the leaders of revolutionary movements in the Philippines. Jose Rizal wrote novels, such as *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, to expose the grievous act of the Spaniards against the Filipinos, while Andres Bonifacio led his troops to the mountains to end the injustices of the colonizers. Though they all came from different vantage points when analyzing the colonial nature, we can see that they had unity in goal: to resist and to explain the work of colonization while simultaneously reclaiming indigeneity. Fear was not sufficient to trump action since without such proactive steps; cultural genocide and domination would result. It was cultural survival and maintained claim to human self-determination which was the prize.

Maranan (1984, p. 26) documents the different segments and cadres of women who were involved in the revolution In the Philippines:

Gabriela Silang carried on the leadership of a rebellion in Ilocos after her husband’s death, and was executed by the Spanish authorities...Trinidad

Tecson wielded her *bolo* courageously against the Spaniards and procured arms for the revolution; inevitably, she bore the weird-sounding sobriquet “*babaing lalaki*” (the female name)...Gregoria de Jesus, wife of Andres Bonifacio, was a full-fledged member of the revolutionary organization called Katipunan and worked actively in the anti-Spanish underground. Agueda Kahabagan, freedom fighter of Batangas, was a soldier who rose to the rank of a general. There are other women, less known perhaps, but whose vision and valor as women cannot long remain obscured despite history’s unkindness to them. (p. 26)

According to Young (2001), “...many histories, rebellions, political campaigns, cultural identification and theoretical formulations that evolved during the twentieth century as part of the anti-colonial struggle that together, at great human cost, freed the world from colonial domination in a remarkably short period of time” (pp. 427-428). However, these could not have happened without the help of women. Women had a role to play, supplying men with both food and indigenous medication made from their herbs. Fanon (1965) expresses his recognition of and confidence in the capacity of women in overthrowing colonization: “the women could not be conceived of as a replacement product, but as an element capable of adequately meeting the new tasks” (p. 48).

In addition to these proponents of anti-colonial thought, this study includes here the Indigenous Peoples in the world, including the Aeta women healers who have been resisting tyrannical pedagogies and reclaiming their space. Human collective success

always works at many levels as we have tried to do. It is important to acknowledge the important epics and paradigmatic models written about anti-colonialism while neither devaluing nor forgetting the work of ground level intellectuals who were and are the front-line personnel and ground-level organic intellectuals of anti-colonial struggle and thought. Since the inception of colonization Indigenous Peoples-with the Aeta women healers as both a text book example and role models-have been skirmishing against oppression and challenging false cultural characterizations.

A holistic and full account of the anti-colonial struggle involves laying out the schematic and diagrammatic parts of the struggle. Hence it is essential to both describe anti-colonial thought while simultaneously acknowledging that the original people who exemplify resistance work against colonization are the Indigenous Peoples, including the Aeta. This is not to romanticize the Indigenous Peoples but rather is to fill in unspoken segments of the empirical basis of human group life from all humanity and to therefore start acknowledging those who are frequently excluded or (misrepresented) for both political, and economic convenience (from the colonial perspective of) knowledge production of theory and "fact". We must exert due diligence in our own method and rigor in our investigations of critical work or we may end up re-colonizing and misrepresenting the actual richness of cultural belonging to the Indigenous people in our theories and "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973). We have to highlight the dynamics, intelligence and uniqueness of their ways of life and how they have mastered the struggles resulting from being eclipsed by reductionist representation, and, in these representations we must be sympathetic yet critical as we watch the unfolding drama of

how Indigenous People like the Aeta are standing firmly for their cultures and traditions and not succumbing to domination and marginalization.

This study further notes that anti-colonial analysis does not sufficiently highlight the contributions of both non-Indigenous women and Indigenous women against colonization (Spivak 1985) and “often reproduce patriarchal, hierarchical models as the ideals for sovereignty” (Kuokkanen, 2007 p. 8). This study seeks to partially address this oversight and is the central reason for the inclusion of the Aeta women healers with the tactical and intellectual hopes of chronicling and recording their voices as part of the growing chorus rising as anti-colonial proponents. Again, this thesis addresses the gap created by the absence of the Aeta from the literature. Anti-colonial theory is nevertheless relevant in theorizing how the Aeta women healers have been rupturing the work of colonization in their community, and how the agency of Indigenous Peoples has been celebrated since it gives us an analytical template that fits many who endured the Euro-colonial paradigm.

What is anti-colonial discourse? Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) explain the nature of anti-colonial discourse:

The anti-colonial discursive framework is a counter/oppositional discourse to the repressive presence of colonial oppression. It is also an affirmation of the reality of re-colonization processes through the dictates of global capital. It is a way of celebration of oral, visual, textual, political, and material resistance of colonized groups, which entails a shift away from a sole preoccupation with victimization. It engages a critique of the

wholesale denigration, disparagement, and discard of tradition and culture in the name of modernity and global space. There is a site of/in tradition, orality, visual representation, material and intangible culture, and Aboriginality that is empowering to colonized and marginalized groups. The anti-colonial perspective seeks to identify that site and celebrate its strategic significance. (p. 301)

Anti-colonial work recognizes the body of knowledge that is embedded in the history, experiences and cultures of the subjugated and brings their experiential reality to the forefront. It violently dismantles the colonial mindset in the lives of the colonized and reminds the oppressed to look back and admire what they have lost both culturally and spiritually in their communities. The axiomatic claim of the paradigm is that lost culture is worth reclaiming as is the restoration of the lost pride of the endemic population.

Anti-colonial theory employs the very apparatus that the colonizer deployed against the Native population; the population was suppressed by the indoctrination of an inferiority complex. wa Thiongo (1986) explains the importance of local language that:

...equally acknowledges and builds on the work being done in the communities by the minoritized scholars; to reintegrate local and native language in the education of the young; in the studying language and literatures; in publication of texts, in nurturing, supporting and publishing indigenous writers in the academies and indigenous literary circles, encouraging that the work not only be reflective of the cultures, but also be written in local language.

By acknowledging the local dialect, wa Thiongo (1986) sees this as a standpoint through which full emancipation of the colonized can be realized. He believes that our culture is embedded in the language that we use and so, to define ourselves, full emancipation has to start from where we missed the step. To him, language is an imperative tool in decolonization. The Aeta women healers concede that language is a prerequisite for the preservation of their culture and traditions. Through their language, they know that they are able to put into context the love that their ancestors gave them. They speak Agta and Ilokano. They use these to educate their children about the importance of adhering to Aeta morals and values.

Anti-colonial theory teaches us how to “resist oppression, assimilation and annihilation by encouraging us to use alternative knowledge, oral histories, literatures, and cultural products as a counterpart to hegemonic forms of knowledges” (Asgharzadeh 2005, p. 65). We need to be aware of the full spectrum of oppressive techniques because the colonialists, “through their methods of writing and teaching, as well as through production, validation, and dissemination of knowledge, [compel] the colonized subjects to view themselves, their cultures, their language, their ancestors, their histories and their identities negatively” (p. 65). Anti-colonial theory “encourages the colonized bodies and communities to define themselves and to articulate their condition through their own voice” (p. 66). Anti-colonial theory places Indigenous knowledge that would have been excluded from the academy at the centre of academic discourse. However, placing Indigenous knowledge at the core of discourse does not mean excluding other forms of knowledge. Dei et al. (2002) assert:

Anti-colonial discourse emphasizes the power held by local/social practice to survive the colonial and colonized encounters. It argues that power and discourse are not possessed solely by the 'colonizer'.

Discursive agency and power of resistance reside in and among colonized and marginalized groups...indigenous knowledges differ from conventional knowledges because of an absence of colonial and imperial impositions. As Dei argues in his article, the notion of 'indigenouness' is central to the power relationships and dynamics embedded in the production, interrogation, validation, and dissemination of global knowledge about social development. Indigenous knowledges recognize the multiple and collective origins of knowledges as well as its collaborative dimensions. (p. 7)

Anti-colonial theory also recognizes the saliency of race. However, it does not mean that other forms of oppression, for example those based on class, gender, sexuality or religion ceases to exist in the analysis. Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) explain that anti-colonial thought realizes that there is a need to highlight the multiplicity of race's real life effects as both a social construction and a social fact (p.310). Race is a significant principle of social organization and identity formation (Omi & Winant 1993). Race mediates and revolves around every aspect of our lives (Lopez 1995, p. 7). In other words, race dominates every aspect of our lives, whether social, political, or economical. That is why anti-colonial theory "forwards a notion of critical gaze that which could be maintained on any single category such as race, class, or gender, at the same time can



refrain from subduing or subordinating other categories and sites of oppression” (Dei & Asgharzadeh 2001, p. 313). It talks about whiteness as a system which evokes dominance. The concept entails power over the radicalized groups in the society. The implicit intentionality suppresses the radicalized entities and stereotypes them.

Finally, anti-colonial theory captures the essence of why we need to acknowledge the Aeta cosmology and practice and why we need to dismantle the notion that knowing by means of Western knowledge is the solitary valid way of knowing. Wane (2009) states that:

Anti-colonial discourse problematizes the marginalization of certain voices and ideas in the educational system, as well as delegitimizes, in the pedagogic and communicative practices of schools, of the knowledge and experiences of subordinate groups. Using the anti-colonial discursive approach means affirming the pedagogic need to confront the challenge of social diversity and the urgency for creating an educational system that is both more inclusive and better able to respond to the varied multiple knowledge's that students bring to the formal learning spaces. (194-195)

Anti-colonial theory celebrates the different forms of resistance of the colonized. It brings the histories of knowledge production, “epistemology of the colonized, anchored in the Indigenous sense of collective and common colonial consciousness” (Dei, 2002b) to the spotlight. It also recognizes the complicities and responsibilities of every colonized individual.

Anti-colonial theory captures the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the academy as well as the anti-colonial struggle against imperialism, racism, sexism, impoverishment, homophobia and other forms of colonial domination. Anti-colonial theory can speak to the issues faced by Aeta women healers because it focuses on agencies and resistance that Indigenous Peoples practice and because it recognizes marginalized groups as subjects of their own histories, knowledge and experience (Dei 2002b; Fanon 1963; Foucault 1980; Memmi 1965). It is because of the focus on the wide variety of pertinent themes, such as the contribution of women, dismantling of dominating influences, use of language in the battle against colonialism, agency and resistance or race, highlighted by the anti-colonial theory, that this study selected to this framework as a means of bringing forth the significance of the role of the Aeta healers.

### ***Postcolonial Theory***

This section discusses postcolonial theory. The section explores its history, different proponents, issues (of focus), and how it is useful in understanding issues facing the Aeta women healers.

Prior to examining the nature of postcolonial theory, the study asserts from the onset of the distinction between anti-colonial and postcolonial theories. According to Young (2001),

The success of the anti-colonial movements did not fully-re-establish the equal value of the cultures of the decolonized nations. To do that, it was necessary to take the struggle into the heartlands of the former colonial powers which retained a dominant economic, cultural and military role, in

order to attack certain Western ideologies and counter them with values and knowledge's developed elsewhere. That is why it is so politically important for postcolonial critique to operate simultaneously inside and outside the west...Postcolonial theory is designed to undo the ideological heritage of colonialism not only in the decolonized countries, but also in the west itself. Once the process of political decolonization has taken place, then a cultural decolonization must: decolonize the west, deconstruct it. (p.65)

Young explains that postcolonial theory is focused on retrieving the Aeta women's histories and making sure that the resources of their histories are strengthened and utilized. Through these resources belonging to the Aeta women healers, ideological heritage of colonialism can be dismantled. Postcolonial theory centres in extricating both the hegemonic economic imperialism, and history of colonialism through focusing on the following key issues: a) colonial; b) imperial and anti-colonial; c) the postcolonial present; d) the international division of labour, starting with child labour; e) human's and cultural rights; f) emigration and immigration; g) forced migration; h) migrancy; i) nomadism and; j) settlement and diasporas in both Western and tri-continental societies (Young 2001, p. 66).

The postcolonial theory explores different facets of colonization that veil the continued process of colonization in the society. It broadens our imaginations in looking considering the work of colonialism. Postcolonial theory presents issues that are connected to colonization. As much as colonization tries to disguise itself in different

forms, postcolonial theory explores every element and its relevance to colonization. The postcolonial theory is relevant to this study because the challenges that the Aeta women healers have been facing are complex but still connected to colonization. For example, who appropriates (steals) their land? It is not only the white man, but also a brown man who embraced the values of a colonizer. This is more than a footnote or a compendium of “enemies”. It orients us towards the central fulcrum involved in these struggles, which is not merely a class of “peoples” but rather dialectical struggle of ideas and spiritual values. Just as sexism points to relations of power as much or more than it denotes simple gender separation or classification so too does division for Indigenous people serve as the core of the “battle for the soul”. Furthermore, in the issue of forced migration, it is not the Spanish who pressurize an Aeta person to move from his or her location, but rather a Filipino. Postcolonial theory helps us examine the nature of colonization in the everyday life struggles of the Aeta women healers. In this study, postcolonial theory is instrumental in helping the theorization of the lived experience of the Aeta women healers by understanding their political, social, cultural, spiritual and economic locations.

Furthermore, when some former colonies got their independence a new anti-colonial discourse emerged. “Its origins is based on the historical resistance to colonial occupation and imperial control, the success of which enabled a radical challenge to the political and conceptual structures of the systems on which such domination has been based” (Young 2001, p. 60). This theoretical stance illustrates that ideas in the postcolonial discourse are powerfully linked to the anti-colonial thinkers like Fanon,

Memmi and Cabral. According to Young (2001), “postcolonial is a dialectical concept that marks the broad historical facts of decolonization and the determined achievement of sovereignty but also the realities of nations and peoples emerging into a new imperialistic context of economic and sometimes political domination” (p. 57).

Young explains that what makes the postcolonial concept distinct from other discourse is that its analysis is focused on a mixture of material, historical conditions and hybrid discourses that also include the analysis of the cultural impact on the Aeta women healers’ identities and epistemologies. Postcolonial theorists largely focus on the interconnections between imperial/colonial cultures, the colonized cultural practices, and the constructions of hybridity and alterity (Dei 2006, pp. 12-13, qtd. Suleri 1992; Shohat 1992; Slemon 1995; Bhabha 1990; Spivak 1998, 1990, 1999). Its main project is to theorize about the nature of colonized subjectivity and unearth the different forms of colonized cultural and political resistance (see Shahjahan 2005; Kirkham & Anderson 2002, p. 3). Postcolonial thinkers who laid the foundations for “colonial discourse analysis” in postcolonial theory include Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Shahjahan 2005; Gandhi 1998; Young 1995).

The work of postcolonial theorists, such as Said, Bhabha and Spivak, is central to this study. In his book, *Orientalism*, Said (1978) provides a detailed explanation of the relationship between the Occident and the Orient. This relationship is one of power, of domination and, of varying degrees, a complex hegemony (Said 1994, p. 133). Said is able to encapsulate the treatment of the Orientals by the “West”. The West asserts that they have the power to represent the Orientals. The West ensures that the Oriental is

totally and completely as inferior in terms of representation. Said (1978) further explains how the Oriental culture is being portrayed:

Along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerated, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was linked thus to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien. Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or-as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory-taken over...Since the Oriental was a member of a subject race, he had to be subjected: it was that simple. (p. 207)

Said shows how the West demonized and criminalized the Orientals. He articulates here that the West perceives the Oriental as merely an "animal" and not worthy of recognition. Said employs historical texts in looking at how colonialism rules over the East. Subsequently, he states that the West's knowledge production in relation to the Oriental is racist, oppressive, ethnocentric, and manipulative, ideologically embedded, rationalized and portrays signs of imperial power (Childs & Williams 1997; Shahjahan 2005). He displays the Western way of treating other cultures in a fundamentally unacceptable manner. One of Said's very significant contributions is his warning about the need to be vigilant with respect to how the West produces knowledge related to the

Orient. He points out how the West portrays “universal” knowledge as the knowledge that is from the West.

In addition, Said “traces the discourse’s discriminatory strategies across centuries and continents and into contemporary period” (Childs & Williams 1997, p. 101). Said initiates energetic discussion on Colonial Discourse Analysis that is being theorized and argued over even today. However, according to Childs and Williams (1997), despite his contribution to colonial discourse, Said is being criticized on his analysis of *Orientalism* which is seen as “monolithic, totalizing, or just insufficiently nuanced, ignoring resistance within or outside the West, or the fact that the binary West/East divisions [project] outward, and thus [mask] splits within Western society” (p. 115). Childs and Williams disagree with this criticism of Said and argue that “it is part of the persuasive power of Said’s argument that it shows Orientalism marshalling texts which, while their form, content, aims, genre and disciplinary origins may be widely divergent, still work with negative, stereotyped or unexamined notions of cultural difference” (p. 115).

In fact, this study is in agreement with the assertion by Childs and Williams that Said lays a strong foundation of the analysis of the relationship between the West and the Orient, which could really help us understand the impact of colonization on the East. His profound colonial discourse analysis is a great tool to help us grasp the effect of colonization on the lives of the “others”.

The work of Said is relevant to the study of the Aeta women healers in the respect that they have been represented in the text and perceived by (other occupied subjects). It explains where this perception comes from and also it teaches us that our

analysis of how the Aeta healers have been represented must be based on the historical imposition of colonial mentality among the subjugated. Yet still, it is easy to transpose blame onto the colonized subject, thereby playing a “blame the victim” game. We have to be aware that by doing this we are not really looking at the root of the issue. We are, instead, complying with the work of colonization. We end up becoming a conduit through which colonization and the independent ideational framework is sustained. We are no different from the colonizer and, as such, we end up becoming the handmaiden of oppression. It teaches us how the West creates the “others” to masquerade its political and economic agendas. The Aeta women healers have been excluded, not just because they are Indigenous People, but also because the exclusion of their wisdom is a way of maintaining the position of Eurocentric knowledge at the centre.

Bhabha and Said were apparently influenced by Foucault. In fact, they both employed Foucault as their starting points in exploring colonial relations. Evidently, Bhabha and Said are labeled as important proponents of postcolonial theory. However, they have different approaches to colonial discourse analysis. Said focuses his discussion on the relationship between the West and the East, colonizer and colonized, latent and manifest as *Orientalism* looks at the differences between them and resistance they faced. Bhabha centres his colonial discourse analysis on exploring the similarities of the colonizer and the colonized and points out, for example, that stereotypes are the fundamental point of colonial subjectification for both sides (Childs & Williams 1997, p. 122). He employs psycho-analysis and deconstruction in analyzing colonial relations. Bhabha (1993) argues that “the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the



colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and establish systems of administration and instructions" (p. 70). In looking at Bhabha's work, one cannot fail to see how he explores the process of subjectification. He examines the notion of ambivalence, which means to be in "two places at once", such as to be colonizer and colonized (Childs & William 1997).

The result of ambivalence to the colonizer is anxiety. Colonial identity is not only for the colonizer but also for the colonized. For Bhabha, the notion of colonial identity that arises between the colonizer and the colonized is problematic. It is problematic in the sense that it is of a violent nature. The colonizer is not ready to recognize the existence of the colonized, yet, the colonizer has the desire of being colonized. This, the ambivalent identification outcome to the colonizer is both a terrifying and a craving feelings. In this context, we can see that Bhabha balances his analysis of colonial discourse with both subjectivity and consciousness. Indeed, Bhabha's concern is to problematize the authority of colonial discourse (ibid).

We can see that Bhabha's work is focused on postcolonial identity. In looking at the postcolonial identity, he highlights the notion of hybridity. He states that:

Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects...It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identification in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite power is enacted on the site of desire,

making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory-or, in my mixed metaphor a negative transparency. (pp. 34-35)

Using the notion of hybridity in the analysis of colonial discourse, Bhabha argues that hybridity serves as a form of resistance to the colonized in both the postcolonial arena as well as the colonial. For Bhabha, hybridity is an “introduction of cultural relativism or a synthesized position resolving the dialectic of two cultures but a return of the content and form of colonial authority that” (Childs & Williams 1997, p. 134) “terrorize authority with the use of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery” (Childs & Williams 1997, p. 134, qtd. Bhabha 1993, p. 115). The result of hybridity to the colonizer is a feeling of paranoia and persecution (Childs & Williams 1997). Consequently, this notion of hybridity and mimicry in the representation of culture presents a form of resistance.

Bhabha explains that when we discuss cultural engagement, it is important to look at it in the context of a migration home and away. He further explains that it is not static, and that in the discussion of race, class and gender, we must be resituated in terms of borderlines, crossings, in between spaces, interstices, splits, and joins (ibid). Through this we can see that this shift in subject-positions constructs cultural differences. In Bhabha’s view, cultural differences resulting from subsequent moving culminates into the “Third Space”. Cultural differences thus replace knowledge from the standpoint of the minority. Bhabha perceives this “Third Space” as a location where the agency belongs because cultural meaning can be constructed with no original meaning, hence there are only cultural differences (ibid).

The work of Bhabha is important in looking at the story of the Aeta women healers because it gives another way of analyzing their identity, agency and representation. The location of the Aeta women healers cannot be explained in a binary opposition. There are many factors that need to be considered in order fully to understand their work, activism, healing practices and way of life. Bhabha has offered tools, like considering the “in-between”, and “beyond” spaces. This gives us a fuller picture of who the Aeta women healers are, how colonization affected their way of life and how they have been reclaiming their position.

The narrative by Spivak is one of the most important works to consider in terms of exploring postcolonial theory. Spivak focuses on postcolonial studies by interrogating feminist, Marxist, deconstructive and psychoanalytic ideas through debate. Spivak’s main objective is to broaden the analysis of colonial discourse from reappraisals of the nineteenth-century European territorial expansion into debates over neocolonial relations. She speaks of racism in the West, and the international division of labour. She employs the term imperialism rather than colonialism (ibid). She looks at the ways in which imperialism has constructed narratives of history, geography, gender and identity (ibid). Her main concern is the location of the subject. That is why one of her objectives is to dislodge the notion of essentialism, because, for her, essentialism is a trap. Essentialism in postcolonial theory, according to Childs and Williams (1997), is “a concrete, specific, unchanging meaning for a term such as ‘British’ or ‘West Indian’: as opposed to a belief that words take on their meanings through usage and discursive power” (p.159). The consequences of essentialism can be oppressive, exclusionary,

exploitative and dehumanizing. However, Spivak also discusses strategic essentialism. Spivak (1990) explains strategic essentialism as “you pick up the universal that will give the power to fight against the other side, and what you are throwing away by doing that is your theoretical purity” (p. 12). In other words, we use strategic essentialism not just to theorize, but to change the world. Spivak is focused on who is representing whom and how.

According to Shahjahan (2005), Spivak “struggles with the question whether or not it is possible to represent the Subaltern voice or oppressed voice without falling under the rubric of essentialism” (p. 221). She warns not to romanticize and homogenize the subaltern subject. Spivak urges us to engage in imperial history and its aftermath. She describes imperial history as ‘epistemic violence’. Epistemic violence, as explained by Childs and Williams (1997), is “a term used by Spivak to refer to the way in which colonial and other historiographical writings forcefully manipulate representations while usually purporting to be disinterested commentaries” (p. 231). According to Spivak (1994), epistemic violence is “the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other” (p.76). In other words, epistemic violence is an establishment of imperialism as the normative explanation and narrative reality (Childs & Williams 1997). Shahjahan (2005) refers to Parry, who explains that “Spivak believes that imperialism’s epistemic violence annihilated the old culture and left the colonized without the ground from which they could reply and confront the other” (p. 222).

Spivak's work is of importance in this study because of the fact that it focuses on the cultural text which has been used by dominant Western culture with regards to marginalized women, immigrants, working class and the subaltern. Her style of using contemporary culture and critical theories to challenge and critique the legacy of colonialism is an important tool in this study.

Consequently, "postcolonial theory and its political practices seek to build on the rich inheritance, (and) the radical legacy of its political determination, (as well as) its refusal to accept the status quo, its transformation of epistemologies, its establishment of new forms of discursive and political power" (Young 2001, p. 427). It does not mean that postcolonial theory forgets colonization. Its focus is instead to look at the impact of colonialism at the present time by considering the past. Said, Bhabha and Spivak employ different ways of explaining the influence colonization to colonizers and the colonized. They use different categories to analyze colonialism. In other words, postcolonial theory designates a new critical discourse that thematizes issues emerging from colonial relations and their aftermath (Shohat 1992).

## **Chapter IV: Methodology**

### ***Introduction***

This chapter discusses Indigenous research. The two questions asked are: (a) what is Indigenous research and how do we know if the research method is appropriate? And, (b) to whom is the researcher accountable? As the researcher in this study, I also describe my first meeting with the Aeta women healers in Cagayan. I will explore the Talking Circle as a methodology of data collection.

### ***What is Indigenous research?***

I remember that when I first conducted research in the Aeta community for my Bachelor of Arts in Political Science degree-I realized that my qualitative research methodology course did not discuss Indigenous research methodology. We only discussed Eurocentric ways of conducting research. I embarked on my fieldwork with no profound knowledge of Indigenous research methodology. I went to the Aeta community, confident that I knew what I was doing and that my research plan was the correct way of conducting an empirical investigation. I talked to the Elders upon reaching the community and I expected them to answer all my questions. I was surprised however, when one of the Elders told me, "university researchers keep coming to our community to take our knowledge, and then they write a book, claiming that the knowledge is their own. They never acknowledge us, our knowledge and cultures" ...it is time to stop this".

Smith (1999) is right when she claims that “the term research is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous word’s vocabulary” (p. 1). The Aeta people know experientially what is happening when they see a researcher in their community. It is essential to recognize that others have cerebral and cultural capacities equivalent to our own is. Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge the multiple ways of expressing both universal and particular truths. We should accept that, by virtue of their time, insights and experiences with their environment, it is not only possible but probable that they have knowledge which is comparably and contextually more sophisticated than our own. Much of the same argument can be made for methods that form the pedagogical transmission, such as “logics” and so on. We collaborate with, work with and hopefully for the communities acknowledge that, ethically and legally, participation is (and should be) their choice. It is time for all elements of Western research establishments to recognize that (following the trends elsewhere) it has become codified in many ethical review procedures such as the New Tripartite Commission of Ethics in Canada (2012). At this point, the academic community needs to understand the need to reevaluate the way in which we do our research amongst Indigenous communities. We need to include them in the process of determining the way in which they want the research to be conducted. We need to accommodate their wishes and recognize them in our academic endeavors. There is a need to refrain from viewing them as “others”. We need to recognize that they are an important part of the research and acknowledge that without them, we are headed for failure. Acknowledging the

vital part participants play in research will help avert in future antagonism that may occur between the researchers and subjects.

Through this experience I tried to learn more about Indigenous research methodology. Smith (1999) states:

While it is more typical (with the exception of feminist research) to write about research within the framing of a specific scientific or disciplinary approach, it is surely difficult to discuss research methodology and Indigenous Peoples together, in the same breath, without having an analysis of imperialism, without understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices. (p. 2)

I agree with this contention since my research is using the lenses of anti-colonial, postcolonial and Indigenous feminist theories that centre the world view of Indigenous People. Consequently, the methodology is geared towards not only addressing the issue of the exclusion of women's knowledge production, but also privileging their agency and resilience in the midst of colonization. Smith (1999) further notes:

Indigenous People across the world have other stories to tell which not only question the assumed nature of those ideals and the practices that they generate, but also serve to tell an alternative story: the history of Western research through the eyes of the colonized. These counter-stories are powerful form of resistance which are repeated and shared across diverse indigenous communities. (p. 2)



The Aeta people know the plan of the researcher. That is why when they first saw me in their community they already knew that I wanted to hear their story.

### ***What is Indigenous methodology?***

Smith (1999) writes about an agenda for Indigenous research:

The research agenda is conceptualized here as constituting a program and set of approaches that are situated within decolonization politics of the Indigenous people`s movement. The agenda focused strategically on the goal of self-determination of Indigenous Peoples. Self-determination in a research agenda becomes something more than a political goal. It becomes a goal of social justice which is expressed through and across a wide range of psychological, social, cultural and economic terrains. It necessarily involves the processes of transformation, of decolonization, of healing and of mobilization as peoples. (p. 116)

If the agenda for Indigenous research is to achieve self-determination, I define Indigenous research as research that respects the way of life of Indigenous Peoples, their worldview, their culture and traditions, and the knowledge that they possess. It is research that privileges the voices of Indigenous Peoples. "By situating Indigenous People at the centre of the research act and using their systems of knowledge and understanding as the basis for inquiry and investigation, we open up the possibility of dramatically extending the knowledge base of Indigenous People and transforming their understanding of the social and cultural world" (Abdulla & Stringer 1999, p. 154).

In addition, Wilson (2001) explains Indigenous methodology as follows:  
To me an Indigenous methodology then becomes talking about relational accountability. As a researcher you are answering to all your relations when doing research. You are not answering questions of validity or reliability or making judgments of better or worse. Instead you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you. So your methodology has to ask different questions: rather than asking about validity or reliability, you are asking, "Am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? What are my obligations in this relationship?" The axiology or morals need to be an integral part of the methodology so that when I am gaining knowledge, I am not just gaining in some abstract pursuit; I am gaining knowledge in order to fulfill my end of the research relationship. This becomes my methodology, an Indigenous methodology, by looking at relational accountability or being accountable to all my relations. (p. 177)

Wilson, like Smith and others focusing on Indigenous method, is focusing on relationships. Indigenous research is about fulfilling our obligations to our relationship to the research and to the Indigenous people. In order to fulfill this responsibility, it is important that the main features of Indigenous research methodology are adhered to. Martin (2002) outlines the following main features of an Indigenous research methodology:

1. Recognition of our world views, our knowledge and our realities as distinctive and vital to our existence and survival. This serves as a research framework;
2. Honouring Aboriginal social mores as essential processes through which we live, learn and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our own lands and when in the lands of other Aboriginal people;
3. Emphasizing the social, historical and political contexts which shape our experiences, our lives, positions and futures;
4. Privileging the voices, experiences, and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands;
5. Identifying and redressing issues of importance for us. (p. 5)

It is in the context of these main features of Indigenous methodology expounded by Martin that Steinhauer (2002) asks the question, "Who will carry out this type of research?" Steinhauer (2002) writes:

...regardless of who is going to do this research, Weber-Pillwax (1999) suggests that those who participate in this discourse of Indigenous research methodology should include a consideration of such principles as:

1. The interconnectedness of all living things,
2. the impact of motives and intentions on persons and community,

3. the foundation of research as lived Indigenous experience, the grounding of theories in Indigenous epistemology,
4. the transformative nature of research,
5. the sacredness and the responsibility of maintaining personal and community integrity, and
6. the recognition of languages and cultures as living processes.

(p. 73)

Indigenous research methodology can be employed in both Indigenous or non-Indigenous research. However, if it is true to this method's objectives, these principles of integrity, respect, and reciprocity must be respected and put into practice. This occurs "as long as they honor, respect, manifest, and articulate an Indigenous world view" (Steinhauer 2002, p. 79). These guiding principles are an integral part of conducting Indigenous research. It is, thus, fundamental that these principles be respected in order to realize our relationship to the Indigenous People.

Indigenous research methodology is about learning from the Indigenous People. It is also used "to ensure that Indigenous People have control of the systems of knowledge that affect their lives and use them to promote self-determination in ways that mainstream systems do not allow" (Abdulla and Stringer 1999, p. 144). According to Restoule (2004, p. 55, paraphrase Gilchrist) that "the goal is to challenge colonization in all its forms and where researchers are best placed to make this challenge is in diversifying knowledge production". Through this goal of Indigenous research, it is important to always remember that when we do research within the Indigenous

community, we need to respect their way of life and to be honest about our intentions. Indeed, Steinhauer (2002) stresses that “Indigenous researchers must engage in their work with both passion and compassion for their obligations are horrendous. They know that research is never objective nor should it be” (p. 79). Steinhauer alludes to Hampton (1995) who writes:

One thing I want to say about research is that there is a motive. I believe the reason is emotional because we feel. We feel because we are hungry, cold, afraid, brave, loving, or hateful. We do what we do for reasons, emotional reasons. That is the engine that drives us. That is the gift of the Creator of Life. Life feels...feeling is connected to our intellect and we ignore, hide from, disguise, or suppress that feeling at our peril and at the peril of those around us. Emotionless, passionless, abstract, intellectual, academic research is a goddam lie. It does not exist. It is a lie to us and a lie to other people who possess humans-feeling and are living, breathing, thinking humans upon whose good will and participation all our research depends. When we try to cut ourselves off at the neck and pretend an objectivity that does not exist in the human world, we become dangerous, to ourselves first, and then to people around us. (p.80)

### ***To whom is the researcher accountable?***

Smith (1999) asks an important question that needs to be considered before embarking on research in any Indigenous community: To whom is the researcher

accountable? I believe I am accountable to the Aeta women healers. I was open to constructive criticism that would allow me to observe and assess with more integrity. I was transparent about the goal of this study and where I would be using their stories. I informed them of exactly why I was doing my study. I still remember my conversation with one of the Aeta women when I did my undergraduate thesis in their community. I was told by one of the Aeta Elders that researchers like myself from the university had been appropriating their knowledge. These researchers usually took the data from them and then wrote books or articles in which they never recognized the Aeta contribution. They went ahead and wrote stories that were not befitting the lived experiences of the Aeta Indigenous community. Indeed, this was a serious Aeta concern. Even though they were not happy, they did not let their past experiences jeopardize their relationships with other people, such as myself. To them, such actions from researchers never ceased their resolve to help the world change its perception of the Aeta people. Subsequently, I was extremely conscious of how I represented the Aeta women healers in my study.

### ***My first meeting with the Aeta women healers***

On my trip to Cagayan, I brought with me my cousin and my niece. Our first mission was to look for the houses of the Elders. We went to the house of one of the Elders and explained to him the purpose of our visit. I introduced myself as a student. I informed him of the nature of my thesis. He was hesitant at first. He later asked me the purpose of my study. I informed him that it was one of the requirements for my degree. I also informed him that I wanted to know about the healing practices of Aeta women

healers and the implications for the academy. He said it was an important piece of work and he gave me his blessings to meet the healers. I am fluent in Ilokano, which is one of the dialects that they speak. This facilitated talking to the Aeta healers.

I met the Aeta women healers in one of the houses where they were making “bibingka” or rice cake, boiling sweet potatoes and bananas. I was informed that this was their tradition. When it rains they are not able to go to the farm to plant or gather vegetable or go to the river to wash clothes. They usually make something for the whole community to eat as they gather and have story telling sessions. The Aeta women healers welcomed us. In fact, we were offered some of the rice cakes to eat. As I was eating, they too asked me the purpose of my visit. It was then that I informed them about my thesis. They were very excited and agreed to share with me their healing practices.

### ***Aeta women healers’ methodology: Talking Circle***

This section of the thesis discusses the study methodology that was proposed by the Aeta women healers, and subsequently employed in the data collection process. In the research proposal, I had stated that I would be using a qualitative research methodology in the form of gathering information on life history. However, this changed when I met the Aeta women healers in the summer of 2010. I brought with me the ethics committee approval of the thesis and the sets of questions that I had included in the proposal. There were 12 Aeta women healers who agreed to participate in my study. I asked them if they would be comfortable being interviewed individually. They

informed me that they were more comfortable talking in a circle than talking to me alone. Hence, I reframed the methodology, and we used a Talking Circle.

Martin (2002) believes that reframing research methodology means acknowledging the existence of Indigenous People. Martin, as an Aboriginal Person, stresses the importance of reframing research in accordance with the perspectives of the Indigenous People affected:

To reclaim research is to take control of our lives and our lands to benefit us in issues of importance for our self-determination. It is to liberate and emancipate by decolonization and privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands so that research frameworks are reflective of this. To reframe research is to focus on matters of importance as we identify these. It is to respect our ways and honour our rites and social mores as essential processes, through which we live, act and learn...To rename research is to recognize and use our worldviews, and our realities as assertions of our existence and survival.

(p. 4)

This study is about the life of Aeta women healers; therefore it was right for me to reframe the research methodology according to what they wanted, their beliefs and their worldviews. As Martin notes, it is about respect and recognition of their presence in this world. Through this, the Aeta women healers can unravel the Eurocentric way of research whereby it is the researcher who determines the methodology. This thesis is about the Aeta women healers, their healing practices and their worldviews. They are,



therefore, the appropriate people for determining the right methodology-one that can honour their existence. As a student, I decided to write a thesis about the healing power of the Aeta women healers and their lessons and the subsequent implications. It is also a thesis that debunks the sense of entitlement that most researchers possess.

The academy should take a leaf from the pages of this grand master work about how to share communal experiences and acknowledge that, in our work as researchers, we need to be active advocates of equal representation of those we carry out research on. We also need to remember that the information that our research subject offers us should be treated with diligent respect. By this I mean that we should write and represent their stories the way they want them to be written. The Indigenous People of the Philippines also teach us that we can have the freedom to consider other ways of knowing as both foreign and devoid of wisdom, or we can pave a way of recognizing them as authentic. The Aeta women healers, after all, are the ones who possess the knowledge, the experiences and the answers to the questions that this study addresses. These questions are related to their healing practices, identity, agency and representation. For example, "can you describe your healing practices? What is identity from your own perspective? How do you make sense of your identity?" A very similar argument can be made in terms of the imposition of state education. For example, the Philippines presents itself nationally as an international leader in multicultural education. This, in part, is based on the fact that it is one of the few jurisdictions in the world that legally guarantees Indigenous education in their mother tongues (Philippine Education for All 2015: Implementation and Challenges 2012). From a legal perspective

this claim to “progressiveness” is true. But in practice there is no “stakeholder” sharing in the determination of curriculum. The pedagogical and epistemological models, values, assessment mechanisms and so on mirror, rather than challenge the worldview that Western knowledge is “valid” and that Indigenous is child-like, non-substantive and thus flawed.

The 12 Aeta members of the circle divided themselves into 3 groups, each forming a Talking Circle. The classification and taxonomy was indigenous: they themselves identified who belonged to the different groups. There were, thus, four healers in each Talking Circle. They needed to divide and schedule the groups with logistical consideration, because not all of the women were available at the same time. Some had to do work outside of their community which included going to the market to sell some of their goods, or visiting relatives, or just being available in case people required their services. When we completed the grouping, they planned the dates when I would be able to hold Talking Circles with each group. I held the Talking Circles in the summer of 2010, with the first of the three groups on July 16, the second on July 20, and the third on July 25. In addition, after holding the three Talking Circles, I visited the women once a week for six weeks. In these visits, I went to their own houses to have informal conversations and to read to them the notes that I had written about the Talking Circles. This was, not only to validate the information that I had gathered during the Talking Circles, but also a time for me to learn more about their way of life, healing practices and implications for academic discourse.

Talking Circles have both a spiritual and cultural relevance to Indigenous People (Prorock-Ernest 2009; Restoule 2004). The spiritual relevance of the Talking Circle has been explained by Prorock-Ernest (2009) who states that it is “rooted in traditional storytelling and religious ceremonies,...it offers a place where stories of life experiences are shared in a respectful, egalitarian, and non-confrontational manner, in a context of “complete acceptance” by participants” (p. 22). It is a place where everybody is accepted and not judged. Talking in a circle is part of the Indigenous worldview.

According to the Aeta women healers, the Talking Circle is a space where there is no animosity, but instead, open communication among the group members. Further, Kovach (2009) states “it is meant to provide space, time, and an environment for participants to share their story in a manner that they can direct” (p. 124). Graveline (1998) also has the same explanation about Talking Circles, portrayed in her poem (136):

In Talking Circle...in “circle time”

We open our Hearts

Speak what we know to be True

Share what we Care deeply about

As Honestly as we can...as Respectfully as we are able.

We are able to enter into another’s experience through their Words.

A doorway to self-examination...a social context for

A “personal” experience

It is a safe space where they can talk from their hearts. It is, furthermore, a space where they can share their healing practices and also an emotive and emotional space for

laughing and crying. In other words, it is a space where everybody is free to express their opinions and share their ideas with others. It is also a circle of healing (Prorock-Ernest 2009; Restoule 2004; Fitznor 1998; Hart 1996). The Aeta women healers state that, as much as they can heal others, they need healing as well and they can do this in a Talking Circle. This is where they express the pains that they are currently experiencing. Singli, one of the Aeta women healers, states:

*You know, when I join the talking circle I feel good because in here I can talk about the abuse that I experience outside my community. Like when I went to the city hall, a group of people were talking about me and I heard them saying, 'bring out your handkerchief an Aeta woman is coming'. You know how these people smell. They smell like a dead rat. This is painful to listen to. But when I am in a talking circle, I share this story with others, pouring out all the emotions that I have inside...ohh...for sure it feels good...my group (referring to the Aeta women healers) tells me to not pay attention to those things...we know it hurts but we have to remember that these people need enlightenment.*

Singli explains how a Talking Circle can be a place of healing through sharing her own experiences through interacting with the non-Aeta people with others. For her, talking about the pains can instigate healing because she knows that other the Aeta women healers are there to support her. In the Talking Circle, voicing one's painful experiences is very easy because she knows that she is not alone and that she is connected with the other healers. For the Aeta women healers, this circle is a place where they reenergize their agency among themselves.

It symbolizes the fundamental truth that we are all inter-connected and that all of us are equally important in this world. Hampton (1995) describes the Talking Circle, stating, “the sharing circles can establish dignity and unity by following the basic teachings of being holistic, in balance, connected, and in harmony...Sharing circles are holistic in that everyone can participate” (p. 69). Everybody within this circle is considered equal. Through this belief system, the Aeta women healers welcomed me in their Talking Circle.

This methodology that has been identified by the Aeta circle mentors helped me understand their worldview with respect to social, spiritual and economic life and governance. As much as they experience challenges in their daily life because of the scarcity of resources and the continued domination of imperialism, the Aeta remain strong as a community in facing the different adversaries in their daily lives. The Talking Circle methodology and format allowed me to hear about their perspectives on healing and its implications in relation to the academic discourse. I also realized that researchers, such as myself, as a student, can never impose the preeminent methodology conducting research. Allowing participants to co-determine which methodology to employ led to a much more meaningful dialogue between me and the Aeta healers. As Graveline (1998) states, “talking in circle reminds us that to speak is a privilege, that spoken thoughts-words-are sacred” (p. 139).

The Talking Circle helped me answer my central research question by allowing me to ask questions about the Aeta women’s healing practices and the implications of their healing for academic discourse. It helped me reflect on my position as a student

who had been immersed in a Eurocentric discourse, because there was a possibility that I could unknowingly use my position to oppress them. This Talking Circle led me to critically reflect on my privileges, prestige and power and how these could be used as oppressive tools in representing the agency and identity of the Aeta women healers. The Talking Circle set a scope of seeing how the external world demonizes the Aeta women healers. It enabled me to provide representation from their perspectives. This is because they allowed me to hear and to write about their knowledge on healing and its implications for the academy after internalizing the discussions. This helped me understand the importance of honoring their knowledge and being consistent with their worldview (Sevilla et al. 1992). This is particularly important in this study as it was the Aeta women healers who had helped me select the methodology for gathering information.

Smith (1999) explains that privileging the “Indigenous presence that uses ‘the words’ (such as colonialism, decolonization, self-determination) and that acknowledges” (p. 6) their continuing existence is important in Indigenous research. In explaining decolonization methodologies, Smith focuses on how to centre and respect the lives of Indigenous Peoples in the research arena. She does not discuss which methodology to use in conducting research with the Indigenous Peoples. What she says about methodology is:

It is at this level that researchers have to clarify and justify their intentions...Indigenous methodologies are often a mix of existing methodological approaches and Indigenous practices...common sense

understandings of research which govern how Indigenous communities and researches define their activities. (p. 143)

What Smith's insights imply for me in my undertaking of this work is that by using the "Talking Circle" methodology, we need to not only make sure that the life of the Aeta people is centred in the research process, but also fully acknowledge and respect their worldviews and ways of knowing. Through this research, I did privilege the Aeta women healers "concern", "practices", and participation as both researchers and the researched (Smith 1999, p. 107).

In this study, the research embarked on a new production of knowledge (Spivak 1996) that highlights the healing practices of the Aeta women. The study explores lessons that those in the academic arena can use to address the exclusion of other ways of knowing in the academy. This study reveals that Indigenous knowledge is an important part in both the political and academic discourses. It is a study that provides "new material for the grasping of the production and determination of literature... and a research about the conditions of women" (Spivak 1996, p. 59).

Finally, the Talking circle follows the work of anti-colonial, postcolonial and Indigenous feminist theories because it is about promoting self-determination, listening, acknowledgment of the voices of the Aeta women healers and recognition that they, too, are part of the production of knowledge in the academy.

**Data Collection**

The Aeta healers know that respect is key in the Talking Circle. It is a forum where patience is a fundamental. Speaking and listening with the heart is an essential part on the Talking Circle. During the study, after the first speaker, anyone who was ready was allowed to respond. After the first round of responses, I asked the second question, and the same procedure followed until the responses to all the questions posed were given. Each Circle lasted approximately two hours.

The women did not encourage me to take down notes during the session, or to record the conversation. Instead they asked me to listen attentively and to join in on the conversation. They told me that if I listened carefully, I would never forget what they told me because it would be in my heart and mind and I would carry it with me for the rest of my life. It is worth recalling methodologically that this is in fact a call to use all faculties and the fullest “gaze” to gather data. It is also useful to recall that writing has certainly no more than seven thousand years of human history. This Indigenous verbal transmission is how humanity was educated and sustained through droughts, floods, volcanic eruptions, traumas and other calamities. Should it not be surprising that it is a powerful information transmission and sharing mechanism? The Aeta women healers assured me that when time came for me to write down the information, it would just flow as if they were talking to me. They reassured me that they would be with me in spirit when I wrote or defended my thesis.

The Aeta women healers also told me that others who would subsequently listen to me would listen as if it was their voices that they were listening to. Furthermore, the



women healers were emphatic that trying to write down notes while they were speaking was ineffectual because, at times, whatever they would be telling me would not be able to be translated into words but rather communicated through their actions. For example, some ideas were communicated through the use of their hands or their facial reactions and expressions. Precisely this kind of non-verbal, situational information is powerful in nuancing intent and establishing context: the very heart and soul of complex linguistic interpretation. Moreover, for the Aeta Circle members, it was very important to continue their oral tradition. Essentially, they impart their healing practices through spoken words. These spoken words are as solid as written documents. Charles Eastman Ohiyesa (qtd. by Friesen 2002, p. 10), an Elder of the Sioux Nations, compared the impact of the oral tradition of his people to the importance of the Christian Bible to people of Christian faith:

The Bible of ours was our whole literature, a living book, sowed a precious seed by our wisest sages, and springing anew in the wondering eyes and upon the innocent lips of little children. Upon its hoary frost of proverb and fable, its mystic and legendary lore thus sacredly preserved and transmitted from father to son, was based in large part on our customs and philosophy.

I believe that the Aeta women healers have faith that I am going to retain the information with appropriate interpretive weightings for the rest of my life. They are certain that their voices will be heard and that their teachings will continue to empower the people who believe in them.

I listened attentively and asked about their healing practices. We also talked about identity, agency and representation. They told me that if I had any questions, I could ask them. I felt the support of the Aeta women healers. Their smiles always reassured me that I would be fine in this journey. After each Talking Circle, I went home and transcribed all that I had heard. I also wrote my own reflections and observations on the things that they had said.

I situated myself in the Aeta community as a student who was ready to learn and to be taught. I took this experience to unlearn the things that I had heard about the Aeta and replaced such prejudices with the knowledge that I had received from the Aeta women healers. Indeed, this experience has shaped my way of theorizing, writing and researching about Indigenous Peoples. I hope that this study will not only challenge our way of thinking about the Aeta women, but that it will also re-orient our Eurocentric gaze with respect to Indigenous contributions to the academy, the political arena, and public health.

## **Chapter Five: Identity**

### ***Introduction***

This chapter maintains the argument expounded by proponents of anti-colonial, postcolonial and Indigenous feminist theories that identity is an essential trepidation of Indigenous People (including the Aeta women healers) and is arguably one of the reasons is that the Aeta people's identity has been demonized by colonization. Fanon (1963) describes how a colonizer views the Indigenous Peoples:

It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the Native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitations the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil. Native society is not simply described as a society lacking in values. It is not enough for the colonist to affirm that those values have disappeared from, or still better never existed in the colonial world. The Native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces. (p. 32)

Fanon has, in the statements above, eloquently deciphered the colonizer worldview of Indigenous Peoples. This kind of description about the Indigenous Peoples is a

complete destruction of their identity. This dominant worldview perceives Indigenous Peoples as evil at worst and child like at best. The intellectual reductionist and dismissive action perspectives have encouraged and inculcated other Indigenous Peoples to commit genocide towards their own people for profit on vested interests.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995) explicate how the identity of Indigenous Peoples has been treated:

...Indigenous groups have so often fallen into the political trap of essentialism set for them by imperial discourse. Imperial narratives such as that of anthropology in their project of naming and thus knowing Indigenous groups have imported a notion of Aboriginality, of cultural authenticity, which proves difficult to displace. The result is the positioning of the Indigenous People as the ultimately marginalized, a concept that reinscribes the binarism of centre/ margin, and prevents their engagement with the subtle processes of imperialism by locking them into a locally strategic but ultimately self-defeating essentialism. As many indigenous commentators have re-iterated, all cultures and societies change and adapt, and it is in a dynamic and shifting environment of adaptation that the political claims of indigenous people are situated. (p. 163)

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain the identity of Indigenous Peoples not by colonizers' colonial paradigms, as Fanon explains, but in relation to how they have been portrayed in Imperial discourses. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have explained how the

academy, or how anthropology categorical practice, has been oppressive to Indigenous Peoples. The Indigenous community has been boxed and isolated such that it is excluded from discourse. This study stresses that we cannot explain their way of life, their practices and worldview just by using the lens of binarism, seeing things as black or white, male or female.

Moreover, Smith (2007) explains:

Indian women suffer death rates twice as high as any other women in this country because of domestic violence (Rennison 2000). They are clearly not surviving as long as issues of gender violence go unaddressed.

Scholarly analyses of the impact of colonization on Native communities often minimize the histories of oppression of Native women...By narrowing our analysis solely to the economic realm; we fail to account for the multiple ways women have disproportionately suffered under colonization-from sexual violence to forced sterilization. (p.98)

It is clear from the above that Smith is not only discussing the identity of Native women but also explaining that the Native women are being killed because of domestic violence. I included this quote by Smith to illustrate how Indigenous feminism framework enables the theorization of the condition of Native women in a manner that includes their identity, in the same way that Fanon, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin discuss the identity of Indigenous Peoples. In fact, Smith (2007) explains, at the beginning of her article, that every Native client she talked to usually tells her, "I wish I wasn't Indian" (p. 93). It is within this platform that we see that Native women are

being violated because of their identity. Because they are women, the society fails to recognize their efforts and deflates their accomplishments and potential. Any societal power, prestige and privilege are swept away from them by the colonial tide and thus they are always held captive because of their identity.

Although this study acknowledges that there are differences between these theorists on how they theorize identity, it recognizes that identity has been used to oppress Indigenous Peoples, including the Aeta women healers. It is in this context that the study shares the result of the narratives of the Aeta women healers. The Aeta women healers talk about identity in different categories, namely: names, age, how they acquired their healing knowledge, racial identity, healing, gender and worldview.

### *The Aeta women healers: Who are they?*

There were 12 Aeta women healers who participated in the Talking Circle. All of them had been living in Cagayan in the Philippines. This section avails information including their names, their ages, and how they acquired their healing practices and descriptions of how they heal. To protect anonymity of participants' pseudonyms were assigned.

Rang-ay is seventy-two years of age. She inherited her healing practices from her mother. At the time of the study, she had been a healer for twenty-eight years. When her mother was alive, Rang-ay used to help her in the healing processes. Her mother taught her how to heal the sick. She started healing when she gave birth to her first child. In her healing practices, she uses herbal medicine and rituals. Rang-ay states:

*Healing other people is a joy for me. I do not ask for money in exchange for my services. I heal because of my “ayat” or love for my people. I do not want my people to suffer. I try my best to help them. There are moments that I get very tired, but I know that if I do not carry out my responsibility to my community and to my people, I will not feel good. Healing is a gift from my Creator and therefore I have to use it for the benefit of my community.*

Rang-ay is working on the notion of “ayat” or love. For Rang-ay, “ayat” means strong feelings or conviction that drives her to do great things for others. “Ayat” governs everything. It dismantles the notion of “gura,” or hatred that brings people to violate others. For Rang-ay, without “ayat”, she could never do anything for other people because “ayat” possesses the qualities of responsibility, respect and compassion. Subsequently, Rang-ay always ensures that what she does conforms to the principles of “ayat”. That is why she was able to fulfill her responsibility to her community. For her, “ayat” means healing and, to her, healing is a way of preserving her identity and her community through tireless service. Rang-ay advocates for this knowledge.

Talna is sixty-five years of age. She inherited her healing practices from her brother. At the time of the study, she had been a healer for nine years. She uses herbal plants and prayer in her healing. According to Talna:

*I heal because of my love for my people. However, if they decide to go and seek another treatment, I am happy with that. To me, when people come and ask for help, I cannot say no. I have to help and to do my best to render my service. Healing is a way for me to continue the legacy of my people.*

Talna shows one aspect of the traditions of the Aeta people: the fact that “you exist because of your people”. She told me that she does not accept any payment because it is part of their practices that when you help, you do not expect anything in return. In addition, like Rang-ay, Talna also possesses the “*ayat*” that gives her the strength to fulfill her duty, a duty that will continue the legacy of her ancestors. In the community of the Aeta People, in the Philippines, they have been divided by decolonization. Some of them live in different towns in the Philippines, like Gattaran, Penablanca and Allacapan. Talna states that they have been divided by colonialists through the expropriation of their ancestral lands for mining purposes. The government of the Philippines passed the law of mining, empowering mining companies from other countries to legally mine. Some of the Aeta people are forced to relocate due to such legal tactics.

One of her goals is to bring all the Aeta together by using her healing knowledge. How could this happen if they do not have enough land in Cagayan? Talna explains that the reason why she heals non-Aeta people is to share the idea of “*ayat*”. She believes that when a person feels the love of others, she or he can pass the same principles that govern them in their daily life. When this happens, non-Aeta people will not work on the notion of individuality, but, instead, bring back the idea that we are all connected and related.

Maya is seventy years of age. She used to get sick when she was young and it is through this that she became a healer. At the time of the study she had been a healer for forty-nine years. She uses herbal plants and rituals in healing. Maya recalls:



*When I was young, I wondered why my body was always sensitive and because of this I always felt sick. My parents used to bring me to an Aeta healer. The healer was always nice to me. Every time she performed healing rituals, I made sure that I paid attention. When she was preparing medicine for me, I would always ask questions. I remember one time she asked me why I needed to know everything, and I told her that I did not want her to get tired of me, so when I got sick again, I would be the one to heal myself. The healer laughed at me. But, at that time, I was already claiming my position in this society as a healer. Since then, I became a healer. When I do not feel good I treat myself. This practice continued and people started coming to me and asking me to heal them.*

Maya is full of humor. She subscribes to the conviction that healing brings empowerment not only to the person who is performing the healing, but also to the community in which she belongs. This is because it gives them the hope and energy to live despite the challenges they experience in life.

Singli is thirty-nine years of age. She inherited her healing practices from her grandmother. At the time of the study she had been a healer for thirteen years. She uses herbal medicine and prayers in healing. Singli notes:

*Being healer is not easy. I do it because I want to have a reason to live. My grandmother used to tell me that we had an immense talent, and said the only way to maintain it was to use it. She told me that my gift was healing and therefore I had to use it in a good way. My grandmother taught me almost everything I know in healing. She taught me very important values in life,*

*emphasizing that we are all connected, and that if one is sick, we are all affected.*

*Therefore, to avoid this, we have to do our part.*

Singli remembers the days when her grandmother was alive. She said that her grandmother told her a story about how the Japanese colonized the Philippines. According to her grandmother, this occupation period was the scariest time of their lives because the Japanese soldiers were ruthless, especially to women. Her grandmother narrated how the Japanese used to take many of the women they came across and use them as sex slaves. While Singli was telling us the story her pain was evident and transparent. She told us that her grandmother cried when she talked about how the women had suffered in the hands of the Japanese soldiers. Singli stated that, from this experience, her grandmother had started the healing process to dealing with the considerable psychological and ecological damage that had been done. The spirit needs healing as much as our physical body. Singli illuminates that as part of the Aeta healing practice; spirits can be healed by offering prayers and carrying on the traditions that have been passed to her.

Stating that colonization brought about oppression in their community, Singli explains that one of the manifestations of oppression in their community was the cruelty of the military to some of the Aeta People. She states that, one time, the military accused the Aeta People of being part of the communist party of the Philippines. Because of this, they killed them. In terms of women's violence, there were few cases of rape in their community. Rape issues were instigated by the colonization doctrine of patrimony which instilled the notion that men are superior to women, and that women

are chattel (cattle in Latin) and another form of non-human property best employed as just sexual objects.

Rula is twenty-nine years of age. She inherited her healing practices from her mother. At the time of the study, she had been a healer for nine years. She uses herbal medicine in healing. Rula noted:

*...my mother is my role model. She taught me how to be a good daughter, a good member of the community. She taught me how to perform my responsibility well. She told me that healing is very important not just for our own self, but also for other human beings". She said that "if I want to see the next generation of Aeta, I had to learn how to heal, and I had to learn the different herbal plants, how to prepare them and the different illnesses that can be healed using herbal plants.*

She also added that she always tends to the herbal plants. From Rula's statement we learn how the oral tradition is alive and transmitted in their community. Rula learned how to heal from her mother. In addition, she also learned the process of preparing the herbs before administration to the ill person. Rula is educating us on the way she heals by giving us an understanding of the process. Her sagacity ravages the idea that "women in Third World countries need to be educated". This is an essentialist dogma meant to devalue the wisdom of the Aeta people. In fact, Rula is educated through oral tradition. In her statement, she is not asking to be educated; rather, she is saying that she already has the knowledge. Rula is requesting that our investigations and documentation demonstrate their agency in the midst of colonization and its subsequent imperialism.

Spivak provides examples of what Rula is talking about by centering her work on the possibility of locating the voices of marginalized subjects within imperial literature. She calls for the recovery of these voices. She wants to find out whether her expertise can be used for the subversion. One of her objectives is to dislodge this notion of essentialism, because, for her, essentialism is a trap. The consequences of essentialism can be oppressive, exclusive, exploitative and dehumanizing. She is offering a way of seeing effects from the lens of the subject. If we do this, we could potentially discover the tremendous knowledge base that Rula and the other Aeta women healers possess.

Himay is sixty-six years of age. She inherited her healing from her mother. At the time of the study, she had been a healer for forty-one years. She uses herbal medicine and prayer for healing. Himay talks about the importance of prayer in her healing practices:

*Before I can heal, I ask God to give me the wisdom and knowledge. I know that without the guidance of my creator, I would not be able to do it. My healing is useless if I do not pray for it. I know well that I am just an instrument of my God. Thus, before I heal, I ask for help and acknowledge that I cannot do it by myself. I also get my strength from prayers. My faith in God is the one that sustains me in my healing.*

Himay apprehends and appreciates the power of God, but she knows that the only way to access this power is through prayer. Prayer is so essential in her healing, for it yields ubiquitous victory: Even diseases which are medically impossible to heal can be remedied with the help of God. Himay is working on spirituality. According to her,

spirituality is about acknowledging that there is a supreme being who controls humanity. Friesen (2000, p. 19) describes the spirituality of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada by stating that “they were a spiritual people, but not really religious in the sense that they devoted their utmost energies towards fulfilling their cosmic callings with little regard to any other obligations”. Himay’s description of her belief, like that of the Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, is to fulfill her cosmic calling. It means that when Himay heals there is a “spiritual implication” (Friesen, 2000). The divinely mandated work is therefore more than just working for a pecuniary reward; it is, instead, fulfilling the purpose bestowed by the Supreme Being. Himay’s work is trying to explain the “beyond” that Bhabha (1994) refers to in his book “The Location of Culture”. Bhabha states:

Being in the “beyond”, then, is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell “in the beyond” is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redscribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; to touch the future on its hither side. In that sense, then, the intervening space “beyond” becomes a space of intervention in the here and now. (p. 10)

Bhabha is referring to a complex term which involves looking at things by considering the “beyond”. It is a space where there is no end. However, as there is no end, faith becomes a space of intervention. The goal of social marginalization and imposed pedagogy is to dominate the Aeta. However, through the healing power of Himay and

the other Aeta women healers, the supremacy of hierarchical racial order is counteracted by their knowledge and spirituality, which are used to reclaim their identity. Their spirituality is beyond words which mean there is no language that can completely describe their faith in God.

Cena is forty years of age. She inherited her healing practices from her mother. She uses herbal medicine and prayer in healing practices. Cena talks about being a healer in times of struggle:

*My healing gives me the power to make a change in my community. I remember there was one time in our community when there was hunger, and people getting sick. It was indeed a difficult time. People came to me for healing. It pained me to see my people suffering. However, I always believe that we are a strong community and I know in my heart that we will survive.*

Cena learned that perseverance is the key to being a strong and knowledgeable healer from her mother. She used to see her mother healing all the people who sought her help. Her mother never got tired of helping others. Instead, Cena could see the dedication of her mother to the people who were in need. Cena realized that she wanted to follow the legacy of her mother. Cena realizes that her community is facing a systemic oppression. Among the systemic oppressions that they are facing is the loss of their ancestral land. Seizures and privatization of land becomes systemic oppression because the system allows individuals to pursue their intergroup cruelty by establishing title deeds which justify private property ownership.

Under Western property law, if a person owns a land title, it automatically means that this person has the right to own (occupy, utilize and divest) the land. As such, it bestows ownership to some and denies it to others. Some of the non-Aeta people have been using this legal definition to expropriate Aeta land. This problem in the Aeta community is reflected in other Indigenous groups in the Philippines, such as the Igorot in Ifugao and the Isneg in Kalinga-Apayo. It is a problem also faced by other Indigenous Peoples who live in other continents of the world, like the Maasai in Kenya, and the First Nations in Canada among others. The challenges that the Aeta face are mirror images of the experiences and tribulations of Indigenous Peoples globally.

Rima is fifty-one years of age. She inherited her healing knowledge from her parents. At the time of the study, she had been a healer for four years. She uses herbal medicine. Rima shares with the group the negative experience she had when she went to the health centre:

*When I was sick, I went to the health centre to get treatment. I was expecting good treatment because I was sick. When I got to the health centre, I approached one of the nurses, and I asked if I could see the doctor. She told me that I should wait for my turn. I waited and waited. After waiting for half the day, I could not take it anymore. So I approached the nurse again. This time, she told me that the doctor had left and that I should go home and come back another time. I was very upset and I became sicker. I had walked for two hours just to go to the health center. When I went back home, I told my parents what had happened, and they*

*informed me that we do not usually get good treatment from non-Aeta people.*

*Following that experience, I asked my parents to teach me how to heal.*

Rima experienced discrimination by a Filipino nurse who denied her consultation with the doctor in the clinic. Rima has experienced discrimination on the basis of gender, class and ethnicity. This study underlines that these forms of discrimination are complex and that they intertwine with one other. However, instead of becoming bitter, Rima decided to become a healer so that whatever she experienced would not happen to another person. She said that she had forgiven those people who had acted in a discriminatory way towards her.

Forgiveness, for Rima, is the only way to move on and answer her calling as a healer. She knows that it is painful to be treated in a manner that damages her spirit. Nevertheless, as a spiritual person who believes that there is a higher ground than fighting back, she chose to forgive and hoped that what she experienced was not the normal practice of those people at the health centre. She also hoped that this experience would not be repeated. That is why she continues to persevere in her way of life as both an Aeta woman and as a healer. She looks forward to changing in her community through her work.

Amay is sixty-three years old. She inherited her healing knowledge from the spirit who asked her to be a healer. At the time of the study, she had been a healer for seven years. In her healing, she uses water which has been blessed. Amay explains more about her healing practice:



*I pray hard before I heal. If I do not pray I cannot perform any healing. For me, it is all about faith in my God, without which my healing is useless. I heal because I do not want my people to suffer at the hands of non-Aeta. I heal because I want to serve my community.*

Amay is just like the other healers who believe in the existence of the Supreme Being. Amay knows that healing is one of the ways of saving her people from being treated unfairly at the hands of the non-Aeta people. She knows that when a person is ill, she or he is more vulnerable. She, therefore, wants to help the sick so that they do not go through more difficulties in their lives. She believes that she can heal those who are ill through her faith.

Wila is sixty years old. She inherited her healing practices when her husband “got lost like a smoke”. She uses oil and prayer in healing. At the time of the study, she had been a healer for five years. Wila states:

*I believe that everything happening is a sign for a greater purpose. When my husband passed away, he wanted me to continue healing. I know that being a healer is not easy, it takes a lot of your energy, however, I know that what I do, can change the way non-Aeta people perceive us.*

Puti is seventy six-years of age. She started began to heal when her son died. To her, a misfortune can be a way to empower oneself and to reclaim what has been lost. She uses herbal plants, oil and prayers in her healing. At the time of the study, she had been a healer for three years. Puti notes:

*There have been many people asking about how we heal and why we heal. It is simple because for me I want to continue our practices. Medicines are all around us and therefore we need to use them for a good reason. I also heal the non-Aeta people. To me, we all belong to one God.*

Naty is forty-eight years of age. At the time of the study, she had been a healer for three years. She places her hand on the head of a sick person and prays for them. She inherited her healing practices from her ancestors. Naty states:

*My ancestors left us a legacy that we have to carry on until the end of time. This legacy needs to live. We have to practice our own traditions that are why we exist. It is because of the culture and traditions that we have.*

Aly is seventy-six years of age. She was only forty years old when she started healing, so, at the time of the study, she had been a healer for thirty-six years. She inherited her healing practices from her ancestors. She uses herbal medicine and prayer in healing. Aly states:

*Healing has been an important aspect in our culture because we know our people. When we go to other people to heal us, it is different because they do not know our way of life. They do not know our practices and, most of all, our worldview. Therefore, there are times when they prescribe things for us that are totally against our belief. So, as Aeta, we have to learn our ways of healing.*

Rosa is seventy years old. She taught herself to become a healer. She states:  
*When the invader came to our community claiming that they owned the land, the land that our ancestor had left for us for a long time, we became sick as a whole*

*community. This is because we could not perform our own traditions and practices. We had to abide by the rules of the outsider. So, because of mixing with the non-Aeta, some of us got sick. I realized that it was happening frequently, and I decided to do something. I started learning the use of herbal medicine or plants that I see around us because I believe that God has created this for a great purpose. Since then, I became a healer.*

We can observe that Rosa has decided to use her healing practices to heal the wounds that have been inflicted by the non-Aeta people. For her, healing is a way for her to represent herself as not only a capable leader in her society but also as someone who can control her destiny. She does this to help decolonize her community by underlining the need to go back to their roots.

We now know the vocational backgrounds identity of the Aeta women healers. The next section is a discussion of identity in terms of race. In this section the Aeta women discuss how the non-Aeta people treat them. They talk about their feelings and how they rise above their experiences. While the “Talking Circle” mirrors many global Indigenous communities, it is specific and unique in form and in cultural content to the Aeta. Note that methodologically, the exchange in conversations corresponds closely to the data prescriptions for qualitative research laid out by Brooks (2007) Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and Geertz (1973) in their work on “thick description”.

***“Race as an identity”***

As I mentioned in chapter one, the moment I step into the arena of education, the modal discourse that I hear about the Aeta people is negative. I was in grade one when I first learnt about the life of the Aeta people from history books. In the historical literature, the Aeta are described as “dirty”. These words seared my mind across time and geography. In my heart I knew the words to be invalid. I knew the Aeta people personally. While I did not intuitively subscribe to my colonial teachers, I subsequently questioned my own intuitive and empirical experiences because of the teacher’s ‘authority’. Because what I had read was presented as “true”, there were times when I was forced to accept this rhetorical view. My elementary school had articulated the “logic” of this “hidden curriculum”: if a person can write a book, he or she must be intelligent. This notion of the Aeta People as “dirty” created both discomfort within me and a disconnection with what I knew. I carried these strong feelings until I started being critical. I started asking questions like, who wrote the book? What kind of lens does the author use? As suggested by Spivak (1996),

These texts must be rewritten so that there is new material for the grasping of the production and determination of literature within the general production and determination of consciousness and society. After all, the people who produce literature, male and female, are also moved by general ideas of world and consciousness to which they cannot give a name...I certainly believe that such work is supplemented by research into

women's writing and research into the conditions of women in the past.

(p. 58)

This study concurs with Spivak's suggestion: it is indeed time to go back to their roots, so as to listen and critically reflect. This study certainly asserts that it is time to reflect and to pay attention to the Aeta women healers' experiences. In such empiricism and reflection we can identify the root cause of their challenges. I can actually name the different forms of oppression that they have been facing and simultaneously gain insight on how they have been coping with these challenges. I also agree with Spivak that research into the condition, of women like the Aeta women healers, can not only teach us another way of viewing the world but can also, most certainly, change the dominant discourse.

In the Talking circle, Wila, one of the Aeta women healers, states:

*Filipino people stare at us in a very offensive way. They judge us on the basis of the color of our skin and the texture of our hair... This time the lighter your complexion, the better the position you will have in the society... Also, we do not have education that is Eurocentric in nature. However, we are educated by our ancestors. They taught us how to love the nature and other human beings... We believe that plants and animals possess the spirit, therefore they deserve to be treated well... We were taught how to read and write with our own alphabet... We were taught how to be sensitive to signs because, before everything happens in this world, signs must come first. We were taught how to be analytical, respectful and, most of all, to recognize the existence of our creator. Now, the people who do*

*not know us, think and continue thinking that we are a useless race. But I believe that time will come when our true identity will be revealed and these people will be educated.*

Wila brings out a very strong statement that requires historical analysis on the basis of race. Obviously, the main reason for Wila's experiences is her race. Griffiths and Tiffin illuminate the dynamics of this race discourse and practice (2000):

Race is particularly pertinent to the rise of colonialism, because the division of human society in this way is extricable from the need of colonialist powers to establish dominance over subject peoples and hence justify the imperial enterprise. Race thinking and colonialism are imbued with the impetus to draw a binary distinction between 'civilized' and 'primitive' and the same necessity for the hierarchization of human types. By translating the fact of colonial oppression into a justifying theory, however spurious, European race thinking initiated a hierarchy of human variations that has been difficult to dislodge. (pp. 198-199)

Wila is a black woman and thus is treated as a second-class citizen in her own country. Race has been used to categorize the social location of a person. It has been used to dismantle the notion that "we are all equal despite the color of the skin". The darker your skin is, the lower your position in the society. In addition to not automatically fitting in, she is not considered an educated person because the notion of race places people of the same geographical location in a hierarchy. Griffiths and Tiffin explain that race is fundamental to the success of colonization. Race is a socially constructed

ideology and becomes a dominant factor in realizing the ideology of expansionism and imperialism which extricates the Aeta way of life. In these circumstances, race has become a sentence for some and a privilege for others.

Furthermore, Wila is an educated person. Her education has been attained through the knowledge that has been passed on to her by her ancestors. But because the notion of “education” is different to the non-Aeta people, she is not considered educated. Eurocentric education is one of the gears of colonization and it has been imposed on colonies such as the Philippines, where education is applied as an instrument of expansionism. The history of Aeta Peoples and other Indigenous People in the Philippines has, resultantly, been excluded from the curriculum. How would a student learn about the Aeta People if she or he is not being taught?

We can see that the academy is a colonized space through which the wish of the dominant discourse is sustained and maintained. One point of thought that has been passed over by the Aeta women healer is that the aura that surrounds the academy needs to undergo a decolonizing trek if we are to realize that Indigenous communities are of great significance in our research. We, as researchers and academics, need to reach out to the Indigenous People with a clear mind and conscience if we are to win on the war on structural ignorance and to lessen the intrusive and totalizing effects of institutional advantages gleaned by lobbying by global corporatism. We need to respect their ways of knowing by representing their ideas as they are presented. Critical reflection needs to accompany the work that is done on the academic platform.

Unfortunately, Eurocentric education leads a student to be predisposed to bias with regard to the Indigenous, from an early age.

In addition, this statement by Wila highlights race as an identity; it is an identity that has been questioned and undermined. Wila is very aware of how they are being labeled, categorized, judged and dehumanized. However, through Wila's statements, she educates us about who they are, where they got their education from, how they interact with nature, and the values that she learned from her ancestors. Wila is trying to challenge the perception of the Aeta portrayed by the West. Through her words, the Aeta's real identity will be revealed. Like Wila, Sunseri (2000) argues that "as Aboriginal women, we have an awareness of inequalities and injustices we suffer as women as well as Aboriginal peoples" (p. 146). They fully understand that they face different intersections of oppression caused by socially-constructed identities.

One of the examples of how the Aeta population is portrayed in literature is illuminated by Kroeber (1919):

The culture of the Negritos (Aeta) seems to lack all specific traits. It is extremely meager, and they seem to possess no tool or custom which is not known also to their Filipino neighbors and which they could not have derived from them...On religion even less can be said, except that its practice and that of medicine seem to be in the hands of such individuals, perhaps in the main old women, as have the power of becoming possessed by spirits. (pp. 41-42)



The above statement portrays a very negative image of the Negrito or the Aeta people. Kroeber indicates that they did not actually have any traditions of their own. In fact, Kroeber has no hesitation writing that the Aeta people own nothing. However, Aly states:

*I feel it before a patient comes to me. As a healer I have the knowledge to know when a person is not well. For example, when a person is beaten by a snake and he/she looks like dead, I just need to look at the fingers and from that I know if the person is about to die or if he or she is going to live. There was one person who was brought by his family to my house. That person could not move anymore because of the poison from the snake. The family had already lost their hope. However when I looked at him I felt that he was going to live. So, I removed the poison by cutting the tip of the middle finger and sipping the blood and, of course, (she laugh...) spitting the blood on the ground, cleaning my mouth with alcohol. I did this a couple of times until I knew that the poison was totally gone. I gave him medicinal plants and, by the grace of God, he got well. What I am trying to say is that our knowledge of healing is a gift that needs to be shared with other people.*

In the above statement, Aly is countering the statement by Kroeber which states that they do not possess anything. Aly talks about the knowledge and wisdom that she has. She is not only a healer, but also a woman who can predict things before they happen.

The experiences of Wila and Aly cannot be dismissed because they have historical and theoretical relevance. The historical relevance is based on the fact that the doctrine of European "manifest destiny" with its different guises continues to burden

the Aeta. Past experiences intertwine with present ones. It has happened to both Wila and Aly's ancestors and is still happening. History both informs and gives us the context of experiences which form our lives presently.

The theoretical relevance of both Wila and Aly's lived experiences informs us how we should make sense of the conjectures. It helps us expose the negation of the power of spirituality and Indigenous knowledge. It brings out the colonial encounter and its aftermath. It discloses the power of the Aeta women healers in resisting subordination against non-Aeta people. It brings the Aeta power of healing to the spotlight and it counters the work of colonization. It calls for a collective agency to resist colonial domination. It reveals the "political, social, and economic practices that dignify, deny or perpetuate colonialism the enforced appropriation of Aboriginal nation's land and resources and the denial of the conditions for self-determination" (Green 2007 p. 22). It "involves a decentering of the intellectual sovereignty and dominance of Europe, the critique of Eurocentrism, that is challenging the limits of western ethnocentricity, and the assumption that the white male western point of view is the norm and the true" (Young 2001, p. 65).

In other words, although the historical roots of Wila and Aly's experiences are rooted in the context of colonization, these historic roots branch into different issues, including questions of education, spirituality, and healing practices, among others. Nevertheless, as much as race has been employed as a target of oppression by the colonizer, the Aeta women healers use race as a means of identifying themselves as distinct and powerful Indigenous women. This especially is evident when they

administer their healing knowledge to the non-Aeta people. This acts as a wake-up call to the non-Aeta people to realize that the color of the skin cannot determine a human being's wisdom and knowledge. From this perspective, a platform of recognition and respect is founded between the non-Aeta and Aeta people. Race has been used here by the Aeta as a source of reclaiming and asserting themselves.

The statements by Wila and Aly teach us that they possess the knowledge, the strength and the power to help others. They possess the necessary intelligence to live in this world. They confirm to us that Aeta women healers also experience pain when they are mistreated. They make us aware that we are remiss in not valuing their existence.

### **“Gender as an Identity”**

Grewal and Kaplan (2006) argue:

With the professionalization of medicine, special practitioners (doctors and scientists) claimed the expertise to treat people’s bodies as their objects of study. This process of professionalization and medicalization was to the advantage of men who became professionals in these new sciences and to the disadvantage of women who had served as healers and midwives and whose knowledge had given them higher status in their societies. Similarly, in places that encountered European traders and colonizers, forms of healing and medicine that were not Western were also dismissed as “unscientific” and useless. (p. 2)

I concur with Grewal and Kaplan's statement. Professionalization and “medicalization” have been part of grand propaganda, acting as a key etiological and exogenous factor in the marginalization of the Aeta women healers by hegemonic institutions. In the eyes of numerous colonized people, the work of the Aeta healers is not scientific because they do not use technology or instruments to restore the health of a person. They are not considered professional if they have not undertaken the Western curricular training related to curing diseases. Wila’s experience with these practices is evident when she writes:

*When I became a healer, I experienced so many things. I heard so many people who talked badly about me. They would say that my healing knowledge was not real. They would say that I had to do it because I wanted to earn money and to*

*receive grace. They said that I was crazy. It did not bother me because I believed that I knew who I was.*

Grewal and Kaplan argue that healers, especially the women healers, are victims of discrimination. The experiences of Wila are consistent with those of other Indigenous People: the non-Aeta people ridiculed Wila. It is important to illuminate how Wila handled the situation; she claimed her position in the society and affirmed her sturdy sense of self. Gender inequity and discrimination could have become a source of disengagement but instead Wila used them to form a foundation for her healing practices. She is conscious of the power relationship that is occurring around her but she is also alert enough to articulate her feelings. She knows that if she does reference her own communal knowledge base countervailing paradigms could dominate and subsequently marginalize both her and her community. She recognizes that speaking is a way of asserting herself and not allowing “gender” to dictate her social location.

Minh-ha (1988) explains Wila’s action:

The further one moves from pattern of sameness, the less likely one is thought to be capable of fulfilling one’s role as the real self, the real Black, Indian or Asian, the real woman. The search for an identity is, therefore, usually a search for the lost, pure, true, real, genuine, original, authentic self, often situated within a process of elimination of all that is considered, superfluous, fake, corrupted, or Westernized. (p. 1210)

Minh-ha states that digressing from the pattern of sameness is about finding one’s authentic identity. Wila chooses to move out from the “essentialist” notion of being

uneducated by both asserting her identity and affirming that she is knowledgeable.

Wila demonstrates this by choosing to be an Aeta healer.

Himay also shares the same notion:

*Healing for me is my identity. It is who I am. Non-Aeta people questioned the efficacy of my ways of healing. They considered me as primitive and useless.*

*However, I heal because I want to continue owning my identity as an Aeta woman healer."*

Healing for Himay is not all about curing the illness. It is also about identity. Not everybody can be a healer. For this reason, the uniqueness of Aeta women healers makes them the most cohesive and effective mentors in the society and, therein, the adhesive elements of the community's social fabric. This community recognition forms the "credentials" of these practitioners. The conventional basis of this authority is at least part of the reason these credentials are being questioned and not considered normal by elements who seek to control these societies and impose their own order of the world upon them. On the contrary, the work of the Aeta and other Indigenous healers frequently also becomes a dialectic journey of questioning established rules and procedures, consequently transforming them and their deleterious consequences. Such practice in this respect may be seen as an anti-establishment activity, meant to cause discord in the society. Healing, such as our participants perspective reestablishes healing practices both holistically and as a political instrument that is able to revitalize the agency of a community to overcome oppression. It commences from an individual level. The transmission and pedagogical elements establish a space where doctrines are

analyzed and reframed to accommodate those who are on the margins. The healing practice Aeta women healers is not considered legitimate by dominant authority because it does not conform to the Eurocentric procedures and sanctioned legal practice for curing diseases. Those who put their trust in the Eurocentric way of healing question the validity of the healing practices of the Aeta women. Minh-ha (1988) states:

Hegemony works at leveling out differences and at standardizing contexts and expectations in the smallest details of our daily lives. Uncovering this leveling of differences is therefore, resisting that very notion of difference which defined in the master's terms often resort to the simplicity of essences. (p. 2011)

A contention like this framing of relations is a major challenge to the supposed integrity of the status quo because the moment the Aeta healers claim the validity of their healing practices, a latent resistance to the authority of prescribed similitude is presented. Wila and Himay have been dismantling the master's contrivance by asserting the validity of their own methodology and in so doing for example leveling the supposed ethnic differences. Disrupting the state monopoly over practice and credential is a threat to institutional powers. When women healers resist instructionally sanctioned sameness they are implicitly trying to identify their individual differences and celebrate the authenticity and time honored validity of their cultural practices. This point of departure at the individual level and the linkage to long standing historical as well as contemporary Aeta values are what makes the neo-colonizers' work of marginalizing the healers so difficult. The establishment state implicitly wants a monopoly of inquiry

by universalizing different identities into a singular model: conveniently, the Western model. Contrary to self proclaimed standards of “openness” the paradigm resists both change and alternate worldviews. The Aeta women healers comprehend these hegemonic practices of closure negating their voices by asserting a “universalism” which in practice is scarcely so but, instead practicing essentialism towards them. Wila and Himay are, thus, fighting back. They are insisting on claiming their positions in the society as healers.

The Aeta women healers do not see themselves as different from the Aeta men in terms of social, political, economic, cultural and spiritual location. From a social perspective, the Aeta women healers have been acting as speakers or representatives for their community. When there is a conflict that needs to be resolved between themselves and the non-Aeta the Aeta women healers are always able to chart a course forward. Himay, for example, represented her people in the municipal town hall, documenting that Cagayan is their ancestral land. She did not have any “legal” document to justify “ownership” of their ancestral land; instead, she engaged in a discussion about their ancestral land with the members of the board of Cagayan. She used millennially tested methodology, and was able to convince the council of the veracity of her claim. She validated the claim by pinpointing her ancestors’ names, the different ceremonies that had been conducted, the number of years that they stayed in Cagayan, and by illustrating knowledge and thereby “documenting” ancestral burial grounds and therein “claims”.



The Aeta women healers are also intra-communally politically engaged: one ran for a councilor position during the municipal election. Economically, our Aeta cohort has equal decision-making power with their husbands with respect to how and where to spend familial resources. With respect to both cultural and spiritual location, the Aeta women perform their healing practices in the community with the support of their husbands or fathers. In fact, they are well respected as members of their community. Talna states that “*they see us as knowledgeable*”. Talna explains that she has never had a negative experience in her relationship with the Aeta men. She explains that the Aeta men always help her in her healing work. For example, when she needs to go to other places to look for herbal medicine, she can consistently count on the Aeta men to accompany her. By contrast the non-Aeta people who are ignorant of their culture frequently disrespect her. Talna cites:

*I went to the market and these non-Aeta men shouted at me and said, “hey Aeta woman go home, you do not belong to the city, you should always stay in the forest”. It hurts so much when these non-Aeta men disrespect us. But what can we do, except to run away from them, because they can beat us without mercy.*

Talna presents us with the difference between a colonized man and a non-colonized man. In this context, we can see that colonization brings about gender imbalances that are prevalent in our society today. Oyewumi (1995) states:

...the colonizer differentiated between male and female bodies and acted accordingly, Men were the primary target of policy...are the justification for considering the colonial impact in gender terms. (p. 256)

The Aeta people have been resisting colonization because of its immoral consequences. Their way of life is completely different from that of the immigrants. Their healing practices, for example, are different from the therapeutic practices of the West. Consenting to the ideology of colonization, renouncing their own morals, results in many detrimental changes; for example, surrendering of their belief that every member of the community is worthy of respect. For the Aeta there is no social ordination of person. They certainly acknowledge the position of their Elder but this does not imply that the Elder does not respect and listen to the other members of the community. They are aware that assimilation entails conforming to the imposed practices of the colonizer, yet they resist this indoctrination despite potentially punitive consequences, because they discern that they will not achieve their own societal peace if they capitulate.

Their paradigm anticipates socialist arguments; Marx (1978) talks about the alienation of labor, which contends that when a person works, she or he alienates himself or herself from their labour, from their production, from their relationship, and from themselves. Marx argues this in relation to capitalism. The organic unity of the Aeta healing practice draws a sharp contrast: alienation, as outlined by Marx, does not empirically encompass or accurately describe the work practice of the Aeta women healers who, by the countervailing intentionality of their work resisting detrimental social institution which, of course, means not surrendering their traditional ways. They shared with me that when they heal, they develop profound human bonds as well as healing relationships. Aeta healing is about knowing the person; it is not about pecuniary gain. Ultimately, it is about having an interpersonal connection.

Healing is a journey that requires coming to a realization about the etiological causes of a given malady. The responsibility of the Aeta women healers is both to insure that this journey is taken in the right direction and to let the sick person understand the process. Along this sojourn the Aeta healer and the infirmed person build a relationship which makes each of them a more robust and communicative human being. Healing in this paradigm is not about being alienated from oneself; but instead, is a way of actualizing one's dream or calling. The more an Aeta performs healing, the more she realizes her intended existence because she is actualizing her communal and spiritual calling. She is not just performing a duty but instead she is living hers assigned societal station and calling.

Healing for the Aeta is not about being alienated from the production. It is about being familiar with the culturally-nuanced healing practices and historically-based knowledge derived from both collective experiences and cumulative and ongoing interactions with the local environment. Every time she heals she knows that somebody has been rescued from the "darkness" or "bad spirit". She believes that when a person possesses a good spirit, this person becomes benign to others. Aeta healing is the antithesis of alienation. The work is not centred on a detached delivery of isolated and technical practice but, contrarily, is about an emerging collective spirituality. Through healing the Aeta become empathetic and knowledgeable healers. Through healing, they practice and live the legacy of their ancestors. The Alienation that Marx refers to in the feudalist era does not exist in the community of the Aeta healers because there is no

separation of community on the basis of property or other devices of imposed alienated labour.

However, Talna states the following:

*I am worried because these colonized men are teaching our Aeta men to see us as inferior members of the society. For example, there was one time when colonized men came to our community. One of them said, "we want to talk to your Aeta men about your ancestral land". One of us women told them, you can talk to us to. But, they insisted to see our men. See, in this kind of practice, these colonized men are bringing gender inequality to our community. But we have to hold on to our culture that we are all important children of our ancestors.*

The Aeta community members keep on fighting for their beliefs. They know that the society is changing but they resist being inundated by this cultural flood which will degrade their culture. They can only agree to change that will strengthen them as a whole community.

We learn from the women's stories above that the Aeta women healers experience discrimination from the non-Aeta people on the basis of their gender. They are being disrespected, insulted and harassed, their healing practices are being questioned, they are banned from the market, and they are identified as being primitive and useless. However, despite these experiences, these Aeta women healers continue to assert their position in their community. They articulate their experiences and apply their strength to carry themselves with conviction. They maintain their uniqueness as women in a society skewed against them. They acknowledge the intricacies of their

position but do not succumb to attrition pressures. They consider their distinctiveness as both a space in which to speak up and to practice their healing. They are women who possess the knowledge and wisdom that can be used to overcome adversity.

***“Their worldview as a source of identity”***

In this section, the circle participants explain their worldview. It is important to take into account the identities of the Aeta women healers because they have been negatively labeled. This will help to document the Aeta systemic beliefs. This also serves as an avenue through which to a grounded interpretation of their beliefs can be identified or given. They stressed in the Circle that they are fully cognizant of the fact that if they do not specify such intent of their practice, “others” will speak up on their behalf without their permission. The Aeta women healers have particular and culturally- informed ways of interpreting the world. They want to make it clear that their perception is not the only way of perceiving the events that are happening in the world. They recognize other ways of interpreting different phenomena. They want to share their world view for “others” to know, and they sincerely hope that they will be heard.

Amay states:

*My healing practice is not only about healing the physical body of a human being.*

*It is also about healing the spirit and the emotional aspect of a person. For us*

*everything is interconnected. We are all connected to the land and to the spirit*

*world. For me, if we disrespect the spirit world then it brings illness, and we are*

*not well. To me, healing is bringing awareness to others that they need to pay great respect to the things that they do not see.*

Amay has given her worldview, which entails respecting both the living and non-living elements. We can deduce that in her healing practice, she does not only focus on the physical part of a human being but also considers the aspects of human beings. She explains that we are all inter-connected. Wila also explains:

*My healing is about letting my people know that we need to be in harmony with each other and with nature. When a person gets ill, it is not only because the physical body is injured, but it is also because we are not sensitive to others or to our nature. For example, one person came to me one time and told me that she had a headache. I asked her, 'what did you eat and what did you do to others and to the environment?' She informed me that she had had a big fight with her sister-in-law about food. She told me that she had not eaten anything, and said that that could be the reason why she was having a headache. However, I told her that one of the reasons could be that she was hungry, and I also explained to her that she needed to go back to her sister-in-law to reestablish a good relationship. If she could not do this, there was no way I could heal her. Yes, healing, for me, is also about teaching my fellow human beings to be in harmony with others and with their environment.*

Wila stresses to us the importance of being in harmony with the world. Being in conflict with somebody can indeed bring illness to both our bodies and our spirits. Aly also explains:

*I heal because I want my people to be well and, as much as they are well, I have to constantly tell them that they need to learn how to heal because everything is constantly changing in a cyclical way. What I mean by this is that I may not be here anymore and there are still people who may need help. So, if they learn how to heal, then they can continue my work. I also I tell my children that the world is constantly changing, so they have to pay attention to what is happening in the present time because this has something to do with the future”.*

Aly knows that what is happening can affect the future. It is therefore, important to transfer her healing knowledge to others and hence ensure that their healing practices will be sustained.

The Aeta women healers named their worldview as their identity because it is that which differentiates them from the non-Aeta people. Their identity also describes their healing beliefs and practices. It commemorates the belief system of their ancestors that helps them oppose colonization. It also shows that, despite the emergence of public health in the society, they are able to continue practicing their healing which is empowered by their robust belief system. While the non-Aeta people keep trying to persuade the Aeta community, introducing Western medicine for curing diseases, such as aspirin for headaches or Advil for body pains, the Aeta women healers insists on the restoration of their ways of healing.

## **Chapter VI: Agency**

### ***Introduction***

This chapter discusses the concept of the subaltern agency and employs it in the analysis of the actions of the Aeta women healers. In this chapter, the study acknowledges the complexity of considering the Aeta women healers, as the subaltern Aeta women healers within the Circle do not identify themselves as oppressed and dispossessed in their community. They feel that, from their positions as women, they have been a fully integral part of the political, economic, cultural and spiritual activities of the community. From their view, these life activities are considered a venue for the betterment of their community. The Aeta practitioners, on the other hand, do acknowledge their positions as oppressed people outside their community because they are not free to practice their healing and they are not considered part of the public health system. Nevertheless, I insist that the notion of the subaltern is still useful in the analysis of agency because, in sharing with the Aeta healers their lived experiences we discern that their audience is the non-Aeta people. Subsequently, the notion of the subaltern can be used because if they are permitted to practice their healing practices in the non-Aeta community, they can be agents of change, especially in communities that have been subjected to imperialism.

According to Young (2001),

Spivak found it necessary to insist on the extension of subalternity to women's and gender issues; in postcolonial studies generally, the subaltern has become a



synonym for any marginalized or disempowered minority group, particularly on the grounds of gender and ethnicity... The concept of the subaltern ascribed a new dynamic political agency to those who had formerly been described as the wretched of the earth, the oppressed and the dispossessed. By means of the subaltern the oppressed assumed political agency to become the subject of history, no longer its abject object. (pp. 354-355)

In the above quote Spivak defines subaltern agency in the context of politics which suggests not only that the Aeta people are now able to vote and express their opinions in public, but also that an agency that transform the society for the benefit of its constituency. As they stated, the Aeta consider themselves subaltern in the non-Aeta community but, as a subaltern, they have not only assumed political agency, but also performed more agency than just political agency. The Aeta women healers, as subalterns in the non-Aeta community, would like to revolutionize the colonized institutional structure in terms of politics as leaders of the community. They can share their knowledge of Indigenous governance so that everybody is consulted in the decision-making process. Furthermore, by exchange of this Indigenous democratic forum they can act as models and as leaders in the subjugated segments of the non-Aeta community. The modeling and sharing is a classical example of a participatory government for the people, by the people. The decision-making is not centered around the few people at the top of a large pyramid. Governance, contrastingly, is done by all the members of the community.

The Aeta women healers can bring forth alternate models of economy: for instance, they share resources according to the needs of individuals. This dismantles the notion of property owning, which I submit is the conceptual keystone of oppression along with the Western concept of individualism. By contrast, the Aeta paradigm is collectivist and therefore is about everybody having the opportunity to own resources based on their individual needs. The same distributive principle applies in the area of the formulation of medicine. Medicine is created for the benefit of the people and is not for profit motives. This infers a distributive justice system whereby each person within the community cannot have more than he or she needs. This curtails the essence of corruption that I also suggest is the core vice within the capitalist ideology. For the Aeta Indigenous community, equality and fairness is an important edifice for social harmony.

In terms of cultural and spiritual agency core values, the belief that we are all related contributes greatly towards building a community and a “peace paradigm”. These principles of equitable and distributive justice continue across the spectrum of social values and cultural norms and so we can surmise that Aeta value all humans, no matter the color of one’s skin, one’s gender, and whether we are able bodied or disabled. These distributive justice and equity principles are rooted, and in the underlying cultural belief in the Unity of nature and Divinity, a connection whereby we all belong to one universe. This belief system holds, as its central tenet, the idea that our oppression of others will have consequence. It is an issue that touches on the connection between our well-being and that of our environment. It is also implicitly a learning

template for how to use non-violent resistance in our communities. This kind of spirituality, which has been used by the Aeta healers when they face challenges, was just like the non-violent resistance that was introduced by Mahatma Gandhi. This non-violent resistance is what he called “Satyagraha”, even though the Aeta women healers do not call it Satyagraha. Satyagraha means “clinging” to the truth. Satyagraha “is a religious spirituality that outlines harmonious ways of fighting social injustices and inequality in society” (Adjei 2007, p. 58.) Satyagraha was Gandhi’s guiding principle as he fought against British rule such that India and her diverse populace to have a free life.

This non-violent resistance for the Aeta therapists is about focusing on the person. They are very careful to assess a person when he or she is violent because they subscribe to the belief that such a person has been possessed by a “bad spirit” or “*dakes nga anito*”. They consider the possessed person to not be cognizant of what is occurring in his or her life, therefore he or she needs to be healed. Punishing a person based on his or her actions is not necessary. According to the Aeta, what needs to be done is that the dire spirit within an individual needs to be exorcised. Prayers are the optimal resolution for such a situation since reacting in a violent way can potentially damage one’s spirit. They also want to promote harmony between themselves and others.

The Aeta women healers possess the knowledge required to fabricate stronger relationships with others in terms of social agency. This is done through healing the non-Aeta people without discriminating against them even though they often receive ridicule in return. In essence the Aeta healers as stewards of their communities’

knowledge are ready to share their ways of healing even to those who are perceived as enemies.

Anti-colonial, postcolonial and Indigenous feminist theories discuss the agency of the Indigenous people. Shahjahan (2005) states that “Said, Bhabha and Spivak demonstrate the shift of anti-colonial discourse from agency and nationalist/liberator discourse towards discursive analysis, and direct our attention to the intersection between “Western” knowledge production on the “Other” and the Western colonial power” (p. 222). I argue that it is not actually the case. In fact, in her interview with Landry and Maclean, Spivak (1996) shows how agency comes into play:

As for subalternity within First World space, which is the Fourth World, pushed back, I think we have to consider the immense space of difference which has not made it possible for those spaces even to claim the kind of agency that I am talking about. The phenomenon of the pushing back of the Fourth World is global, and it did begin with the current conjuncture of capitalist imperialism. (p. 296)

In addition, Subedi and Daza (2008) state that “Spivak maintains the question of agency cannot be separated from the ongoing reconfiguration of power discourse that silence the subaltern subjects, in other words, postcolonial theory is concerned with questions of agency and how marginalized subjects are capable of interrupting or resisting dominant discourses” (p. 3). This means that colonized subjects do not just accept the hegemonic treatment of the colonizer without resisting and challenging it. Moreover, anti-colonial theorists believe that “agency and the power of resistance reside in and

among colonized and marginalized groups” (Dei et al. 2002, p. 7). Anti-colonial theory argues that agency and resiliency are not possessed solely by the colonizer. Colonized and the Indigenous people- also own power and discourse.

This presents possess power as something that is everywhere and not only limited to and solely owned by those we perceive as powerful. Shahjahan (2005) states:

Agency is not just about resistance but the will to change and hope...presenting the voices of those who carry indigenous knowledges and using their concepts and standpoints as our analytical systems...Agency does not necessarily have to take place in terms of accommodating voices, but it is also about employing one’s indigenous ways of knowing and centering these in the process of knowledge production. (p. 229)

Could not our own value schemes profit by listening to the Aeta women healers’ voices? How could we do this? One of the cannons guiding my research is the axiom that it is my responsibility to translate and transcribe the voices of the Aeta women healers to text. In this way, whoever reads this paper will see that the Aeta women healers possess knowledge and agency within their reach. They have endured marginalization from the non-Aeta people and withstand with humanity, resilience, and kindness, should be placed in public records so as to educate and enlighten us. Understanding them holds the potential to dismantle the mentality that the Aeta women healers are backward, primitive, savage and ignorant.

In terms of Indigenous feminism can be called, “a distinct identity, history and culture: each Native woman defines and describes her history, including the impact of colonization, racism and sexism, tribal women’s culture and worldviews” (A. Smith 2007, p. 101). I consider this an agency because it shows that the power of women to name and define what is important for them is an important aspect of revitalizing the agency of women in the Indigenous communities. Agency is a driving force for change because for so long in our records and inquiry, Indigenous women’s identity has been appropriated and misrepresented. This Indigenous feminist project intends to dismantle this appropriation, thereby reclaiming the agency of Indigenous women. The Aeta women healers have been accomplishing this by stressing their healing practices in public. They gave names to the different plants that they use for healing, such as, oregano for colds. They also name a person’s illness without doubting the validity of their knowledge base or the utility of their teachings. However, the non-Aeta people continuously construe this as “silly” or superstitious. But for the Aeta women healers, this course of action was imperative in staving off a worse alternative. Documenting their story matters because if we do not bear observational witness to the Aeta knowledge of healing and their healers sagacity, then who will do it? Education is "empowering only when the works and lives of the few are regularly discussed in the curricular canon within their own contexts, such that the meanings that emerge from analyses of textuality are coherent and illuminating" (Minnick 1990, p. 43). So, if in the education arena, the Aeta women healers’ ways of knowing are not taken into account and are excluded from the process of knowledge production, how can we claim that

education is empowering when it is apparent that some groups of women are being marginalized?

This study incorporates a discussion of gender, health, resistance, indigeneity, and education as highlighted by the Aeta women healers during the Talking Circle. They shared with us how they have been using their healing practices to make a change in their community. They are aware that their community is a target of assimilation. They also know that their people have suffered from both discrimination and marginalization. However, they believe that despite all this negative treatment, their culture will live and they know that they have to do their part in order to make it happen.

I include quotes from the Aeta women healers to show how they have been agents of change and how they have been resisting colonial imposition on their way of life. Their narratives also show that they are aware of how the outsiders perceive them. They know that they may speak up, but the outsiders may nonetheless decide to ignore them. Nevertheless, the Aeta women healers know that it is vital to speak out even though there is a possibility of being ignored. They are not speaking up because there is a need to defend themselves, but rather because it is a way to share to share and inform outsiders about their cornucopia of knowledge. I label this narrative the counter discourse of the women healers. Counter discourse, according to Tiffin (1995), is about “rereading and rewriting of the European historian and fictional record (p. 99)”. My thesis is not only about rewriting the text, but also about providing the voices of the Aeta women healers. It is a way of hearing their voices, feeling their emotions, and

paying attention to the messages in their statement. The questions they grip in this discursive interrogation go to the heart of Indigenous issues both in the Philippines and internationally. These include the rights and questions of land, sovereignty, self-determination. The issues they cover are the core issues for Indigenous Peoples and their struggles to gain self-determination. The United Nations in many statements has attempted to deal with the complex legal issues of sovereignty (see for instance, UNGA OGR, supp No 16, UN Doc A/4684 (1960); UNTS 3, Can TS 46, 6 ILM 368 (1976); UN Doc A/RES/61/295 (2007). The issues involve labour rights (ILO, 76th session (1989) and general issues of sovereignty, self determination and freedom from discrimination (Cobo 1982; Gros Espille, World Bank 1991; Hannum 1990; Koskenniemi 1994; Krasner 1999; Moore 1998; Wiessner 2011; Xanthaki 2009). These issues illustrate that the struggles we document in this thesis and which the Circle participants discuss are universal and ongoing ones for Indigenous Peoples, for instance, United Nations conducted a survey in September 2007 in the UNDRIP (declaration of human rights) to the right of self-determination to Indigenous Peoples. The vote was 144 to 4. The four states voting against the declaration were all English-speaking settler states: Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia. This suggests that the issues of self-determination, land and sovereignty the Aeta are dealing with as issues of decolonization and self-determination are hardly unique and that while specific to own situation have parallels globally.



***“I am the light of my family and my community”***

Young (2001) argues that, historically, anti-colonialists scarcely discussed neither gender nor women’s rights. For example, Fanon’s literary work has been criticized because of the limits of his engagement with regards to gender and feminism (Torres 2010; Moore 2007; Dubey 1998; Sharpley-Whiting 1998; McClintock 1995; Fuss 1994; hooks 1981). However, there are women who have played an important role in introducing gender in the anti-colonial movement, yet they are not as popular as Fanon or Memmi. For example, in the Philippines, a woman by the name of Felipa Culala, alias Dayang Dayang, organized a guerilla detachment referred to as peasant organizer. As an organizer, she led her group in a successful assault on the Municipal Hall, on March 8, 1942 (Logarta 1989, p. 132). Young (2001) states that “in India, several women led armed rebellions in 1857-8, notably Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi.” (p. 362). Moreover, Wane (2006) states that “African women have however written to challenge colonialism-authors such as Flora Nwapa, who through her fiction (see her earlier novels, *Efuru* 1966, and *Idu* 1971) expresses the struggles of Nigerian people as they try to make sense of their exploitation by colonialism and capitalism in the midst of civil war and authoritarianism is worth noting” (p. 95). Wane argues that women are the leaders in anti-colonial struggles, and that feminist work has been on the ground since colonization became to reality.

In the discussion of anti-colonial discourse, we have to ensure that their contributions to history are documented; these contributions may include, but are not limited to, the following: healing power, forms of resistance, agency, spirituality and

resiliency. The Aeta, including their women healers, have maintained fidelity to their beliefs and territory through much trepidation. For instance, when Mt. Pinatubo erupted, instead of choosing to live in the community of the Christian Filipinos and to disregard their own traditions, they chose to stay in their village and be with their own people. Hardship was a fact of life. During this time, there was no food, no shelter and their land was infertile. Nevertheless, they did not forget what their ancestors had taught them: when there is crisis, they must work collectively and pool their faith and efforts. They performed the necessary rituals until a time when they were able to find a solution to their ominous situation. When members in their society fell sick during this bleak epoch the Aeta women healers did not hesitate to heal.

This illustrates the immense role that these women play in resisting not only neo-colonization but that they have considered and reflected upon all of these in detail in narratives referencing other historical challenges encountered when maintaining their ways of knowing. Anti-colonial discourse interrogates the notion that women are ignorant. Moreover, according to Mills (1998), postcolonial theory is focused on, but not limited to, the following: "assessing the gendered nature of colonialism and its influence on present-day forms of thinking and behavior, and the worldly focus which forces an interrogation of the nature of 'woman' and 'universal' statements about what women want" (p. 99). Spivak (1995), Mohanty (2006), and Minh-ha (2000) also discuss women-related issues, including women's liberation and emancipation. The discussion traces back to the question of "Can the Subaltern Speak"? Spivak warns us not to

romanticize and homogenize the subaltern subject (Shahjahan 2005, p. 221). Mohanty (2006) discusses how Western feminists universalize Third World women:

I argue that assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality on the one hand, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the 'third world' in the context of a world system dominated by the West on the other, characterize a sizeable extent of Western feminist work on women in the third world...And it is in the production of this 'Third World Difference' that Western feminism appropriate and 'colonize' the fundamental complexities and conflicts in these countries. It is in the process of homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse, and this power needs to be defined and named. (pp. 242-243)

Mohanty explains that this homogenous notion of the oppression of women present them as ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, and victimized (Mohanty 1995); this representation is very damaging and the very notion of 'oppression' becomes another instance of oppression by stereotyping. This presumption about the oppression mental states of others forecloses our learning the abilities and awareness's of others. I suggest this is the case with our understanding of Aeta healers and their Indigenous knowledge of ethno-medicine. This is, in fact, privileging a certain group and positioning Indigenous women in a very precarious location. The impact of colonization on women was so profound and negative, such that

they are still considered second-class colonial subjects, unfit to determine their own destinies (Oyewumi 1995). In addition, through Oyewumi's essay, "Colonizing Bodies and Minds", we see how colonizers regarded women. Oyewumi also explains that in the analysis of the colonial situation, "in addition to employing race as the basis of distinctions, should take into account its stronger gender component" (p. 257).

In other words, we have to appreciate the role that the Aeta women healers play in the community and thus understand the issues that confront them, such as the fact that their voices are heard that their knowledge is excluded and that there is a great impact of colonization on their lives (Dei 2002; Wane 2002; Tauli-Corpuz 2006; Peczon-Fernandez 1989; Oyewumi 1995; Smith 1999). The Aeta women healers need to be acknowledged because history tells us that in pre-Spanish time, they were being recognized as spiritual leaders (Salazar 1989).

In the Talking Circle, I heard and I saw that the Aeta women healers are totally different from the way they have been pictured in the text. Himay states:

*I love serving my family and my community. To me, when I do things for my family and my community, I feel good because I know that those little things that I do can help them. For example, when I cook, I am not only cooking for my children and my husband but I always make sure that I include the rest of my people.*

For Himay, serving her family and community is not only a responsibility, but also a means to help and change their situation. For her, a woman who can both serve her family and community possesses the strength, intelligence, and, most of all, the power.

Himay considers herself fortunate because she has the power to make sure that the family and community are healthy. She believes that if the family is healthy, then each of the members is able to carry out their respective responsibilities. This can markedly improve their life. However, if the family or the community is not healthy because their well-being is not attended to, each of them will deteriorate, initiating the demise of their race. Himay feels very empowered by what she does. She is aware that other people criticize her and label her as an oppressed woman. However, she sees it from a different perspective. To her, no one can stop her. We can see that Himay is countering the label of Third World women as oppressed the production of the “Third World Woman’ as a singular monolithic subject in some recent (Western) feminist text” ... (Mohanty 1995).

Essentializing Third World Women is a mistake because women in the Third World are very diverse. There should be some recognition of these differences that exist within the larger community of women in the third world and more especially the Aeta Indigenous people. Mohanty (1995) states that “the assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy (as male dominance-men as a correspondingly coherent group) which can be applied universally and cross-culturally “(p. 243). Mohanty argues that applying a generalization to the condition of women is like recreating the mistake of the fundamentalist: instead of learning from Himay, we are actually pushing her to a location that she cannot find herself. Himay is teaching the society how to pay attention to her. Through this we become cautious of how we perceive her as Indigenous woman.

Minh-Ha (1995) explains why it is important for Himay to say what she needs to say: “you who understand the dehumanization of forced removal-relocation-reeducation-redefinition, the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality, your voice-you know” (p. 246). That is why she decided to speak this time.

Furthermore, Rima notes:

*As a healer it is not just healing the whole well-being of a person but it is also to make our body healthy so that we can make our community rich and healthy. I exist because of my people, therefore, if one of us is not doing well, then we are all affected. To prevent this, I have to do my part and that is to undertake my responsibility as a mother, a daughter, a wife, an aunt and, most all, a member of a community that has been there before I was born.*

As a mother, Rima believes that her responsibility is to cater to the needs of her family. She makes it a point to till the land and plant vegetables and fruit trees. She also raises chickens and pigs. She knows that by doing so, the family has something to eat. We can see that Rima is instrumental in the health system of her community. She believes in the notion that we are all connected, and therefore, that it is important to take care of one another. I asked if it was too much for her to do both the work on the farm and in the house. Rima told me:

*You know, Rose, life is not about counting how many things you have done for your people. It is about doing things that can make a difference in the life of the people that you love and in the life of other people who may be asking for something to eat. You see what is happening now in our society is that when we*

*do something we want others to do the same thing and, if not, we place ourselves in a lower position. For example, when I go to the farm, I cannot expect my husband to do the same thing. However, there are times when he does not want to go to the farm because, to him, there are other things to do that are more important than farming. When other people see that I am the only one doing the farming, they equate this to being an abused, oppressed, and marginalized woman. However, I look at it from a totally different perspective and that is, I am a strong woman who possessed the intelligence to make my family live and therefore healthy.*

Rima is reminding us not to fall into the trap of believing that the Aeta women like her lack both knowledge and reason. One of the challenges that the Aeta women are facing right now is the fact that they have been put into a box. Every time they are highlighted as objects of analysis, it is manipulated so as to generate negative connotations about them. In other words, this is how the power of language plays its role in defining the other regardless of facts. For example, in the texts, the Aeta have been identified as “uneducated”, and this term becomes normal and “fine” to define, even if it connotes negativity. In this respect, we can see that language can be used to oppress the Aeta and their care givers. This is why Loomba (1993) cautions that we “engage with current debates about the colonial subject and resistance is also to examine our own construction and to reflect on the possibilities of our articulation. Such a personal stake in subaltern agency may be read as detrimental to ‘true’ analysis or, on the other hand, as making possible the connection between ‘neo’ and ‘colonialism’” (p. 306).

Before describing the Aeta women healers as “uneducated,” let us be careful so we do not downgrade them instead of celebrating their agency. From an outside perspective it is easy to say that she is being exploited because she is performing multiple tasks. However, when we listen to Rima discussing that working is actually for the benefit of her family we learn that this is a form of strength and power because it produces a healthy community. Lorde (1981) reminds us that “it is our task to educate white women, in the face of tremendous resistance, as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival” (p.100). Rima is doing this for us, by educating us about their reality.

I also asked the Aeta women healers regarding gender differences. Maya states:

*In our community as Aeta, there is no such thing as inferior or superior. We treat everybody with equal respect. For example, when we face a situation that requires a decision, we usually consult each other, husbands consult their wives and vice versa. We also include our children in the decision-making process. There is no such thing as gender inequality.*

Maya explains that gender differences do not exist in the Aeta community. Women are respected. In fact, the Aeta women are “active and capable hunters of wild pig and deer” (Estioko-Griffin 1985, p. 18). History tells us that hunting is the work of men. However, within the Aeta community gender division of labor is not part of their belief system. Griffin and Griffin (1999) state that:

Gender relations profoundly exemplify Aeta or Aeta egalitarianism. Men and women have equal access to decision-making functions. A couple,



together, decides the major issues in their lives, and they consult older children, parents, siblings, and co-residents. Neither gender is inferior. (p. 292).

This guides us to the truth that the Aeta community believes in the interconnection with one another. No one has power over another. For a community to exist healthy reciprocity is essential. They try not to compete, although, some of the Aeta People are trying to engage in land owning through formal property title because of the rise of capitalism. Co-investigators in the Circle acknowledge that they are facing such assimilation dilemmas and paradoxes. However, they have to continue reminding their people that their cultural confidence and construction of relations are not about “owning” property, but rather, alternatively, about taking care of the land and sharing land and wealth with community members.

Amay also explains her role as a woman in her family and in the community which shows that gender inequality does not exist. She also shares the notion of “the light of the home and the community”:

*As a woman, when there is conflict I stand in the middle to ask the people what their concern is and whether it is necessary to resolve it by beating each other or through a peaceful and respectful manner. In my house, there are times when other members of the family become angry. Instead of getting angry, I talk in a way that the other person feels loved and respected. In my community, when I heal, I let the person know that I am there for her or him. I reassure my people that I work for my community, not for myself alone.*

Amay learnt from her ancestors to always advocate for peace and love in both her family circle and in the community. This is what is important to the Aeta women healers: respect, love and equality among their issues. For them, the issue of gender inequality is not part of their culture. This kind of discourse actually does not concern them. What is important to them is that everybody has an equal share of every opportunity that their Creator provides for them.

***“I heal because I want to improve the health of my people”***

I was oblivious to any rational assessment about the Aeta healing practices until I went to their community and actively listened, to and documented their activities , engaged my analysis against their analysis and then critically conceptualized what I had observed. Although my mother had always practiced Indigenous healing, I had harbored some doubts about its efficacy. The conceptual origin of my skepticism lay in the cumulative effects of modernist socialization. The influence of this invisible paradigm, "the Nazi man within", was enough for me to regurgitate misinformation about Indigenous healing. As Dei et al. (2002) explain:

As a result of colonial, patriarchal, corporate, exploitative, and often ecologically destructive development models, indigenous knowledge's have been underestimated and undervalued. Knowledge production has been socially constructed so as to become a near monopoly from which most ordinary people are excluded. (p. 9)

Among the many reasons why Indigenous knowledge is still undervalued in the academy is the fact that numerous students (including many with whom I have spoken)

are afraid that they may not be able to get jobs. I was told, one time, by senior scholars in the academy that if I focused my study on Indigenous knowledge, I may end up jobless. This informal knowledge implicitly speaks volumes about how the discourse related to Indigenous healing has been marginalized in academic spaces and treated as if the knowledge in itself is contagious. (We should ask who has the superstition?).

Today, the work of Indigenous Peoples is too often characterized in informal settings as devoid of sense and, thus, marginalized. Furthermore, its expertise is under-represented and presented as tacit informal practices within the academic circle. We may be promoters of equal justice and fairness in society, but if we do not recognize our roots and cultures in our teachings, anything we proclaim about justice will be an incomplete epistemic. We need open exchanges since they are the heart and soul of what is generally understood as “ethics”, open discourse and “bias free” inquiry. Our academy is still involved in the colonial beliefs that tend to deny that the Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge belongs in safe space. In fact, we have ended up imposing a death sentence on would be scholars by claiming that choosing this area limits job prospects. This is a Eurocentric mentality in its most plain, apparent form and the prejudice has manifested a bias which has been taken to levels bordering on disgrace.

There are, and should be, levels of engagement and varying degrees of “proof” in a valid epistemological assessment. One potential methodological critique of my own claims made here, for instance, is frequently and often correctly made towards anthropologists: the claims are single accounts (and therefore single cases) with no independent check on spurious or exogenous factors nor cross-checks on inherent bias

particularly to the observer. They are therefore lacking validity and consequently are suspect on fundamental methodological criteria of both reliability and validity (Campbell and Stanley 1966). Put another way, one might ask sociologically (and logically) where are the counter interrogation of the negative space which is created by stigmatizing individuals using judgment that is offered, frequently without the possibility of counter analysis or even an open discussion of merit? The Aeta “methodology”, by contrast, is empirical but it begins with trust in a community and the belief that we are rooted, there from our values to our methods.

The Aeta represented by their women healers look at life from a perspective that is more integrated and communal and less atomized and individualized than the Western model. Aly, for example, stresses that she does not focus on material things or on how much she can make in healing. She focuses on helping other people. She talks about believing in what she does and how it will help her community. She states:

*There may be a health center in our community, but there are still so many people who come to me because they believe in my healing power. I have been healing very many people who have been beaten by snakes, among other things. Some of them were about to die when they came to me. But, through my knowledge of healing, and with the help of my creator, I was able to help them. There are times when I feel so weak, but I still perform healing because if I refuse to heal the people who are in need of help I feel worse. My work as a healer is the one that gives me strength and happiness. I believe that I possess the knowledge that can help the people who are in need. It is a power not only to change the life of my people but*

*also the life of other people. I do not ask for money or any material things. I only ask the people who come to me to believe what I do and to respect my people.*

For Aly the well-being of her people and others is the *raison d'être* for her vocation. Healing may sometimes be harsh, for example, when she is exhausted, but she continues working despite her own exhaustion in order to improve the health of others in the community. Improving the people's health conditions for the better is one of the reasons she continues to heal. When I asked her if the existence of a health center affects their healing practices, Aly stated:

*I'm glad that the health centre exists in our community because there are things that I cannot do, for example, I cannot tell the exact temperature of a person who is having a fever. I believe you need some instruments to do that. In the health centre, they have it. However, there are things that the health centre does not have that I have. For example, when a person is bitten by a snake, I can tell right away. I do not need any instrument to do it.*

Aly recognizes the importance of a health centre in their community. Her attitude does not portray any hostility and she does not see other health services in the community as rivals or competition. Indeed, she acknowledges that there are things that the health centre has that she does not have. For her, what is important is that she is healing people who are sick because she wants to improve their health. Aly does not ask her patients for money. I asked her how she survives. She told me that healing people is the main goal and not making money. She believes that if she does her calling, God will provide for her needs. It is up to the one who has been healed to give her what they can afford

in terms of a gift, such as, vegetables, sugar, or rice. However, this is not considered payment for the service rendered. This is precisely the type of argument anthropologist Marcel Mauss argued in his classic work *The Gift* (Mauss, 1967). Mauss argued that in pre-capitalist societies without capitalists organizing concept of private property (and hence transferability) and the intentment ability to alienate one from one's own labour as argued by Marx, Montesquieu and others that in the act of social relations there was a particular set of relationships whereby one's own relationships of work and production were so integral as to become inalienable in the sense that they were non transferable and were a special relationship organized in the de facto economic relationships of the gift. The relationship is not one of 'buying a service' as one might do from a doctor but instead is a relationship of reciprocal stewardship implicit in the organization of the society and localized relations. This is very close to the kind of argument we understand Aly is denoting in her statement.

Aly also asserts her knowledge of healing. For her, health cares function is to produce the true version of reality: by unifying spiritual and material the Aeta women healers save lives. Aly knows that she may have the knowledge to heal but she acknowledges that other people or other entities in the society also have their ways of healing. She has admiration for others who have different ways of healing or curing diseases. She states that if public health practitioners were open for dialogues with them, the notion of competition or actions to damage others would be diminished. Aly knows that, with respect to public health, they are not given recognition as agents that provide healing serves among the population. She notes that most of the medicine that

public health staffs use is from herbal plants. The only difference is that they patent the plant, blend the herbal mixture with other substances and package it in a decorative container which is appealing to consumer.

Aly knows that the goal is not to eliminate the disease but rather to make a profit. She says I may call her "*bagtit*" in Ilokano or crazy, but rather a fact that healing in the public health system is not completely for the benefit of the people but it is also for the proliferation of vested interests. Even then, she is not totally dismissing the work of public health because they have been helpful to the infirmed who can afford to buy medicine. She states that it is time to voice her reflections on the impacts of modern world. Along the same lines as Aly's thinking, Larkin (2006) writes:

The health problems and prospects within the poorer regions of the Third World are intricately caught up in these development processes. It is within and through the complex web of influences at play that health and health issues come to be defined, shaped, and experienced. However, these processes can no longer be understood solely within the confines of particular countries or nation-states. As Western technologies, cultures, and ideologies spread around the globe and insert themselves into the Third World, so increasingly development and health issues become caught up in and are shaped by these globalizing influences.

The above argument by Larkin agrees with Aly's explanation that medicine can only be afforded by the affluent. It is a clear depiction of the fact that contemporary medicine, as implemented in the Philippines is an organizational delivery structure whereby many

suffer while few prosper. Profit, rather than healing, is the objective of the central mandate of this endeavor. Medicine by commoditization has been used as a contrivance to divide and rule. According to Aly, it is the haves in society that tend to go to the health centers. The rest of the population is either doomed to languish, die or seek the help of Indigenous healers. This has a great demographic and hygienic impact on the poor population of the country as the country's poor exceed the number of people who can afford services at public health clinics and who can afford to buy the medicine (Encyclopedia of Nations, 2011).

This is a classic instance of how the introduction of the Western medical system has been complicit in creating classes of people within a society. In the Philippines even with an established medical system, there is a further divide. The system is a hybrid of the public and private where the poor are always relegated to the former if they receive any care at all. In much of the "Third World" the Western medical model's application has become a catalyst for the oppression of the most vulnerable in societies. By contrast, instead of dividing the population along this wealth partition the Indigenous sector of the healing community, in which our participants are models, has been acting as both a uniting factor and a source of solace to the disposed. Larkin is arguing that the root cause of this problem which impacts the Filipino People originated from Western technologies, cultures, ideologies and proprietary practices. The Aeta healers, without reading Marx, Foucault or Fanon, have interrogated and analytically crystallized their own institutional ethnography (Smith 2005) from their own empiricism. They have concluded that medical models of the establishment offered gave rise to a process



whereby an entrenched system makes the most vulnerable poor and defenseless against the internalization of the false consciousness of their status. Meanwhile, practitioners inside the system are not sufficiently critical in the understanding of what is needed for an effective medical delivery system which processes the demographic, health, socio-economic and cultural realities of the country and comes up with adaptive planning and implementation of health care delivery using all appropriate resources available which is both functional and appropriate. Instead, they have too frequently indulged in sophistic arguments ranging from “blaming the victim” models (Ryan, 1976) offered in the “modernist” arguments to acting as if these should be the overarching factors in justifying such an unequal health care delivery system.

The Aeta Healers have their own medicine that they use for themselves and to others who believe in their healing practices. Their medicines are available for everybody and therefore a genuinely “universal” health care system. No one is excluded on the basis of race, class, gender, and ethnicity or any other basis of difference. Indigenous healing is for the benefit of everybody, without subjecting them to the torment and artificially induced self-loathing which is caused when one is made to feel like a second class citizen in a land that was his or her homeland, after all.

As part of her healing practices, Rang-ay asks everybody to take care of their environment. She states:

*As a woman healer who has the power to speak, I would like us to take care of our mother earth. All the things that I need in my healing, I get them from the land. But at the same time I do not leave the plant to die. When I need leaves from a*

*plant I only take the leaves not the whole plant because I know that if I uproot the plant then others cannot use it any more. Today, I am very worried because non-Aeta people come to the forest and cut the trees. That is why you do not see so many trees any more. It pains me when they do this because I know the impact on us. I talked to these loggers one time and begged them not to cut the trees, instead they insulted me, and told me that I was just an Aeta woman who did not have any importance in the society...I believe that the land the trees and all the creation in this world must be respected and taken care of.*

Rang-ay is calling for environmental conservation. She is aware of the environmental related challenges that they are facing, such as, “the worsening of the quality of their lives in terms of insecurity, poorer health, less food, the worsening quality of air, water and soil, decreasing income opportunities, degraded social conditions, and little if any political power...All the promises of progress have passed them by and left them saddled with many of the problems” (Lamba 2005, p. 2). When the Philippines became a part of the “global capitalist system and how it has come to dominate the world” (Lamba 2005, p. 2), communities of the Aeta people, where Rang-ay lives, were tremendously affected by this change. Rang-ay experiences the environmental changes: for example, the weather has become extremely hot and humid. Furthermore, most of the herbal plants that she has been using in her healing are gone because of patenting.

I would like to speculate that the extension of intellectual property including the patenting of medicine and even use of the sequencing of the genome and the genetic code represent one of the most insidious and unwarranted extensions of power

appropriation and concentration. This represents a substantive threat to global health in the past quarter century. Consider this in terms of epistemology. The largely plant-based remedies that the Aeta use from the “pharmacy” of their forest and agriculture lands have palliative veracity because of their healing properties regardless of which one the likely etiological model uses. Regardless of the causal attribution for the cure, whether spiritual, divine, natural, genetic, or chemical, there remains one underlying claim. The primary concept is that the determinant root cause of the healing be it from the spirit, our DNA or our chemistry, is the external force which made us and continuously remakes us. What is common throughout these models is that we did not “make” the world. The sequencing and “proprietary authorship” is clear in each of these analytical models. By patenting the elements of nature that we use, we, as scientist or corporations, are in effect claiming to be God. This can have preposterous outcomes: for example, chemical and pharmaceutical companies have patented, as intellectual property parts of the Genome Code (which was publicly funded in the US and the UK) as well as the parallel private project whose members have frequently borrowed from the public project “for free” (as in, used knowledge produced with public monies as their own). This “barrowed” information was repackaged for proprietary patents, or as “their own”. Chemical companies using these legal creations (created largely by unequal lobbying) have, for instance, sued farmers in Canada whose crops were cross pollinated with Monsanto genetically-engineered products which had become airborne (Fox, 2001). In some markets, the seeds available will only germinate once and even this single crop model (plants thusly grown will not produce seeds themselves) requires

pesticides (sold by the company also selling the seeds and therefore collecting twice the sales) to germinate. Did multi-nationals create nature or are they themselves God? These projects use proprietary practices not unlike land expropriation to privatize Indigenous knowledge that has been understood for ages and then act as if they were the creators.

The use of antibiotics while helping those who can afford them in the short run has yielded drug resistant or “super strains” of diseases (WHO, 2012). Recall the conclusions from Crosby’s work in the Columbian Exchange (1972): it is disease and ecological disruption even more than war, that have been the sources of mass destruction which have devastated people historically . This was certainly true for Indigenous Peoples. In North America, the death toll was at least more than 5 million and in South America and the rest of the world, genocidal levels are much higher. The smallpox outbreak in the Northwest Coast of Canada, for instance, may have killed upwards of one third of the population (HistoryLink 2003). It was, after all, the black plague brought along the silk road opened by the Moguls (Weatherford 2004) which temporally ended trade and disposed of more than a third of the (or 1.5 of an estimated 4 million) the inhabitants of Europe. (see for instance:

*[www.historylearningsite.co.uk/black\\_death\\_of/1348\\_to1350.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/black_death_of/1348_to1350.htm)*).

It is precisely these kind of central epidemiological and social consequences that our participants are pointing to within their “data bases”. They are also implicitly inviting us to honestly interrogate the consequences of our own arrogance, oversights, and the dysfunctional elements of our own value and health delivery systems. In this

respect, it is clear that our Aeta healers are critical “organic” intellectuals. One can speculate how “enlightened” or “rational” a system such as the official health delivery system in the Philippines can be wishes to embrace a value schematic which superimposes proprietary rights over our natural human obligations and as UNESCO states the “right” of a child to both health care and education. How effective is a system which establishes uneven distribution and leaves pockets of poverty in which once “extinct” diseases are allowed to rise again? Who is the “barbarian” and the irrational in this problem and the inherent effects such a health care model generates? These are questions beyond the scope of this thesis and should be later pursued. It is sufficient to note here that as we reflect, we may wish to consider what the stories and analyses of the Aeta women in my thesis show us: parallels in anticipation of many of the most vanguard epidemiological issues debated in modern health. We see these global issues reported on by our Circle member’s in highly local and specific contexts.

For Rang-ay, it is noting that it is hard for her to catch fish in the river because some of the non-Aeta fishermen use bombs to catch fish, such that even the smallest fish die. The Aeta people have their different ways of catching fish, mainly using nets, which catch only big fish such that the small fish continue to grow. Gathering wild fruits is now a struggle because of the issues of deforestation and mining. This further extends to include the issue of hunting wild animals. Most of the wild animals are gone, which has led to concerns relating to food scarcity. These challenges that the Aeta women healers are facing are also being faced by the Cree Peoples in Canada. Feit

(2004) writes the following about the government asserted of dominance over the Cree People in Canada:

The expansion of the rail and road networks into the southern portions of Cree territory occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, and several mines, mining towns, and commercial logging operations were established. Their impacts on the Cree were neither foreseen nor considered...Cree reported frequent finds of dead fish and aquatic animals and changes in the taste of animals over large areas. (p. 112)

However, the Cree People did not capitulate and allow the government to rule over them: "dozens of Cree hunters came to Montreal to testify, explaining to judge Albert Malouf, government representatives, and the public how they lived on the land and why they had to have a say in what was done there. Their tone was not confrontational, but truthful and firm" (Feit 2004, p. 114). The Aeta women have also been doing the same thing with respect to the integrity of their land. They take a stand on matters relating to their community. One example is the statement of Rang-ay advocating for environmental conservation. We can see that what matters to the Aeta women healers is also significant to the Cree People of Canada. They may be living in two different worlds, but they share a common concern. These two groups of Indigenous People know the root cause of their problems, as explained by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995):

The hegemonic power of Europe's economic and scientific rationalism also, in time, extinguished Indigenous ontology and epistemologies, re-

defining for much of the world, the very nature of human being and land, flora and fauna...And although environmental degradation had occurred (and was occurring) in a number of pre-colonized areas, the post-incursion and damage to people, animals, and places on a world scale was unprecedented. It is thus not surprising that so many individuals and organizations across formerly colonized countries are now turning their attention to a radical rethinking of relationships between human, animals, and place; a re-thinking which, at least in some cases, is looking for its inspiration to the once despised or ignored aboriginal ways of apprehending human identity in place. (pp. 491-493)

Nevertheless, they are teaching us their agency. Shiva (2002) writes:

For Indigenous communities, conserving biodiversity means conserving the integrity of ecosystem and species, safe-guarding their rights to these resources, and maintaining their production systems, which are based on long awareness of biodiversity. For them, biodiversity has intrinsic value as well as high use of value. For commercial interests, biodiversity itself has no value; it is merely raw material for production commodities and maximizing profits. (p. ix)

The above statement enables us to appreciate how the Aeta women look at the environment around them and how they utilize their power to resist the continued depletion of nature. Their way of life is about protecting Mother Earth Shiva (2002) elaborates on this concept as follows:

Indigenous knowledge systems aimed at local self-reliance in nutrition and health care need criteria for protection that are different from Western models, which are based mainly on patents. Such protection must be based not on individual rights but on community rights and collective innovation - that is, on the concepts of heritage and of innovation over time.

Indigenous knowledge, as exemplified by the Aeta women healers, is based on love for mother earth. They are community nexus connectors between the material and the spiritual worlds. They accept that if they take anything for granted the repercussions will return cyclically over time. They live with the understanding that they exist for their community rather than for themselves.

***“Healing as a means of resisting the modern way of life”***

The Aeta healers have been disposed of by outsiders for a long time. I remember when I was young. The Military forced them to leave their ancestral land because it had been appropriated by a wealthy person. They therefore could not reside on that land. Because of this, they were forced to live in locations close to the cities where they were being governed by city politicians with little knowledge or interest in their plight. They were mandated to follow the rules and regulations to the point where they were functionally dictated to abandon their culture. My conversation with our Aeta healers has shifted my thinking regarding survival from these forms of challenges. Rosa states, “I heal because I resist assimilation into the modern way of life”.



This statement informs us that these Aeta women are not ready to give up their traditions and practices in exchange for modern life. For Rosa, healing is a way of resisting neo-colonization. Not only does she resist neo-colonization, but she also heals the injured spirits of her people. These injured spirits have been caused by their shift to other lands, their departure from their ancestral land and their loss of their cultures. They do not only leave the land physically but they also leave the places where their ancestors are buried. It is in this context that the imperative for healing is greatest and Rosa fulfills this psychic necessity. She heals her people's physical as well as emotional and spiritual ailments. She knows that when they are well in all aspects they can resist the treatment forced on them by outsiders. Dirlik (2005) explains the nature of global capitalism and reasons why the Aeta women healers have been resisting it:

What is ironic is that the managers of this world situation themselves concede the concentration of power in their (or their organization's) hands; as well as their manipulation of peoples, boundaries and cultures to appropriate the local for the global, to admit different cultures into the realm of capital only to break them down and to remake them in accordance with the requirements of production and consumption, and even to reconstitute subjectivities across national boundaries to create producers and consumers more responsive to the operational of capital...From the perspective of Global Capitalism, the local is a site not of liberation but manipulation; stated differently, it is a site the inhabitants of which must be liberated from themselves (stripped of their identity) to

be homogenized into the global culture of capital (their identities reconstructed accordingly). Ironically, even as it seeks to homogenize populations globally, consuming their cultures, Global capitalism enhances awareness of the local, pointing to it also as the site of resistance to capital. (pp. 466-467)

Global capitalism has mastered the paraphernalia to hoodwink the locals. Nonetheless, the Aeta women healers see through these apparati. Rosa's testimony details why she does not want to succumb to the operation of global capitalism. She knows the consequences for her people. She also knows that one way of dismantling global capitalism is saying no to the modern way of living. This is because she knows that the moment she agrees to the manipulation of the global system, she will be making a culturally and ecologically grievous mistake. Rosa, therefore is standing firm and holding on to her way of life: one that is connected to nature and to honouring other creations. For her, life is not just about having a lot of material possessions, but it rather about sharing whatever you have with others. It is not just about taking ownership of everything that exists in the universe, but it is also about respecting and taking care of others. Life is not just living as an individual; it is about living with others.

Rosa expresses her disappointment with modern society:

*I feel sad to see how this modern way of life is treating the creations of our God.*

*Nowadays you can see a lot of killings because of greed, jealousy, and hatred.*

*Everybody wants to be at the top of the ladder. To do so, they have to hurt their*

*own fellowmen. Another thing is when my children go to the market, others treat them like animals, for example, hitting them with a stone. This is a painful experience. I do not want my children to learn any of these kinds of values. In our own community, we tried to respect each other. We talked about helping each other and sharing whatever we have. These are some of the reasons why I do not want to be connected or assimilated in this way of life. There was also one time when I went to the health centre, hoping that they can help my child. I respect their ways of healing, so I asked for advice on what I could do to my child who had a fever at that time. Instead of this nurse advising me, she gave me a box of medicine. The nurse did not explain to me how I was supposed to use it. For this nurse, I do not have the brain, so there was no point explaining. I looked at the box of the medicine and checked the expiration date and I found that the medicine expiry date had already passed. It hurts so much to see how the nurse had treated us. Nevertheless, I went home full of hope that I could heal my own child. I prayed to my God, and I applied and boiled some herbal plant and gave to my child. I did this a few times, fortunately my child got healed... I prefer to continue living the way we do.*

We can see that although Rosa has tried to use modern medicine, she decided to protect her family and her culture because of the way the nurse treated her and her child. She believes that her healing may be imperfect but, to her, there is a multitude of reasons why she should continue to practice it. In her heart, she is acutely aware that she is making a change not only in her life but also in her community.

Rula is also steadfast in using herbal plants instead of yielding to the power of Western medicine. Rula states, *“we have to make sure that, even though we have access to modern medicine, we need to keep using herbal plants because there are things they can help to heal our body.”* I asked Rula about her experience with modern medicine. This is what she said:

*Well, I have had both positive and negative experiences. I went to the health centre because I had a terrible headache. I wanted to get healed quickly because I had things to do. I asked for medicine and they gave me. I took it, and few minutes later the headache was gone. I was very happy about it. However, after a few days, the headache came back. I went back again to the health centre. This time the staff at the health centre gave me a bottle of medicine. The staff did not inform me how to take it and because I told her that the headache had come back, I assumed that the medicine was for headache. However, when I took the medicine, instead of getting better, I ended up getting diarrhea. I wondered, what possibly could have gone wrong. So this time I went to the health centre to complain. One of the staff looked at the medicine that I had been given. I could see that she was shocked because the medicine was not for headache but for other illnesses. I waited for a few hours to see what these staff could do about my complaint and my illness. What they did was, they asked me to come some other time. They did not apologize for what had happened. I went back to my house full of anger. Later I realized that it could be a sign that I should stop going to the health center. Since, I am a healer, I prepared some medicinal plants for headache and for diarrhea and*

*I got well. These herbal plants are hard to find, and it is a complex process before one can actually use the product. In the end, it is beneficial to our body. So, as an Aeta healer, I prefer our own ways of healing to taking this modern medicine because of the side effects. For herbal plants, you do not need to worry about side effects, as long as you know the right plant for the disease.*

From Rosa's and Rula's testimonies it is clear why they resist modern models of life and healing. First, it is personal experience and negative experience. Second, they want to demonstrate that their healing practice is beneficial to all; and they do not want to be manipulated and act as pawns in a game directed by global marketing and corporate health agendas. Through the work of Rosa and Rula, the goal of global capitalism has been disrupted and the new way of medicine has had a hard time surviving in the lives of the Aeta people.

***“My ancestors taught me how to honor other human beings”***

Euro-education could be either a source of empowerment or a source of oppression. This study has established that Eurocentric education is different from the form of education received by the Aeta. Indigenous education derives its teachings from its ancestors. The Indigenous Aeta people did not allow colonization to blemish the nature of their education. The Aeta healer “diploma” is in their history, hearts, and stories, embodying cultural and health knowledge wisdom which is reinforced and replenished through use in their everyday activities. In my conversation with the Aeta women healers we thematically established that the Eurocentric education system has

tried to suppress the Aeta culture but their Indigenous education has been used as an instrument of agency in facing social challenge and change. Cena states:

*They say that we are stinky, stupid and barbaric. We do not belong to any religion. Old people like me did not go to school that was established by colonized people. Our children are now in school but it has so many bad effects on us. For instance, our children do not want to be called Aeta because of the negative connotation. But we are Aeta, we have a very beautiful culture, we have been here for a long time. We have our history. But I guess, they call us barbaric because we do not conform to the rules or to the ways of knowing of the colonized”.*

Cena neither admires nor addresses to the form of education that her children received.

Altbach (1995) notes, with regard to the nature of education, that “colonial education policies were generally elitist...Indigenous cultures, in many cases highly developed, were virtually ignored by colonial educational policy” (p. 382). I concur with Altbach’s argument. In fact, the primary school that has been established in the community of the Aeta, where my own cousin happens to be teaching, does not acknowledge the culture of the Aeta community.

The Aeta culture, worldview, spirituality, healing practices, myths, history, and other elements pertaining into cultural instrumentation are not part of the curriculum. What is considered part of the curriculum is English, Math, Sciences and other subjects based on the American pedagogy and curriculum? It is not surprising to hear Cena complaining about the school system since formal schooling syllabus does not cater to the needs of the Aeta community. How, then, can we expect an Aeta student to honor

their ancestors if Western ideas not only occupy the spiritual world but also the “negative space” of the unspoken through knowledge and community values are supposed to be transmitted? How can we promote the Aeta ways of knowing if the Aeta students do not see themselves as part of a larger society or find role models resembling themselves in mainstream or official texts?

Altbach (1995) further argues that “the colonial language has also been used as a means of national unification in a number of Third World nations, particularly those in which no one indigenous language commands the loyalty of the entire population” (p. 409). It is indeed true. When I visited the school I was informed by the students, including the Aeta students, that they were not allowed to speak in their dialect by the school administration. If the students were caught conversing in their own dialects, they were punished with a fine of P5.00 (P=pesos). Hence, students have to learn the official (colonial) language. The result of this is that students lose fluency in their own dialects and subsequently assimilate into using the settler language. This variation in linguistic usage creates a distance between the children who go to school and other children who refrain from attending. It also creates a gap between their parents and other community members who cannot speak the “official language”. This issue of curricular language is no small matter for the Aeta, the Philippines or for Indigenous People globally. The Philippines has an estimated between 120 and 175 languages with 13 languages having at least 1 million speakers. Languages mostly belong to the Austronesia language family (Bellwood, Cox & Tryon 1995). The Philippines has only two official languages with 12 “auxiliary” official languages. Tagalog has been considered the base language

since December 30, 1937, but English and Spanish are the “bridge languages” used for higher education although Tagalog and English are the two Official languages. In spite of guarantees made to minority languages the practice is the imposition of language forms that are alien to the Indigenous communities and for many of them, this becomes a barrier to educational and vocational advancement: it is a structural canyon between metropolitan and rural Indigenous populations. It also becomes, in effect, a fissure within the community between language and practical socio-cultural identification. This dual-track educational process creates division among family members and the community. This phenomenon is being replicated in the academy where those who champion Indigenous healing are often informally dubbed as failures or seen at the margins of “serious” work.

Given such apparent bias, is it any wonder that Indigenous students choose to drop out of school, in the face of such slanderous misrepresentations of their own communities? As Weis and Fine (1993), Dei (2007) and others argue, in education, is this a “dropout or push out” phenomena? Students watch as their Indigenous ways of knowing are subjugated or subverted by their own teachers. The experiences of the children of the Aeta women healers are similar to those of Aboriginal Students in Canada. In this context, Battiste (1998) explains the nature of education:

Education has not been benign or beneficial for Aboriginal peoples.

Rather, through ill-conceived federal government policies Aboriginal

peoples have been subjected to a combination of unquestionably

powerful but profoundly debilitating forces of assimilation and



colonization. Through various systems of boarding schools and education institution, the Aboriginal world views and the people who held them were attacked. Although instructed by Catholic and Protestant clerics in almost all of the boarding schools, Aboriginal children were subjected to persistent violence, powerlessness, exploitation, and cultural imperialism, only to become impoverished and devastated in the cognitive and physical aftermath of schooling. In short, the educational tragedy has been to Aboriginal world views, knowledge, language, cultures, and the creation of widespread social and psychological upheaval in Aboriginal communities. (p. 19)

I would like to pose an assessment question about the epistemological meaning and to borrow John Dewey's helpful neologism: the "educative" prowess of such a system procedures empirical result. When did cultural genocide and a policy which, by its own assessment, quickly renders results which might be glossed as "every child left behind" become something is "rational", "civil", or "worthy "of emulation? Where is the objective epistemic examination and "adherence to facts" in this "scientific" educational model? The Aeta healers-like all humans,- posses the same 100 billion functioning neuron-transmitters in their brains. If you are spiritual, are the souls of the Aeta less "equal "than those who practice Western culture before God? What the evidence from my work subsequently documents is that in very tangible and universally ethical and logically critical ways, Aeta as people, as embodied by the healers who shared in the Circle, are a

model for both the Philippines and other Filipino peoples to emulate, learn from, and respect. I am arguing that based on outcome and comparative results, the Aeta healers have as much claim to effective educative practices as do the other Filipinos who subscribe to standard curricular alternatives which have yielded tragic and woeful results for both the Aeta people and too many other Filipinos and Indigenous Peoples in comparable colonial educational settings.

Following the experiences of the Aeta students in the Eurocentric academy, Himay decides to do her part. She states:

*My grandchildren who have been received a Eurocentric educated have had a bad experience. They adhere to our history and to our roots because, from my way of healing, they could see the difference between Aeta culture and the cultures of other groups which accept the spirit or ideology of colonization. In other words, my healing practice has been an instrument in continuing our traditions.*

Himay acts as an agent of change within her family. From her practice, we can learn that Himay is focused not only on helping the infirmed, but also on educating her grandchildren. Himay apprehends the difference between the cultures and, based on her statement, wants her grandchildren to maintain both their culture and the legacy of their ancestors. Himay has prepared herself to handle Eurocentric education. She knows the impact of this form of education on her grandchildren. To educate her people, she pursues her healing, most especially for the younger Aeta generation.

Rang-ay outlines the role of her healing practice in educating the Aeta youth:

*As a woman I use my healing practice to educate my grandchildren and other children in our community about our beliefs and practices, and about our people. I teach them how to heal so that when I cannot heal anymore, this future generation can continue healing.*

Rang-ay practices her healing to educate her people's future generation. It is at the local level by which her practice of cultural continuity mirrors the pedagogical practice of vocational exchange and socio-cultural interactions which use humans' most dynamic processes of educational practice: language, love, and healing. Her work is understanding that cultural, epistemic, and spiritual unity transcend time and space. Is it not just this type of theological understanding that is the cultural and spiritual basis of all intergenerational and specific transfer of belief and values? Is the Christian belief in the Unity of the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost so different as an act of faith and conceptual model for belief transmission as the theology and logic Rang-ay professes? Shall we understand and subsequently dismiss all Christians as "superstitious", "uneducated" and deficient in "scientific rigor"? It would, of course, be biased and unfounded to make such a supposition and (rightly) lead to charges of religious bias. We are merely quarrying as a part of "open inquiry"-why does such specious and post hoc ergo hoc logic pass as "rational" in our academies when applied to remote and socio-political groups like the Aeta which are more vulnerable? Sterling (2002) highlights the role of grandmothers as the natural teachers:

The grandmothers are natural teachers because they care for children. In the narratives they laughed and worked and told stories to little children

and rode up into the mountains, were kind, were strict, made twine out of plants, cut willow switches to make the children behave, rocked the babies to sleep. Their creation stories and narratives show the children their unique place in their nation's history and contribute to a positive self-image by validating First Nations experiences. Like the grandmothers before us we can create lessons built on experience and storytelling to transmit knowledge and skills, cultural pride, and self-confidence. (p. 5)

What Rang-ay is doing for her grandchildren fits in with Sterling's description of the grandmother's role. Rang-ay is teaching them their culture. She cares for them and she knows that they wish to persevere and embrace their culture. As a grandmother, Rang-ay knows that her grandchildren are the next generation of the Aeta. She knows that they have been the target of assimilation. She knows that in order to be able to resist assimilation, her grandchildren have to learn, live and practice their culture.

The Aeta women healers have exemplified their form of agency. The agency is grounded in experiences that are catalyzed from their gender, Aeta knowledge education, and their comprehension of healing. We are documenting the range and ask that it be informal and non-credential of Aeta knowledge. How, then, is it that so regularly these very same competencies could be deemed dysfunctional from a Eurocentric point of view? We argue that such an assessment is in part motivated by the fact that the Aeta women clearly deploy this learning, teaching and healing space as a site where cultural and social agencies play out. Aeta women, as healers, are also

illustrating how the spaces “in-between” and “beyond” are domains for both agency and cultural cohesiveness.

## **Chapter VII: Representation**

### ***Introduction***

This section explores how the Aeta women healers talk about the issue of representation. Representation is fundamental in putting forth the agendas of anti-colonial and postcolonial theories and Indigenous feminism. It is apparent in the history of colonization and its aftermath that there is a great deal of work yet to be done in terms of documenting, classifying and providing analysis to issues pertaining to how Indigenous Peoples are being represented. It is evident that Indigenous Peoples are systematically represented in a way meant to demonize and subjugate them.

Representation has been used by the dominant social elites to maintain their hegemony.

This supremacy is both engineered and prized destruction on the memory and cultural practices that have so long been part of the Aeta and other peoples' cultural sojourns.

To sustain their supremacy the dominant elites in the Philippines have to make it their legal, educational and administrative practice to functionally destroy the native identity, culture and the life of way of life and hence are frequently instrumental in the negative labeling of the Aeta and others who are resistant to their imposed knowledge.

Again, the contrivance is the labeling of Indigenous knowledge as "barbaric" and archaic.

Anticolonial, postcolonial and Indigenous feminist theories are critical in exposing how Indigenous women are being portrayed in the current normative discourse (Spivak 1996; Smith 1999; Mohanty 2006; Green 2007). Indigenous women have been improperly represented in both literature and society. White feminism

discourse is often portrays Third World women in a homogenous representation of all forms of feminism without acknowledging the differences among the various communities or the need to prioritize self identification when involved in a political struggle. In this regard, Bhabha (1994) urges us to see the in-between and the beyond spaces of cultural diversity when looking at Third World women.

Spivak (1995), whose works always focus on the intervention that changes the world, asks how we can bring about change without repeating the mistakes of previous non-native investigators who, instead of bringing change for their “educative efforts,” ended in failure. There is a way for Spivak to make a difference in society: by attending to the two definitions of representation, *Vertretung*, meaning political representation, and *darstellung*, meaning “proxy” or representation in an economic sense. To combine the two meanings of representation is dangerous because, according to Spivak, it will lead to a “fundamentalist mistake” (Landry and Maclean 1996). This fundamentalist mistake entails representing constituencies based on an unstable identification like “the women”, “the world”, “and the workers”. There is a ramification which stems from representing unstable identity which is repeating the work of White feminism by universalizing the situation of Third World women. Nevertheless, for Spivak, *vertretung* and *darstellung* go hand in hand. So, to resolve this dilemma, we need to use deconstruction because it acknowledges that in representation, *vertretung* and *darstellung* are connected to each other, while simultaneously recognizing that there is complicity in doing this. Fundamentalists act as if this complicity does not exist.

This representation is important in this study because it makes me conscious of how I represent the Aeta women healers. I have to be cautious about what I write about them, and I have to always remind myself that I am complicit in what becomes written, and responsible for my actions. In the same way, Spivak is cautious about how representation is used.

I acknowledge the complexities of representing the Aeta women healers but as long as we write and talk with integrity, the truth shall be divulged. Whose perspective are we going to use in defining truth? In this study, I have to use the perspective of the Aeta women healers. In this study, the purpose of representation is not just to counter the work of colonization, but also to make known the knowledge and wisdom that the Aeta women healers possess, and to hear from them how they want to be represented.

Smith (1999) explains representation for Indigenous People as both a political concept and reclamation of voices. With respect to political representation, colonization excluded the Indigenous Peoples from decision-making. For example, the colonizer expropriated one might argue stole the land of the Indigenous People without considering their existence or input. The colonizer ravaged the lives of the Indigenous Peoples by taking away their women and children. They raped and used them in inhumane ways. Indigenous men were killed. Thus, for Smith, representation in the political sense is about exposing all these negative experiences which were endured by the Indigenous Peoples. Through representation, the voices of Indigenous Peoples can be reclaimed because it is within this location that we talk about their bona fide story. The representation of Indigenous Peoples is a project of “countering the dominant



society's image of Indigenous People, their lifestyles and beliefs systems. It also proposes a solutions to the real-life dilemmas that Indigenous communities confront and try to capture the complexities of being Indigenous" (Smith 1999, p. 151). In representing Indigenous People, there should be an acknowledgement of the different aspects of their lives. The Indigenous People's successes and victories should be unearthed in order to counteract ideas about them, while simultaneously not romanticizing their lives.

Knowing Indigenous Peoples have been shamelessly and incorrectly represented, the following question ensues: how do we correct and challenge colonial bias and ignorance? How can knowledge subvert ignorance and yield the most coherent method of representing the Indigenous Peoples, including the Aeta women healers? We submit, following many traditions including the Aeta, the optimal formula is to focus on the value of telling stories and how these stories can be used to remedy faulty of representation. This study emphasizes the immense need for telling the story of the Aeta as represented by their women healers, not just to attain recognition of their knowledge production, but also to deconstruct the way they have been portrayed in literature. According to Spivak (1996), deconstruction:

...does not say there is no subject, there is no truth, there is no history. It simply questions the privileging of identity so that someone is believed to have the truth. It is not the exposure of error. It is constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced. (p. 9)

In so doing, this section of the thesis explores how the Aeta women healers talk about their reality and how they want to be talked about. This is one of the representational forums that we currently lack. These troves of cultural and medicinal knowledge are not being acknowledged and are too frequently being misrepresented. By bringing storytelling clearly, honestly and to the forefront (especially in the academy) we can have an authentically open discussion in which one can also subject Eurocentric ways of knowing to questions based on comparative methodologies. The Euro-centric knowledge can be subjected to evaluation based not on a single and predetermined endogenous model which conveniently conforms to its own political agendas. We can see the effects of various methods in their own representations. For instance, telling a story is not just about talking with a group of students in the classroom but also about writing and theorizing. What special characteristics of storytelling make this method a prevailing instrument in representing the Aeta? Smith (1999) explains storytelling:

Intrinsic in story telling is a focus on dialogue and conversations amongst ourselves as indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves. Such approaches fit well with the oral traditions which are still a reality in day-to-day indigenous lives. Importantly, storytelling is also about humour and gossip and creativity. Stories tell of love and sexual encounters, of war and revenge. Their themes tell us about our cultures. (p. 145)

Storytelling is a conversation amongst us. For me, the issue of representation is very political and thus I would like to share the history of the Aeta women healers in the public arena, such as the academy. I would like to share this history with our students,

colleagues, friends, and the whole world, and in accordance with how the Aeta want me to present their culture. Why do we need to do this? If we do not take steps to highlight that they are and what their way of life, is we may potentially lead linguistic, cultural, social and technical knowledge to extinction. We betray our children by depriving them, as the richness that is our ability as humans to learn, share and preserve knowledge must be regarded. What could be a more important criterion for the evaluation of the utility of knowledge? What could be a better example of the best of humanity? By putting the Aeta and the rich tapestry of Indigenous knowledge on the world map, we can bestow them with the sustainability and authenticity they deserve and preserve, for both their and all our children, the bank of collective knowledge. I know that in claiming a voice in which to represent them, I have to be careful not to romanticize or essentialize the story and knowledge with which I have been entrusted.

Spivak warns that when one is telling a story of Indigenous women's knowledge, with respect to strategic essentialism, one has to be careful not to purport that it holds the whims of universality. There is a need to emphasize that this knowledge is not the only knowledge in existence and that it is part of other knowledge. We can do this in the classrooms by hosting sessions whereby all the students are given the chance to talk about a story that they have learned from the ancestors in their respective communities. We have to encourage students to tell stories that are Indigenous in nature because having such a voice in the academic setting can be empowering and help dislodge the notion that there is only one voice (Caicedo 1997, p. 3). This is also the most ideal way of talking about the Aeta women healers' knowledge of ethno-medicine. In this thesis, for

example, I try to capture the ways in which the Aeta women healers perform their healing and why it can be called ethno-medicine. If this kind of story is invisible in the academy, it will be known in neither the research agenda nor on the syllabus. Recall the final line by Wittgenstein at the end of his master work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. The line is particularly haunting in this regard to knowledge lost or omitted: "Where of one cannot speak, there must be silence" (Wittgenstein, 1961). Our project aims to assist in giving a voice to the Aeta via the words and wisdom of the healers and thereby assists in ending the silencing of their self-representation in both our academic and official accounts.

Using anti-colonial discourse analysis, we can explain the different forms of Indigenous resistance. We believe that the constructive act of documenting Indigenous forms of healing wisdom and courage is a prerequisite in the process of sustaining resistance and dismantling the prejudiced objectives of the colonizer. By using postcolonial discourse analysis, the notion of "*Orientalism*" can explain how Indigenous women have been marginalized in the knowledge production arena. The knowledge of the Aeta women healers has been negated and devalued in both history and the realm of knowledge production. From the perspective of Indigenous feminism, we have to acknowledge the work and the contributions of the Aeta women healers, which show how they have been stereotyped and devalued as members of the community. This does not suggest forgetting the work and the contributions of the men but rather, highlighting that the Aeta women have been placed in subordinate positions by the colonizers despite having a particular and honored status in their own communities.

This section of the thesis focuses on the discussion of the Aeta women healers in relation to representation. In order to make clarifications with regards to this negative representation, our healers discussed and elaborated upon the topics of indignity and spirituality. In turn, they contrast their healing practices with public health. Their hope is to amend the way they have been represented and to project a fairer representation of women who play an immense part in their how their community is maintain and sustained.

Singli explains:

*Representation to me is about helping the Aeta community and other people who are in need. We want to be represented the way we are. We want to change all the negative representation that has been written in books, magazines and textbooks because the misrepresentation has really destroyed our identity, the mind of our children and our future generation.*

Singli is explains the impact of negative representation on their lives. My representation bore both potential danger and promise: it can affect them in a negative or positive way. That is why, during the Talking Circle, I asked about the topic of representation, so as to enable myself to get an opportunity to learn how I should represent them. Although they have been representing themselves, there has been a problem of sanitizing institutions whereby the authorities has tried to subvert their image. Subsequently, each time there is a study about them, investigators and their mainstream audience always thinks that we are representing them. However, Indigenous people have existed before colonization and before modernization. They were the first people in the Philippines. I

acknowledge that they know more about the history of the Philippines than I do.

However, I also have the responsibility to write down what they shared with me in the Talking Circle. I acknowledge the privilege and opportunity I have had to listen to their story and put it into writing.

Rima explains:

*For me, I want people to know that we are poor, we do not have a place to live. We are poor, not because we are lazy, but because of the circumstances that we are facing. The current government of Santo Nino keeps on making laws that are only beneficial to them. We are not included in any decision-making. If we are part of the decision-making, then everybody should have an equal opportunity to live. Our beliefs do not allow us to take ownership to anything. Actually, in this world we do not own anything. Therefore, we do not have the right to be selfish in relation to anybody. However, what is happening now is about being greedy and materialistic. Because we do not believe on these things we end up being poor.*

Rima is clarifying that they are poor not because they are lazy, but because the colonized people have been expropriating their resources through tricks and often outright fraud. Tujan Jr. and Guzman (2002, p. 222) explain that the World Bank has released a code of conduct for mining companies in the Philippines which allows Trans National Corporations (TNCs) and governments to claim environmentally, socially-responsible, and sustainable methods of large-scale mining operations. How can TNCs know how to take care of the environment to which they are not accustomed to? This alone signals that the culture, traditions and lives of Indigenous Peoples are in peril. For

example, the TNCs have been buying land from the mountainous regions of the Philippines to excavate gold and diamonds. This is done without any consultation with the Aeta People of said land. The sense of a community that brings them together is also interfered with, causing, the loss of ethno-medicinal knowledge and other forms of knowledge. In the Philippines, knowledge of the healing practices rests in balance since the herbal plants upon which the women rely for healing are also endangered, due to practices of these multi-national companies that spare nothing at all in their quest for more profits through mineral exploration. The compensation that they offer to these Indigenous populations is no parallel what they will lose in the end. Their culture, which is pivotal in their lives, is lost with the loss of their ancestral lands. It is not only interesting how colonized people twisted the whole story of theater people, but also how easily they try to use labels like lazy to characterize others without acknowledging their own self-interest in these processes and the uneducational functions which they perform.

But the Aeta know how the implicit cultural violence of intruding institutions, from schools to church masquerades, is considered “progress”. They know that, empirically, this “progress” brings increased hardships to their lives. Their leaders, including the healers in our Circle, have consequently decided against this to unite as a community and to speak up. They recognize that working together as a group has a more robust impact than working as individuals. No liberation struggle is easy, but according to their accounts the Aeta remain optimistic about positive social transformation. As long as the people of the Philippines are united, they remain

confident in their goal of reclaiming their land and know that cultural autonomy will be attained.

Rima is clearly raising awareness about the fact that politicians do not consider them members of the community during the decision-making process. She knows that it is dangerous to take such a proactive position but she is also singularly aware that it would be legally comparatively easy for global finance interests to legally take over the resources of the Philippines, including their ancestral lands.

Cena also talks about her experiences in the political arena:

*During the election, politicians beg for our votes. But after the election, they do not even come to us and they do not even improve our roads to facilitate going downtown even after promising to do so during election time. In addition, when we go to city hall and ask for information regarding projects in our community, they talk to us as if we do not belong to the human race. They treat us as "other". They look at us as if we are not part of their constituency.*

Himay agrees with Cena and explains:

*You see, our community has no infrastructure because politicians represent us as if we do not exist. It's only during the campaign that we see them and only because they are seeking our votes.*

Cena and Himay are questioning why they are being marginalized in their own country. This is another impact of colonialism that Fanon highlights. Institutional lobbying, corruption and transfer of pecuniary interests drive the intentional claims from settlers-values which, in turn, are transferred to locals. At the core, these values



are based on an extractive model of the economy (including the knowledge which is valued) which has no mercy or remorse when marginalizing their fellow citizens. Many Filipinos embrace the negation of collective responsibility in favour of a model of individualistic capital accumulation, which is designed to reward few and leave the multitude as underclass. These co-opted elements in our particular context use the Aeta women healers to aid in the promotion of their vested interests. During elections, for instance, they issue promises to hoodwink the Indigenous Peoples, who understand that people keep their word because otherwise, they face shame from the community, by assuring them that they will address their needs. Yet as this pageant play of promise and betrayal unfolds the moment they get into office and become leaders of a town, these same elected officials experience “amnesia” with regards to the promises made to the Aeta. Why? Because in their minds, the Aeta, and their spokespersons, such as our healers, are not important constituents but rather are characterized as “ungrateful fools” who will never realize the work done for them. Yet despite this discourse of slander, as we have seen in their testimonies in the Circle, the Aeta women healers are aware of the operative dynamics of power. They voted for a particular leader who would not perpetuate the work of colonization based on his campaign promises, yet once in office, he did the opposite. In spite of repeated betrayals and false promises the Aeta continue to live with hope, considering the possibility that this particular elected official may still fulfill his or her promises. This exercise of faith is no practice of naive faith. They fully comprehend that the moment a person embraces the ideology of colonialism, it is

difficult to decolonize him or her unless that colonized person is self consciously willing to undergo this process.

Moreover, Aly states:

*I experience triple oppression because I am old, I am an Aeta and I am a woman healer. Those people who do not believe in my healing power label me “an old Aeta woman who does not know what she’s doing”. I know this because they tell me right on my face. However, the people that I have helped thank me and they refer other patients to me. Those people who believe in the spirit of colonization totally brutalized me and told me to get lost. Well, it is painful to hear the negative things about me. But I am a healer for those people who are in need. I believe that I am not responsible for the actions of other people. I can only take responsibility for my own actions, therefore, whatever I do, I make sure I do it with love from my heart and with respect.*

What Cena, Himay and Aly are doing is sharing their experiences. One cannot help but be impressed by their resiliency in the face of negative treatment by the non-Aeta people. Instead of being resentful, they have decided to continue to respect other people, appending that mirroring the violence of others will not free but rather degrade their own morals and sense of self and community. Cena, Himay and Aly understand that they are facing multiple dimensions of oppression because of their ascribed social positions and the conventional (prejudiced) ascriptions assigned to them as women, and, above all for being Aeta. Despite this willful prejudice, ignorance and slander, their souls remain whole: they maintain their belief in treating people respectfully, including

the oppressors who govern them, no matter the circumstances. Why? This is the essence of being an Aeta woman healer.

They fully understand how they are being represented. They, in turn, are now calling for change to how they are represented and how their stories are pigeonholed in books and other media. They want this to happen, not for themselves, but for their future generations. They want to challenge and amend all the facts that have been written about them, thereby yielding a transformation of representation to leading society to adopt a fair and respectful representation which is fact-based rather than tale or character-based.

### ***Indigeneity and language***

One of the paraphernalia in the colonization's battle plan is to destroy the indigeneity of the Indigenous Peoples and to annihilate their language. Colonial agents know that when the indigeneity of one human being is destroyed, the other parts of her or his life, including politics will also be destroyed. The colonizer knows that when a person cannot speak his or her own language, it will be extremely difficult for him or her to build the sense of their own culture or world view. Eli Taylor, cited by Battiste (1998), states:

Our Native language embodies a value system about how we ought to live and relate to each other...It gives a name to relations among kin, to roles and responsibilities among family members, to ties with the broader clan group...There [are] no English words for these relationships...Now, if you destroy our languages you not only break down these relationships,

but you also destroy other aspects of our Indian way of life and culture, especially those that describes man's connection with nature, the Great Spirit, and the order of things. Without our languages, we will cease to exist as a separate people. (p. 18)

This analysis sees the holistic functions of language in an interpretive practice.

Language is not just the words that we speak but also something that exemplifies our whole being. Thus, if we lose our own language, it is just like losing the genetic code of our community: we lose the operational blueprint for our hearts and souls.

The Aeta Circle members talk about their indigeneity and language as powerful instruments when advocating for issues that have been affecting them. Wila explains:

*I am an Aeta woman and I am not ashamed of it. I was born an Aeta and I will die an Aeta. Our language is different from that of the non-Aeta people, but we insist on our position in this society. For that reason, I must say I can speak my language even if they may refuse to listen to me. But, one way or another, they will hear me. Again, I am an Aeta woman, who possesses the language and the will to live forever.*

Rosa also states:

*I want to ask those people who know us to continue listening to us because, as time goes by, we have so many more things to talk about. We have so many stories to tell. Therefore, I want to continue talking and keep introducing my culture to people who do not belong to us. My language may be different; however, I believe that it is a powerful tool for communicating what we have.*

Wila and Rosa explain the importance of their race and language. They state that through their language they have developed/communicated a plethora of stories. These sets of memories constitute a oral library of Aeta cultural stores; these are stories details their resilience, agency, and their struggles as Aeta women healers, a mothers, daughters, wives, and members of their community. Through their language, the Aeta women intend to send a message to listeners, explaining that their healing is alive and that the healing can, therefore, be used by anybody who subscribes to its efficacy. Interaction with the Aeta healers exposes a healing knowledge that is not only for the purposes of healing the physical body but also the emotional and spiritual well-being of a person. The women stress the fact that their healing brings with it the power to change society as a whole because of the egalitarian nature of the Aeta inter-group practice, by which the women healers do not choose whom to heal on the basis of skin colour, gender, religion, or class. They build cultural and medical bridges to anyone seeking their knowledge.

Talking with the Aeta also makes it clear that their healing demonstrates the agency and resilience of the Aeta women who perform the healing. These Aeta women healers clarify that oppression, or *pinangikuspil* in Ilokano, can be explained, depending on the social, spiritual, political, cultural and racial location of a person. They have been represented as oppressed Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines, but they argue that locating them in this category of the “oppressed” is in itself oppression. They believe that, before giving them labels, it is necessary to understand the history of their struggles, resistance, resilience and agency. I asked them to elaborate more what they

meant using this controversial term. The Aeta women healers explained that in their own community there may be problems and challenges that they face, such as scarcities of food, violence or alcoholism, but also that they can practice their healing, perform their rituals, speak their language, and be consulted in decision-making process about their community. Their voices are being heard and recognized.

The Aeta do not categorize them as "*maikuskuspil*", or oppressed, when they perform all the aforementioned functions, including many other activities in their community that they are part of. They do not want to represent their community as flawless, but what they want to convey is that they have a community which is fair in terms of justice and recognition. In fact, they reflected on the impact of colonization: for example, the issue of private ownership. Some of the Aeta have started claiming that they own land, but according to their belief no one has the right to own land. Everybody has the right to share the land with all the members of the community. Based on the above circumstances, the Aeta women healers assert that they are oppressed by structural elements in the Philippine hierarchy but empowered with healers who maintained the cultural norms of their community.

They acknowledge that the moment they find themselves outside their community, they experience oppression because they are not allowed to practice their healing, take part in the decision-making process in their country, be considered as part of the public health system in the Philippines, and be free to perform their rituals in the public arena, such as in the city stadium. The voices are not being heard and their existence is not being acknowledged. It is for these reasons that they consider

themselves oppressed by the non-Aeta community, a community that embraces the ideology of colonization. They understand these levels of power and the interplay and cultural dynamics that are present, thus they want us to hear their voices.

Barnhardt and Harrison (1993) explain that “language can serve as an important focal point for rekindling a sense of cultural identity and distinctiveness” (p. 96). Wa Thiongo (1995) notes that:

Language was not a mere string of words. It had a suggestive power well beyond the immediate and lexical meaning. Our appreciation of the suggestive magical power of language was reinforced by the games we played with words through riddles, *proverbs*, transpositions of syllables, or through nonsensical but musically arranged words. So we learnt the music of our language on top of the content. The language, through images and symbols, gave us a view of the world, but it had a beauty of its own. (p. 287)

Language is very powerful in advocating various issues. Ngugi wa Thiongo’ chooses to write in his mother tongue, Gikuyu, holds credence that “writing in the Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples” (p. 267). In other words, as Achebe (1995) explains “we play politics with language and in so doing conceal the reality and the complexity of our situation from ourselves and from those foolish enough to put their trust in us” (p. 269). Wila and Rosa are aware that their language may be different from that of others but this is a source of pride. They recognize the

power of their language. They are not willing to give up for the sake of being heard or to succumb to the convenience of others. They believe that they will be heard.

The Aeta women healers would like the non-Aeta people to understand that they, too, have their own identity and language. Their identity and language do not imply power and control over other people. For them their identity and language speak are about "*pinagkaykaysa*" (unity) and "*pinagkikinnaawatan*" (understanding) among their people. It is because they understand the discourse in the society that they are open and willing to collaborate in my research. I call this representation in terms of identity and language because the Aeta women healers would like me to write about and share their identity and language. Since this is such a marvelous chapter in human group intelligence they also believe –rightly so–that this knowledge should be featured in the academic discourse, as another perspective and area of study in libraries, and another topic of scholarship. Because they, as keepers, are so fully conversant with the richness, texture and complexity of these stories and cumulatively acquired knowledge, they are confident that any potential reader will profit, enjoy, and indeed revel and revere from learning about their language and identity as they do because it celebrates their living culture. It is a self similar replication of the best in all of us and therefore it can be deemed Universal, precisely because of its ecologically and culturally specific roots.



## **Spirituality**

One of the fundamental instruments of colonial brutality (sadly and ironically) was religion. The Spanish colonizers used religion because they knew that the Indigenous Peoples possessed sturdy spirituality. Trillana (2004) explains:

Pre-colonial native of the archipelago believed in a unity of the spiritual and the material words. Purity of the inner self (*Kalinisan ng Loob*) led to harmony in the external order (family, community, society and nature). Conversely, the value of *damayan* (compassion and reciprocal assistance) reinforced these inner connections within members of the community. (p. 1).

The spirituality of the Aeta women centers around respect of both the visible and invisible. It is about having a fruitful relationship not just with you but with your family, community, society and nature. It is about helping each other in times of need and difficulty. In addition, the Aeta believe in the power of “ayat” or love. When love is possessed by a human being, harmony, good relationship, respect and care come together. When colonizers entered the Philippines, they used Christianity as an implement to dismantle the spirituality of the Indigenous People in the Philippines. Zaide (1957) points out how such indoctrination procedures stemming from foreign belief systems succeeded in creating a reorientation akin to psychological brainwashing:

Right from the inception of Spanish rule, Christianity took firm anchorage in the Philippines. By their exemplary virtues and spirit of Christian

affection, the missionaries convinced the Filipinos of the falsity of their pagan gods and raised them to the light of the true faith. (p. 187)

Moreover they not only impose their own hegemonic teachings about Christianity also destroyed the artifacts and sacred material belongings from their cultures. Guerrero (1970) describes how the conqueror worked to achieve what he or she wanted from Filipinos:

...Among the masses, the friars propagated a bigoted culture that was obsessed with novenas, prayer books, hagiographies, scapularies, the passion play, the anti-Muslim moro-moro and pompous religious feasts and processions. The friars had burned and destroyed the artifacts of pre-colonial culture as the handiwork of the devil and assimilated only those things of the indigenous culture which they could use to facilitate colonial and medieval indoctrination. (p.15)

This is why documents, and artifacts, among other things, from the early Filipino peoples no longer exist. This illustrates that the settlers' agenda was to impose their own culture. In addition, they did not only succeed in convincing the Indigenous Peoples that their spirituality was false, but they also dislodged the lives of Indigenous women in particular. "As Fanon and later writers such as Nandy assert, imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations, and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world" (Smith 1999, p. 28). As a result, Indigenous women have to counteract the heinous crimes done by the colonizer.

The Aeta spirituality is rooted in their ancestors without any kind of colonial stain. It is pure and serves as a guide for building a loving and peaceful community. It destroys any notion of invading other communities and debunks any colonial mentality. It resists colonizing methodologies for knowledge production. It recognizes that men and women are equal. Furthermore, Watson (1997) describes the nature of spirituality, stating:

All of life is spiritual. Even that which is considered material is of the Spirit if one believes...that everything comes from the Spirit, the Creator, the Giver and Source of all life. Spirituality is more than one's religious convictions; it is a way of life. (p. 325)

The Aeta women healers explain their spirituality. Talna explains:

*Our spirituality is about acknowledging the existence of our creator. We give thanks for everything that we have. We give thanks for the knowledge of healing. We give thanks for the gift of life. We give thanks for all the creation.*

Maya also states:

*Our spirituality is about believing in our Creator who gave us life. We do not believe in the power over other creations. We believe that every single thing in the universe has an equal significance in the eyes of God and in this world. It is also about respect for everything that exists in the universe. We denounce power and control, because we know that if these things exist in our way of life then we are destroying the essence of our spirituality.*

Spirituality is embedded in their healing practices. Spirituality is part of their daily lives. It is about giving thanks to the Creator. It is about giving thanks to Mother Earth and for Nature's bounty. It is about giving benevolent thanks for the sun, the moon and the stars. It is about giving thanks for the gift of life, for family and the relationships that exist in the universe. It is also about asking for forgiveness. Dei (2002) further explains that "spirituality and spiritual discourses brought ideas and ontology's that emphasize connectedness, belongingness, identifications, well-being, love, compassion, peaceful co-existence with nature and among other groups" (p. 5). Wangoola (2002) further re-affirms that we are all connected by explaining that "...the unshakable belief that humans were but a weak link in the vast chain of nature, which encompassed the many animals, plants, birds, insects, and worms, and indeed inanimate things such as stones and rocks" (p. 265). "The world was not for conquering, but for living within adoration harmony and reverence" (ibid).

The Aeta women healers' "credentials" which are to be represented are based on their spirituality and the extensive experiential study of how this plays out in nature, medicine and healing practices. Their spirituality is the source of their strength and power in the struggle against colonization. Their spirituality is an instrument for sustaining both their identity and agency. Their spirituality is one of the sources of healing. It gives them the confidence to heal and to perform their responsibilities as members of their community. They acknowledge their awareness of Christianity and attend to its truths rather than summarily dismissing it. In fact, they respect the teachings and recognize that it shares common truths with their own beliefs; we are,

after all, human, all with the same strengths and flaws. Nonetheless they would like to maintain the spirituality that they learned from their ancestors and to sustain it despite having different struggles, oppressions and dismissals. They would like to be identified by their spirituality because this would explain who they are and what morals and values they have in life. If the non-Aeta people appreciate their spirituality, then the Aeta women healers believe that the stereotypes about the Aeta will cease.

### ***Indigenous healing vs. public health practice***

The history of Philippine medicine historically required the use of herbs and followed to the belief that sickness was brought by the spirits. Historians thus, concluded that the earliest practice of medicine was in line with the Indigenous healer practices (de la Cruz 1984). Nevertheless, when Spaniards established their colony in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Philippines, they brought with them physicians from Spain. Indeed, the creation of public health and Western medicine “were integral parts of the ideology of empire” (King 2002 p. 765). This “ideology of colonial healing” is one of the justifications given by colonizers, on the pretext that they were bringing the best quality of life for Indigenous People. The idea that the Spaniards were out to save the newly found heathens from their uncivilized way of living was planted in the minds of the Indigenous People. It does not matter if the colonizers ravage, demonize, or dehumanize the lives of Indigenous People. The colonial healing has been used to cover up the real work of colonization. In fact, history bears witness to several diseases in different countries where colonies were established. In other words, colonial medicine

was a means of achieving the goal of colonization. The role that the Indigenous healers have played was completely disregarded. Alfred Crosby, in “The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492” (Crosby, 1972), forcefully argues that the main destructive effects of the conquistadors and other settlers was the introduction of alien animals, plants and diseases and that much of the project of genocide was operationally realized by these forces. In the case of North America, this led to over five million deaths and a radical alteration of population demographics and subsequently paved the way for the land expropriation, such as the “Manifest Destiny” in the United States. Similar analyses have been done and should be expanded to include the Philippines. In some ways the Aeta were “protected” from earlier ravages by their comparatively remote location. Expansionism works on logic not unlike cancer: it is “sustained” by uncontrollable and unsustainable growth. In this respect it is hardly surprising that all people, including the Aeta, are exposed to its acidic forces. The Aeta women's work is therefore linked in the deepest ways to the connections between Nature, health and society and is a counterpoint to what may be seen as the “crisis medicine” approach imposed from the West.

The Aeta women healers explain the differences between their healing practices and the Western way of healing.

*Singli: In my healing I use herbal medicine and prayers. I believe that without the help of my Creator, the herbal medicine that I apply for my patient's body will be useless.*

Holmes (2002) states that, “ways of knowing are not based on the limits of one's own physical sense and may include prayer, prescience, dreams, and messages from the

dead” (p. 37). This has been affirmed by the Aeta women healers who state that their healing practice does not only focus on using herbal plants but also focuses on other ways of healing. Cena states:

*Before I start healing I ask my God to give me the wisdom so that I know which herbal medicine I should use. Through this, I get the courage to diagnose and at the same time to give my patients the necessary herbal medicine.*

Cena corroborates that she can diagnose diseases without going through any Western training and knows what herbal medicines she can prescribe for her patients. What Cena is trying to do here is tell us that her knowledge is authentic, as Hurtado (2003) explains, “the important thing was for the world to hear their hollering and to claim an intellectual space not by only complaining and deconstructing but by being fruitful and multiplying” (pp. 218-219). Cena knows that by sharing her knowledge she will be heard. She does not complain if others do not recognize her but rather continues to assert her place as an Aeta woman healer.

Other Aeta women healers explain their ways of healing.

Rang-ay states:

*I prepare my own medicine depending on the needs of my patients. I do not just heal the physical body but also the spiritual aspect. Sometimes you look at the patient and it seems that she is okay, in this I can tell it is the physical that needs healing the spiritual or the emotional being.*

Aly also notes:

*Before a patient comes to me I dream about him or her. So before I meet my patient I already know the problem. However, I usually consult my patients first. I believe that my and patients have a way to heal her or him. Actually, I always give power to my patients to heal themselves.*

Wila further explains the difference between her healing and the Western way of curing diseases:

*Aeta healing is not all about healing the physical body of a person but also bringing back that person into the good relationship with the other creations. Our practices always encourage our people to be respectful to others. In our community among us healers we do not compete, in fact, we help each other. There are times that I need the help of my fellow healers to heal the sick so I usually ask them to help me.*

These observations bear witness that the Aeta women healers neither ignore nor compete with the public health healing system. They work on the basis of their worldview. Despite the knowledge that the Aeta women healers have, the public health system does not recognize them. Indeed, Philippine public health administrators are aware that having Western trained doctors and nurses in health centres does not adequately solve the health problems of the Filipino people. Gonzalez III (1998) has profiled some problems faced by this health care system, including “insufficient funds; lack of medical and paramedical manpower; inefficient use of scarce health services available; and lack of community support for health programs” (p. 70).



The World Health Organization (WHO) and various United Nations entities have been giving out medical and humanitarian aid to the Philippines to treat different kinds of diseases. As much as this help is of immense importance, illnesses such as respiratory infections, tuberculosis, malaria, and skin infections, still persist. This has also been worsened by the fact that, “despite the advancement of the medical system, they fail to reach the majority of those who are at risk, due to rising costs, and complex and expensive technologies that limit accessibility and availability of health care” (Marks 2006, p. 473). Tan (1987) has a different explanation of these health problems in the Philippines. According to Marks, “the need to recognize plurality in our society is especially important for health care as it has become clear that the deficiencies of the health care system are partly rooted in our inability to understand even the most basic concepts of health and illness among our people” (p. 1). Gonzalez III who situates himself from a Eurocentric perspective, refutes these claims, because Tan suggests recognition of the notion of health from the Filipino people, including the Aeta women healers. Other aspects of life like spirituality and connectivity with the environment play a marginal role in the contemporary health care arena. Non-recognition of these factors in the contemporary medicine world has been the cause for its minimal performance in seeking the precise way of curing illnesses among the population.

In spite of this shoddy treatment of the Aeta women healers by the public health system, the healers still want to be represented on the basis of their healing practices. They believe that if they are represented based on the knowledge that they hold, the readers who do not know them will finally get to know and respect them. They want to

change the negative characterizations about them. It is time to change the current norm into a reality: a reality that speaks honestly about the Aeta women healers. In fact, they believe that public health has played a tremendous role in helping the people who are sick. The only concern that they have is that public health is claiming to be the dominant player in curing diseases. This claim is extremely problematic to them because they recall that empirically, there are more diseases than before. Despite all the claims about the technical mastery of nature and science, the colonized people suffer from highly toxic ailments like high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity, among others. Before the introduction of Western medical models and its monopoly over health care, which came with credentials and certification, these illnesses usually did not exist in their community because the traditional Aeta person walks, climbs the mountain, eats fresh food, and wild animals and drinks herbal medicines to cleanse his or her system. Increasingly, even in the West it is now being understood that it is the body's immune system, not medical interventions per se, which sustain "wellness". All pharmaceuticals are, after all, chemicals and all such chemicals are generally found in their most complex and useful forms in Nature. The Aeta clearly embrace this and it is built into their practices. For example, *aloe vera* mixed with lemon juice and honey is used for cleansing. For the Aeta women healers, representation is about writing and talking about their authentic identity but their identity is very much grounded in what the West glosses as "scientific fact".

## **Chapter VIII: Conclusion**

This chapter contains, the conclusion this study draws in relation to the Aeta women healers, the implications for the study, particularly in the academy, the recommendations from the study's evidence and analysis, and finally, a summary of findings and conclusions of the thesis.

### ***Conclusion***

This study bears witness to the Aeta women healers' epistemology and practices, medical, political and culture. It is also, tacitly, an examination of human prejudice, exclusion, and methodological bias including those practiced by those educated in Western academic institutions. I hope that this thesis helps to foster a discourse about what is authentically meant by "open discourse" (Olson (2012) and in this respect, helps to make visible what McLaren (2003), Apple (1982), and Giroux (1981), have labeled in critical education as "the hidden curriculum". It is important that we, as scholars, stop excluding certain people from the knowledge production arena knowledge simply because they do not originate geographically or paradigmatically in zones or interests from which we come. I hope to have illustrated, through (remarkable) accounts of the participants and teachers from the Circle, that their healing practices help not only their own people but also the non-Aeta people in healing their physical, emotional, social and spiritual illnesses.

This study concludes that the Aeta women healers' knowledge has enhanced their ability to resist colonization and the tendency to use modern medicine as an

apparatus for oppression, an unseemly experience that the Aeta and their healers have (sadly) too often experienced firsthand. Through their healing practices, their identity has been maintained because the Aeta women healers use their healing to educate their own people about their way of life, worldviews and culture in both a holistic and technical or prescriptive realm. Through their healing wisdom, they have been able to sustain their resilience. Through their healing practices, the Aeta women healers have been able to talk about how they have been represented in the media, in books, and in politics. They have also been able express that they want to change the negative representation about them. Through their healing practices, their race will continue despite the assimilation and colonization process that incessantly intrudes their community. The Aeta women healers have been using their cultural knowledge and practice as a form of agency.

Their ways of knowing have helped them thrive despite the challenges that they have endured from the non-Aeta people. Challenges included the expropriation of their ancestral land and, the kidnapping of their children. The Aeta women healers have stood firmly in defense of their community, identity, culture and way of life. The Aeta women healers are always vigilant because they know that they are the subjects of oppression, marginalization and discrimination based on their race.

This study also concludes that the Aeta women healers are knowledgeable about which research methodology is the optimal strategy for enhancing the health and well being of their community. Their success, persistence and generosity offer a model of knowledge production that the academic community would do well to learn from. I

embarked on this thesis with a Western research methodology as my research design. In the course of many honest exchanges and the simple, but powerful, act of listening, the Aeta healers in the Circle taught me that I should always be ready to reference the ultimate library of knowledge: what our Mother Nature is willing to give to us. These are lessons in limits and possibilities, and truths such as that we are made from nature and neither the controller nor arbiter of the possible. These ecological, biological, physical and emotional truths are ones Western Science and ecology are only now rediscovering. When I met them, this set of caring women taught me how to pay attention to their way of life and practices while carrying out the study. Through this discussion, the study methodology that had been proposed was changed to entail the better-suited Talking Circle. Talking in a circle is a safe place for them (and as I discovered to my delight, also for me). It symbolizes interconnection, love, respect and openness to one another. The women taught me not to impose upon their lives, but, rather, to respect and be willing to make changes in methodology. Allowing the use of the Aeta women healers' suggested methodology enhanced the research findings as the women had a more meaningful interaction which enables a show of respect for each other's ideas, and allows sensitivity to their own culture and beliefs.

Finally, I offer empirical findings and a conclusion about the women with whom we discussed decolonization as a process that has to be dealt with. Despite the continued challenges from outside their community that they must endure, the women's determination not to give up only increases. They make a concerted effort to use their healing practice as a tool for change in their community, as they interact with

both their own people and with the non-Aeta people. They may not have received a Eurocentric education, but they apprehend what is happening externally. Nonetheless, however, through their healing practices, they believe that their race will continue to exist. They are human, highly intelligent and understand life and nature, including the dynamics of power assimilation, knowledge production, and the healing power of caring.

### ***The strength of this study and Implications to the Academy***

The strength of this study is in highlighting and documenting the knowledge of the Aeta with respect to healing physical, emotional, social and spiritual well-being. Our ethnographic records from the Circle thematically document and emphasize the distinct identity of the Aeta in general and of their women healers in particular. Our thematic elements focus on their different forms of agency and resilience and strive to comprehend the empirical and conceptual schemata. This schematic is as conceptually rich and complex as are those that describe the interplay of society, nature and human adaptation as, for instance, an esteemed Western scholar such Habermas (1996) might when formulating the concept of “habitas,” which, in many ways, parallels the paradigm that the Aeta use. The study documents that the Aeta women, as healers and community custodians and sages, are not docile, primitive, and backward individuals who are not conscious of what is happening around them. My thesis chronicles the cultural richness of the Aeta women healers.

The implication of this study for scholarship is that it casts an inquiry into our own ethical understanding and the idea that we have been inclusive. It asks us to acknowledge that Aeta women healers have the right to, as both an ethical matter and one of rigorous scholarship determine how they want to have a conversation with researchers, such as myself, when they are the subjects. The study highlights the need for researchers who undertake studies in Indigenous communities, to respect their culture and practices and to be sensitive to their beliefs. The Aeta women healers' narrative can append to the Indigenous feminism framework for future theory construction. Such potential areas of inquiry can focus on the discussion of identity, agency and representation. The Aeta women talk about different ways of looking at identity: it is not about just looking at the physical body, but also looking at all aspects of a human being. They discuss the methods of bringing about proactive change in their community. Even though they are not Western-trained healers, they have been continuously engaged in a range of medical, political, and educational practices to make their community grow and be sustained. In terms of evaluation methods which are now becoming recognized, even in the West, they should be acknowledged for their prior learning. Topically we must explore and critically assess how they have been represented in books, magazines or journals. Ignorance should never be valued over knowledge, no matter where it's cultural roots lie.

This study also highlights how postcolonial and anti-colonial theories and Indigenous feminist framework inform the Aeta women healers' identity, agency and representation.

### ***Future Research: Recommendations: A new way of thinking***

#### **Theory**

Postcolonial, anti-colonial and Indigenous feminist theories have helped to theorize the lived experiences of the Aeta women healers. In this study, these frameworks were valuable both in the elucidation of the agency of the Aeta women healers and in illuminating how the Aeta women healers view the world. Even though there are some debates and tensions among them, these frameworks enhanced the ability of this study to shed light on the contributions made by women in knowledge production, which have been forgotten or under represented because of colonization. I was able to, as a researcher, reconcile these theoretical tensions and congeal the main themes on which the Aeta women healers focused during the Talking circle; these themes were namely, identity, agency and representation. The postcolonial, anti-colonial and Indigenous feminist theories widely discuss these themes, and converge on how colonization and the aftermath of colonization ravages the identity of Indigenous Peoples. Experientially, our participants also concur with the assertion that Indigenous Peoples possess agency, and they illuminate how Indigenous Peoples have been negatively and stereotypically represented.

Of the many lessons that the Aeta women healers taught me, for academic purposes, I would like to name "*ayat*" (love) as an "open discourse" as the most profound. This study recommends that "*ayat*" be included in our discourse and that rather than acknowledging "value free" we should understand that all knowledge



affects people and has effects on someone. Knowledge should acknowledge responsibility and consequence for the products; the uses of our knowledge are never simply “neutral” and isolated. I concur with the Aeta women healers in that we must be generous to others and to ourselves. We may fight for equitable society—for example, we may fight for equality for men, women, or for gay and lesbian communities, among others—but if we do not do it with earnestness and love, or “*ayat*”, those efforts devolve to nothing. Even when we are able to achieve our goal, the question should be, “How do we sustain an equitable society without love?” It is impossible to live in a healthy way without love since we are all created (or should be) with love. Wherever we are in the world, in order to reclaim our indigeneity, agency, spirituality, and land, we need love. Love, after all, is the greatest 'conqueror'. For this reason we recommend that our academy explore the possibilities, and ethical implications of employing “*ayat*” as a criterion in an “open discourse” and as a praxis of decolonization of knowledge and self.

The Aeta women healers face systemic prejudice and ridicule. Reflect upon what your reaction would be if others labeled you as “dirty” for expressing your beliefs. This is not an inquiry into obtaining knowledge but rather is implicitly categorical and classic racism that seeks to dehumanize the other, which traffics on the deep psychological human fear that those unlike us may in fact be “contagious”. It is a childish and ill thought out pedagogy. It is analogous to the kinds of brutalization Western school children do to one another when they are taught by the jaundice elements of the hidden and informal curriculum of classrooms (the true mentor of

“othering”) to fear their fellow pupils. It is a childish discourse in many ways but as the eminent sociologist Thomas (1903) once observed “things perceived as real are real in their consequence”. This certainly applies to prejudice and bias. From the academic perspective, we should conclude that such others (be them the child with supposed “cooties” or the Aeta labeled as “dirty”) are an artifacts of our systemic oppression of others which claims to be based on their diseases but in reality finds its base in nominal endemic factors, such as skin colour, gender and class. The toxic environment of racism becomes oppressive and scarily “nominal”. We forget that in their own narratives the women do not see this as a form of oppression but as an opportunity to exercise their power and a chance to assert their way of life in society. It is akin in its own context to what in the West is sometimes called “liberation theology”: a proactive stance to blend belief and action for liberation.

Through their healing, the women are able to diminish the learned prejudices of non-Aeta people through allowing them to join them in on their healing practices. As women healers, they are contacted by the non-Aeta people in times of sickness. This entry point, what in education we address as a “teachable moment,” enables the Aeta women healers’ to gain respect and credibility for themselves and their communities by being open to providing their services, even to those that oppress them. Acts of oppression, thus, serve to create an arena for show-casing the Aeta women healers’ way of life as well as exposing their identity, respect and recognition as well as agency. It is an opportunity to showcase knowledge and what is worthy. What might academic discourse need to learn from this narrative? In this study, the Aeta women healers are

informing that, us, as scholars we should see knowledge, not from, but from one but multiple dimensions of interactions and consequences so it maybe usefully recast if we alter our perspectives or paradigms.

Operationally this means that we should interrogate our own assumptions and acts of oppression and get past these to value and learn from information we previously overlooked, in turn employing this additional knowledge as a source of empowerment (or disempowerment). We can decide to use knowledge to uplift or to degrade. The Aeta women healers have decided to embrace oppression, process and transform it for their good-their own, their community and for others . This does not imply that they do not recognize that they are oppressed. They are very clear that society has behaved oppressively towards them through issues central to many Indigenous People, such as being expelled from their own ancestral land, the raping of the Aeta women and the forces of acculturation and marginalization that we have documented. They hold their own knowledge as self-evident and hope others will see the Universality and utility in their knowledge and culture as well.

### **Methodology**

In terms of methodology, this study recommends that future researchers allow participants to engage in the selection of methodology so that it is appropriate to them. In this respect, it mirrors the emergent discourses between governments, NGO's and Native people. Doing this gives them the power to set the rules in a way that respects and recognizes their culture and traditions. Unilaterally setting the methodology for

Indigenous participants brings back memories of power and control that underlie colonization.

***Recommendation relating to Public Health:***

**Local Public Health**

The narratives of the Aeta women healers in Cagayan serve as a paradigm to other Aeta Peoples in different parts of the Philippines. The women healers speak to the non-Aeta people about the healing knowledge that they possess, and tell the story of their struggle against colonization. Hopefully in this way the normative discourse about the Aeta will change and the space for inclusion in a more robust health model for all will evolve.

**National Public Health**

For the period between 2005-2010, Francisco Duque III (2005), the Secretary of Health in the Philippines, identified several challenges that the Department of Health (DOH) was facing, including “macroeconomic and political issues, fragmented local health systems and private health care markets, limited capacity for quality assurance of health care products and services, many essentials drugs still excessively priced out of reach for the poor, low investments in health, and the mal-distribution of health professionals compounded by their massive out-migration” (p. iv). The DOH does not consider the Aeta women healers their partners in the eradication of health problems among the Filipino people (National Objectives for Health Philippines 2005-2010).

At the national level, the DOH focuses on addressing the health crisis by placing: “public health nurse, rural sanitary inspectors and midwives” (Cuevas 2007, p. 32) in the hospital or health care facilities. The Aeta women healers are not part of the team involved in resolving the national health crisis. Moreover, what DOH focuses on solving the health crisis in the Aeta community by deploying Western trained practitioners, who do not understand the culture of the Aeta people. Instead, this practice violates their well-being as a community. This is because such a move is imposed on the Aeta people without consulting them. This study recommends that the DOH learn a lesson from the voices of the women healers heard during the course of this research.

The Postcolonial Aeta women healing practices do not only take the form of healing people, but also recognize the whole community as part of the healing process. Talna, who is also one of the Aeta women healers in Cagayan, stated: “in our community during my healing rituals everybody is involved. Some are part of singing and dancing, others are part of drumming and the rest are part of praying or being present to give support to the ill person. Through this, an ill person feels the support and love of his or her people”. Maya, an Aeta woman healer, pointed out that “one of my ways of healing is using herbal medicine, for example, boiled *aloe vera* mixed with honey cures amoeba”.

The DOH can learn from the practices of the postcolonial Aeta women healers by including not only the health practitioner who has undergone Western training but also other entities in a society, including the postcolonial Aeta women healers when

addressing the health crisis. This will not only lessen the financial burden on the health care system, but will also encourage the postcolonial Aeta women healers to contribute their skills in treating diseases.

This is what this study is calling for in the face of major medical catastrophes. Ellerby (2001) notes that, “most elders and cultural teachers view the sharing of knowledge and collaborative treatment of an individual as important” (p. 47). Moreover, using herbal medicines that are already available in the forest or farms in the Philippines can address financial problems and can accommodate some members of the society who cannot afford to buy medicine. Furthermore, such collaboration brings back to the recognition of the indigeneity of every person, and disrupts the mentality that was induced by colonialism in the Philippines.

This thesis presents the Aeta women healers’ knowledge of healing. It showcases the sociology of health from the Indigenous perspective, which has been sidelined by central government. Collaboration brings about the awareness of the people in the Philippines showing that the Aeta women healers possess the healing power that is available to everybody. It highlights the agency and spirituality of the Aeta women healers that gives them the strength and knowledge to heal. It gives another way of understanding the root cause of illness that of the of the Aeta women who have resisted colonization. This study recommends that the public health in the Philippines recognize the knowledge of the Aeta women healers in order to have a more effective way of addressing the health problems of the people.

## **Global Public Health**

Certainly, Indigenous healing is important to most people in the world, as has been noted in the World Health Organization (WHO) 2004 report. Dr. Margaret Chan, the Director-General of WHO does not include them in the decision-making platform when addressing the global health crisis (WHO report 2004). Instead, Chan calls on “governments and a host of agencies, foundations, nongovernmental organization, and representatives of the sector and civil society” when talking of efforts to resolve the global health crisis which is plagued by illnesses such as “malaria, women’s and children’s health, tuberculosis, venereal disease, nutrition and environmental sanitation, including HIV/ Aids” (WHO 2004). Chan recognizes the participation of different stakeholders in resolving these health crises. As much as this may be appreciated as the way forward, Chan fails to explicitly state the role that the Indigenous Peoples, such as the Aeta women healers, need to play in resolving the health crisis. This not only sets the stage for the perpetual marginalization of the Indigenous Peoples’ role in knowledge production, but also denies them a part in resolving the world’s health crisis.

Furthermore, Chan states that the WHO “standards help protect the safety of everyone’s food and the quality of medicines and vaccines” (WHO 2004). This strategy only focuses on curing the physical health of a person. The Aeta women healers focus not only on healing the physical health, but also the whole well-being of a person. This holistic healing focuses on the physical, emotional, spiritual and cultural aspects of living. Rang-ay, an Aeta woman healer in Cagayan, believes that a person gets sick

partly because of disrespecting the spirit world. That is why the body is affected. For Rang-ay, healing the sick person includes calling on the spirit that brings the sickness and asking for forgiveness. According to her, if there is no conversation between the healer and the spirit, healing will not be completed. It is, therefore important for Rang-ay to teach her patients to be respectful to the spiritual world in order to avoid illnesses.

What lessons can the WHO learn from this healing practice of Rang-ay? It provides an understanding that health crises exist in part because of a lack of consideration of the spirit world. The treatment of one's disease does not focus solely on the physical well-being of a person but also on the inclusion of other parts of a human being. Ellerby (2001), a healer in North America, states, "all aspects are important in a person's health: spiritual health, mental health, emotional health, physical health" (p. 3). This study recommends the inclusion of the Indigenous Peoples of the world, including Aeta women healers in the global public health policy making , process when combating diseases. The WHO should also be more proactive in sharing the experiences of initiatives in different countries that have started to unite Western medicine and traditional healing.

### ***Limitation of the Study***

There are some limitations of this study. First, the themes are focus on identity agency and representation but it does not discuss the different herbal medicines that have been used by the Aeta women healers and the different ailments that they can heal. Finally, there are Indigenous methodologies that I believe can be employed in the



conducting a research in the Indigenous community and these methodologies are not being discussed in this study. Because the work is a case study it cannot be replicated. I sought to attenuate this by two means: first by making visible the words, contexts and views of the participants in their own words so that others may offer alternate interpretations. Second I tried to use continued and comparative analysis to show how the findings are applicable across a wide series of contexts, particularly colonial and other contexts where power and prejudice are important operational variables such as race, class and gender. My study is limited too in that while I tried to triangulate with historical accounts and other data sources my work is not fully longitudinal and therefore has the limits of all case studies. Again I tried to use a comparative frame to show the generalizability of my research and (like all studies) rely on others and future work to draw utility or find fault with my account. I will also try to cross check my accounts with the participants.

### ***How to give back to Aeta women healers?***

I will go back to the community of the Aeta women healers to give them a copy of this thesis and I will translate it into their own dialect. I will relate to them some of the comments that I received from the academy. I will ask them for feedback regarding what they want me to do with the thesis. I will also ask them if they would like us to form an organization that will focus on the sustenance of their healing power.

In addition, I will be presenting the results of this study at the University of the Philippines, and some of the universities in the West to share the knowledge of the Aeta women healers and also to educate students and members of the community.

***Future Project:***

The next project will be a study that includes Indigenous healers and public health practitioners. The rationale for this study is to find possible ways of collaboration to address more effectively the physical, spiritual, social and cultural ailments in society.

***Last Words: Wisdom shared from the Aeta Circle:***

*“Ayaten tayo iti maysan-maysa tapno kasta agnanayon nga adda iti kapia iti lubong tayo.”*

(Let's love each other so that there will be always peace in our nation).



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guava>

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