

BOOK REVIEW

Population Dynamics of a Philippine Rain Forest People: The San Ildefonso Agta. J. D. Early and T. N. Headland. University Press of Florida, Gainesville. 1998. Pp. 208. \$39.95 (cloth). ISBN: 0-8130-1555-3.

This book is based on over 40 years of demographic and ethnographic work among the San Ildefonso Agta. The quality of the publication certainly reflects the authors' profound intimacy with the study population. In just over 200 pages that include 80 tables, figures, maps, and black-and-white photographs, Early and Headland meticulously craft an outstanding book, a must-read for anyone interested in tropical rain forest peoples. It makes a superb addition to any demography, ecological anthropology, or geography course syllabus.

The 12 chapters are divided among six themes. In Part 1 they introduce the study population and provide the essential ethnographic data. In Part 2 they discuss how historical forces have shaped the trajectory of the Agta in general, and

the San Ildefonso population specifically. Their discussion of methods in Part 3 is a high point of the book and could very well serve as a blueprint for future studies in demographic anthropology. In Parts 4 and 5 they present and discuss their data, while in Part 6 they attempt to shed comparative light on the population dynamics of the San Ildefonso Agta.

Many rainforest peoples have experienced extreme cultural changes as they have come into contact with the industrialized world. The San Ildefonso Agta are no exception. The text encapsulates this cultural transition quantitatively, through the lens of demographic anthropology. Early and Headland follow the Agta through three arbitrarily delimited yet highly salient stages: the Forager Phase (1950-1964), the Transition Phase (1965-1979), and the Peasant Phase (1980-1994). By analyzing the four principal demographic variables — fertility, mortality, in-migration, and out-migration — the authors successfully identify the principal cause of acculturation among the Agta: hypergyny. Recently, women from the foraging group have been marrying lowland, Agta peasant men which has dramatically accelerated the growth of the acculturating population while subtracting from the foraging population. Such “cultural migration” is an enormous threat to the San Ildefonso Agta foragers and could ultimately lead to the assimilation of the Agta into the national Filipino ethnic matrix.

Although the quality of the analysis throughout the text is at times brilliant and the explanation of methodology superb, several of the authors’ conclusions mar what is otherwise an outstanding text. Most importantly, the discussion of rampant acculturation among the Agta is not grounded in a clear definition of the peasantry, and, because the authors are content with understanding culture as a non-dynamic system, the discussion of acculturation, the peasantry, and Agta “cultural maintenance” seems somewhat shallow. Also, in their presentation of “Characteristics of the Agta Population,” Early and Headland momentarily digress to a brief evaluation of the impact of high mortality on individual consciousness and the self (p. 126). In a text so dedicated to quantitative description and analysis, such a digression seems out of place.

Despite these minor problems, the text is a great success. Readability, close attention to methods, and the quantitative support of qualitative ideas are the book’s chief resources. The authors’ conclusions and analysis in the final, comparative chapter also have very practical consequences. They contribute to our understanding of landless peasants and their role in global tropical deforestation. The text’s final paragraphs emphasize the importance of missionary work in the survival of foraging populations, which may strike a sour note with some, but few will deny the book’s important contributions to the field of demographic anthropology.

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