RECONSTRUCTING MEANINGS OF THE "DISCRIMINATED MANGYAN": TOWARDS AN EMANCIPATORY EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Available historical accounts suggest the existence of discrimination against Mangyans in what is supposedly their ancestral island of Mindoro. Narratives of how they are discriminated against by many "lowlanders" (i.e., non-Mangyans now inhabiting and dominating Mindoro) persist until today. This study probed into the experiences of six Mangyan students of the Tugdaan Mangyan Center for Learning and Development in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro about the discrimination they experienced from non-Mangyans. Guided by the Social Construction Theory, the study characterized the social world within which lowlanders historically discriminated against Mangyans, explored the Mangyan students' meanings of discrimination, and determined the communicative interactions that had been responsible for such construals of discrimination. Based on the results, the study crafted a working educational framework to counter discrimination against Mangyans, especially in the context of formal and nonformal education. The framework was also partly based on historical accounts and other narratives on the cultural, political, and economic plight of Mangyans. This paper poses a challenge to educators who are proactively engaged in advocacy projects for the empowerment of vulnerable groups and policy makers who wish to institutionalize emancipating anti-discrimination laws. In order to conceptualize and implement educational interventions for social change, there needs to be a clear analysis of how the problem of discrimination translates to actual scenarios on the ground, especially with respect to how the affected sector sees it.

Key words: discrimination, Mangyans, Mindoro, social construction, educational framework

INTRODUCTION

Romel's Point of View

Many ethnolinguistic minorities in the Philippines, like the Mangyans of Oriental Mindoro, have long suffered discrimination from fellow Filipinos, especially those belonging to dominant ethnolinguistic groups in the country (Bawagan, 2010; Helbling & Schult, 2004; Lopez-Gonzaga, 1983, 1988; Quebengco, 1986). Even I grew up and lived in communities where disparaging words were used to describe, joke about, or compare repulsive individuals with members of some ethnolinguistic groups. It was only during my college years when I realized that the Philippines had an awfully weak cultural education and that my understanding of indigenous people (IP) had to be reconstructed so I could avoid hurting and harming them.

My community development experience for more than a decade as a volunteer of the Ugnayan ng Pahinungód, the official program for volunteerism of the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), inspired me to embrace IP advocacy. So, when Elijah, one of my undergraduate thesis advisees, decided to explore discrimination against Mangyans as an undergraduate research topic, I thought this would be a good opportunity to help Mangyans in making their voices heard. It was my frustration with the country's weak cultural education that prompted me to challenge Elijah to include an anti-discrimination educational framework in his research on Mangyans.

Elijah's Point of View

I was not new to the plight of the Mangyans before deciding to pursue this research. A Mindoreño myself and having lived nearly my entire life in the province, I had been witness to a spectrum of interactions between "lowlanders" (i.e., non-Mangyans, mostly from town centers) and Mangyans, from harmonious to hostile. Interestingly, I had discovered during the span of the research that some of these encounters, especially those I had long considered neutral, were actually meaner than they seemed. This perspective may have stemmed from my ignorance to introspect on why my notion of the spectrum was skewed that way, and which forces around me were responsible for it. I figured that writing about it would provide me some enlightenment on this phenomenon.

Since childhood, I had been used to seeing Mangyans roam around the streets of my hometown, Calapan City, during December. Dressed in tattered clothes, they would go around in families, begging other people for alms. I did not exactly know why they were begging, although remarks from my family and friends seemed to suggest that they were asking for money from people as Christmas gifts. These visiting Mangyans were also nomadic. They would travel from the southern, rural regions of Mindoro to Calapan City in the north and would create makeshift bedding out of cardboard boxes during the night.

My mom would also tell me stories about Mangyans during her jeepney trips from Calapan City to Puerto Galera. She would tell me that Mangyan passengers would sometimes be asked to step out of the jeepneys and climb up the vehicle roof due to the persistence of Tagalogs, as they often complained about how the Mangyans smelled.

There were also a lot of negative attributes ascribed to the Mangyans back in my province. Discriminatory language was rampant, as I witnessed many Mindoreños appropriating the term "Mangyan" to someone who was "stupid" or "uneducated." Back in elementary school, one would be told, "Ang Mangyan mo

naman," if he or she was given a cellphone and did not know how to use or manipulate it. More so, there had been urban legends saying that looking straight into a Mangyan's eyes would give one "balis," an illness characterized by nausea and headache which affects a person who has locked eyes with individuals who practice witchcraft. All these were stories I had either simply observed or obtained from family members and friends—accounts which favored an onlooker's view of the Mangyan, not a Mangyan's view of himself or herself.

My richest encounter with Mangyans was during a major field project in my interpersonal communication class during my junior year as a student in the Bachelor of Science in Development Communication (BSDC) program of UPLB. I had a golden opportunity to interact closely with Mangyan students from the Tugdaan Mangyan Center for Learning and Development (TMCLD), an indigenous school for Mangyan students located at Brgy. Paitan, Naujan, Oriental Mindoro. From our conversations sprung stories of how they were unfairly treated by lowlanders for their ethnicity, and how they would seldom fight back or complain during such conflicted situations. During these exchanges, I also was able to note the students' lack of ability to maintain stable eye contact with my group mates and me. According to Mrs. Gay Lintawagin, TMLCD's principal, such communication behavior was a defense mechanism of the students when talking with lowlander visitors, as they would feel a certain condescending energy exuded by lowlanders which would quite put them off during conversations.

The agglomeration of these observations, narratives, and experiences made me ponder the role of development communication (DevCom) in creating opportunities or supporting platforms that would make Mangyans' voices heard and their struggles understood so they would not be treated unfairly by their fellow Filipinos. After all, the very first scholar who defined DevCom, Dr. Nora Cruz Quebral, said that the field's "allegiance is to the poor, the powerless and the disadvantaged in any developing society" (Quebral, 2012, p. 7).

But, first, I had to understand the various aspects that made prejudiced communicative acts against Mangyans a social reality—who perpetrated it, which spaces allowed it to occur, and what the enabling reasons behind its commission were. In general, I sought to explore through this study how discrimination as a reality unfolded in the eyes of the affected sector—in this case, young members of an ethnolinguistic group, particularly senior high school students of TMLCD. These students heard stories of discrimination from their elders and experienced the act as well.

In exploring the social phenomenon of discrimination against Mangyans, this study was guided by the Social Construction Theory (SCT), which was first articulated by sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. In their seminal book The Social Construction of Reality (1966), Berger and Luckmann argued that reality is a phenomenon created and sustained by people's interactions with one another.

Two key assumptions make the SCT relevant to the discipline of communication. One, people create a model of the social world which becomes their lens to understanding their experiences. Two, language is the most important system which people use to construct this reality; hence, the practical importance of conversations in maintaining this reality (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). These assumptions are reminiscent of two key propositions in the socio-cultural tradition of communication, to which the SCT belongs, as follows: a) the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which demonstrates the push and pull relationship between the structure of people's language and their perception of the world; and b) George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism theory, which holds that meaning, language, and thought are the core principles that govern our conversations with fellow humans—that is, how we interact with others in anticipation of how they will react to us (Griffin, 2012). To understand social reality from the lens of the SCT, the following three key premises must serve as a framework for analysis: a)

the social world that provides context to the reality under study; b) the meanings attached by people to this existing reality; and c) the process through which this reality is communicatively constructed (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

In essence, the study asked six fundamental questions to attain a deeper understanding of discrimination as a social problem, all of which were informed by the assumptions of the SCT. The first question was loosely based on the first premise of the theory, which holds that there is a social context within which the reality in question—in this case, discrimination—exists: What is the history of the social world within which lowlanders discriminate against Mangyans? Data to answer this research question were largely lifted from the available literature, referencing narrative material from scholars who documented the history of lowlanders' maltreatment of the Mangyans in various respects.

The four succeeding questions were informed by the second premise, which examined the key meanings attached by the participants to discrimination as a social reality. Here, the results centered on the interviews that occurred between the main researcher (Elijah) and the Mangyan students who participated in the study. Specifically, these questions were as follows: a) In what situations did the students of TMCLD feel discriminated against as Mangyans? b) What were the entities (i.e., individuals, groups, media, and others) that discriminated against them as Mangyans? c) From their point of view, what were the reasons they were discriminated against as Mangyans? d) How did they deal with discrimination against them as Mangyans?

The final question emphasized the final premise, which was about the process of construction of discrimination against Mangyans. Taking off from Carey's (1989, as cited in Littlejohn & Foss, 2009) articulation of this process as a four-step undertaking, the study answered the following question: What was the construction process that gave rise to such meanings of discrimination? This final research question was crucial as it provided compelling justification for the educational framework against discrimination proposed at the end of the paper.

As it stood, the study sought to provide a grounded depiction of discrimination in order to help formulate policy-based mechanisms of countering it. A well-pictured notion of discrimination, that which accommodates the realities of its genesis and occurrence, as well as the motivations behind and the acts of resistance against it, would push for more meticulously crafted and case-specific policies, or even laws in the long run, to prevent it. To start with, discrimination is a very general term which may fail to capture the nuanced experiences of the sectors habitually experiencing it (e.g., IP, LGBT community, women, religious minorities); hence, the need to characterize the actualization of discrimination from the vantage point of a particular minority group.

METHODOLOGY

The study was a basic interpretive inquiry, a basic qualitative research method for understanding a social phenomenon based on the accounts of participants experiencing the phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). Cresswell and Clark (2004) describe qualitative research as a form of inquiry wherein a researcher delves into a key social occurrence through a systematic and well-detailed documentation of the research participant's views of the social phenomenon through words or images (Cresswell & Clark, 2004). In this study, the social occurrence investigated by the researcher was discrimination against Mangyans.

The study was conducted at the TMCLD, Brgy. Paitan, Naujan, Oriental Mindoro. Six Alangan Mangyan students, who were graduating senior high school students at the time, served as participants of the study. Primary methods of data gathering were *pakikipagkwentuhan* (informal conversations) and participant observation, while the sampling method used was snowball sampling. The sampling method involved students who had undergone the interviews giving recommendations to their friends to participate in the study, allowing for a friendlier, less intimidating approach in gathering participants.

Mangyans, as we were told, were known to have barriers communicating with lowlanders due to the discriminatory aura that they associated with the latter. This became an important consideration in how the data gathering schedule was planned. The first visits were devoted to knowing first who they were, where they came from, what their likes and dislikes were, what daily tasks they did in school and in the community, among others. In total, I spent three days of immersion in the community prior to actual data gathering.

There were four *pakikipagkuwentuhan* sessions with the participants spread across four separate days of data gathering. These sessions mainly revolved around getting to know them more on a personal level—their family backgrounds, their hobbies, their personal aspirations. More importantly, the *pakikipagkuwentuhan* sessions delved deeper into the research questions earlier mentioned, four of which sought to unearth the dimensions of discrimination (i.e., situations, enablers, perceived motivations, resistance) from the point of view of the students.

Data analysis for the gathered information was guided by grounded theory methods of open and axial coding (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). The main themes that answered each research question were derived through the second coding method.

As a knowledge-generation process, this study was guided by the main assumptions of the socio-cultural tradition of communication theories, particularly that of SCT, which largely belongs to the tradition. The tradition stipulates that communication "is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" (Craig, 1999, p. 144). Discrimination is a communicative act which is produced and reproduced by humans as a social reality in various forms and situations. Since discrimination against Mangyans as a reality is socially constructed, it may also be deconstructed, and the meanings that non-Mangyans attach to Mangyans may be reconstructed to diminish, if not eliminate, discrimination against the latter. In this study, the dimensions of discrimination

were analyzed from the vantage point of Mangyans as members of an ethnolinguistic minority which bears the brunt of this social phenomenon.

Qualitative studies are also marked by their commitment to reflexivity, a "conscious revelation" of an author's beliefs, affiliations, and ideological stances and how these provide him or her analytical lenses to perform a research (Shacklock & Smyth, 1998, as cited in Hellawell, 2006, p. 483). In this qualitative study, reflexive exercises were observed, especially by the main researcher (Elijah) who did the fieldwork. Reflexive discussions were also conducted by the authors in the course of writing this paper.

[Elijah's experience in reflexivity] As the main researcher of the study who belongs to the Tagalog majority in Mindoro, the group historically documented to have discriminated against Mangyans, I understood my limitations in trying to understand accounts that were far from my own. Berger (2013, p. 9), citing Fontes (1998), noted that research in circumstances where the researcher has not established "points of identification" with the researched could not completely grasp the phenomenon under study. Hence, researchers may encounter complications such as language insensitivity and construction of detached research questions. The former, in fact, was a difficulty I faced during the course of the data gathering. Some of the research participants were students I met during a previous trip to the community for a curricular activity, as earlier narrated. In this activity, my teammates and I conversed with the Mangyan students about their experiences of discrimination, but despite having heard some of their stories related to the phenomenon, these were stories communicated to me in Filipino. Since I could not speak Mangyan and could only converse with them in the language I knew, I may have lost the opportunity to see a broader, more grounded understanding of the phenomenon of discrimination. It is because of this that I would not claim objectivity of the accounts that follow, as these had been largely reflective of the cultural lenses—in this case, the language I spoke—that were available to me at the time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Examining the Social World: A Historical Overview of Discrimination in Mangyan-Lowlander Interactions

A crucial part of understanding the construction of a certain social reality such as discrimination is situating it in an existing social world, which is defined as a sphere of social and cultural practices that spring from constant conversations and interactions among actors within the sphere (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009; Luchini, 2010). Examining the social world is key to understanding how this social reality has come to existence and persisted. It elucidates the interactional roles taken by the actors in the world and gives context to the outcomes of the interactions they engage in. This section presents the social world of Mangyans in Oriental Mindoro based on previous studies and other documents that discussed the roots of contemporary Mangyan-lowlander relations. It provides historical backdrop to the discriminatory experiences narrated by the Mangyan participants and presented in the latter portion of this paper.

Marginalized **d natives of Mindoro since the Spanish era.** "Mangyan" is a catchall term used to refer to the eight existing ethnolinguistic groups in the island of Mindoro, as follows: Alangan; Bangon; Buhid; Hanunuo; Iraya; Ratagnon; Tadyawan; and Tau-buid. These groups comprise about 10 per cent of the total population of both provinces of Oriental and Occidental Mindoro. The Mangyan Heritage Center (2009) claims that the number of Mangyans in the island will reach as high as 100,000 in the coming years.

Despite being the original inhabitants of Mindoro and their significant number in terms of population, Mangyans have apparently been excluded from mainstream Mindoreño agenda since the Spanish occupation of the Philippines (Helbling & Schult, 2004). European scholars Jurg Helbling and Volker Schult (2004) provided one of the most comprehensive historical accounts of how the Mangyans of Mindoro got ignored and even oppressed in their own land. In their book *Mangyan Survival*

Strategies, they pointed out that the lack of regard for the Mangyans as a building block of the Mindoreño identity is not only a concern that has risen from contemporary history, but it is also a living threat that has existed for hundreds of years of their coexistence with mostly Tagalog, Ilocano, and Visayan lowlanders.

During the Spanish colonization of the Philippines, Mangyans living in *reducciones* or Christianized regions were made to build boats, cut trees, and work in fields for significantly lower pay than their Tagalog counterparts (Helbling & Schult, 2004). This unscrupulous practice was rampant despite that residence in reducciones supposedly entitled any person, regardless of ethnicity, to be treated equally by virtue of fidelity to the Catholic Church and the government of Spain.

During the American occupation, discrimination against Mangyans was further exacerbated. Tagalogs and other lowlanders dominated the local politics of Mindoro, while the Mangyans were almost left out of the decision-making process in and governance of their homeland. Worse, with the introduction of land titles by the Americans, lowlanders indiscriminately grabbed lands from Mangyans, who were not familiar with the system of obtaining land titles and who feared aggressively responding to lowlanders given the latter's ownership of guns and other weapons of defense (Helbling & Schult, 2004).

The American government instituted mechanisms to protect the welfare of the Mangyans, like the establishment of special schools for the ethnolinguistic group (Helbling & Schult, 2004). The provincial government of Mindoro also authorized the Mangyans to build settlements in the lowlands of Mindoro and appoint their own local officials (Helbling & Schult, 2004). Such mechanisms, however, proved to be short-lived. One of the reasons why the Mangyan settlements had not lasted long was that lowlanders were known to attack these settlements to capture quasi-slaves who would be forced to work without pay (Helbling & Schult, 2004). This pushed the Mangyan inhabitants to go back to their

communities in the hinterlands (Lopez-Gonzaga, 1983). Due to limited resources in these communities, however, they would be forced once more to go back to the lowlands and venture into servitude in order to earn a living.

Sparks of cooperation between lowlanders and Mangyans were observed during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, as both groups conceded that the Japanese needed to be driven out of their communities to restore peace and order (Helbling & Schult, 2004). Despite this short period of mutualism, most lowlanders who had been displaced by the war started to encroach on Mangyan settlements in town centers, claiming the special zones the Americans had designated for the ethnolinguistic group. The provincial officials did not help the Mangyans take their lands back, fearing they would lose the electoral support of Tagalog and Ilocano lowlanders occupying these areas (Helbling & Schult, 2004).

There were multiple efforts from post-war governments to establish institutions protecting the interests of indigenous groups like the Mangyans. These, however, have proven to be unresponsive to their specific needs and, at worst, exploitative of Mangyan communities.

The case of "peasantization" of Buhids was discussed by Lopez-Gonzaga (1988). According to her historical account of this Mangyan group, many Buhids were convinced by Christian evangelical missionaries to establish bigger and fixed settlements in Batangan in the early 1950s. In these settlements, they experienced lowland migrants taking their resources, especially land, by deceit or force. The Buhids later decided to have economic and political ties with town officials and lowland migrants as a means of protecting themselves and their resources from non-Mangyans. Lopez-Gonzaga (1988) pointed out that the case was worse for many Hanunuo Mangyans who "lost their lands" to lowland migrants engaged in "unscrupulous maneuvering of the legal system" (p. 134). The original settlers of the island thus became tenants and laborers to these scheming lowlanders from the Tagalog and Visayan regions.

The 1980s saw little progress in the social position of the Mangyans. This was very much evident in the way the Marcos government infiltrated the lands of the Mangyans for infrastructural development (Helbling & Schult, 2004). The Marcos government was also lenient towards companies conducting logging activities in Mangyan settlements. During that time, a match-producing company called Provident Tree Farms Inc. was given license by the government to cut trees spanning 6,500 hectares of land in Puerto Galera and San Teodoro, posing a threat of expulsion to around 5,000 Mangyan families living in these areas (Malaya, 1985; Patunay, 1984, as cited in Helbling &Schult, 2004).

Many more tales of Mangyan oppression, marginalization, and discrimination have been reported since the 1980s (e.g., Askeland, Torill, & Mittelmark, 2010; Bawagan, 2010; Bonta, 2011; Olea, 2011). The Iraya Mangyans in the northern part of Mindoro, for instance, protested against intrusions by or devious contracts of government and private corporations planning to put up mining operations and timber plantations in their areas (Bawagan, 2010). They also dealt with non-Mangyan groups and individuals grabbing their lands. In many cases, the Mangyans lost their land and "moved further to the mountains to avoid conflicts" (Bawagan, 2010, p. 187).

A few studies focusing on specific communities of one or two Mangyan groups also beefed up Helbling and Schult's accounts of how these IPs of Mindoro had long been discriminated against, abused, and oppressed by lowlanders. For instance, Lopez-Gonzaga's (1983) research on the Buhids claimed that even during the Spanish and American occupations, there were already "exploitative" lowlander-Mangyan interactions and relations, as exemplified by how lowland Christians took advantage and abused Mangyans in terms of "manual labor," "fictitious debts," and "profit-making" (pp. 23, 39-40). After World War II, the encroachment of lowlanders, which the Buhids called *loktanons,* in the upland territory of the Buhids became more rampant (Lopez-Gonzaga, 1983). While studying the

Hanunuo culture, Miyamoto (1988) also found that Christian lowlanders took lands "legally and illegally" from Mangyans (p. 204).

Quebengco's (1986) dissertation on the Hanunuos of Bulalacao, Oriental Mindoro identified discrimination as one of the main reasons why Mangyans who had the chance to go to formal school dropped out in a year or two. In addition, Quebengco (1986) also reported that the IPs fell victim to land encroachment by lowlanders and were exploited at the market (e.g., selling their farm produce at very low prices).

Marginalized until today. The lives of Mangyans have not improved much in recent years, in general. The study of Declaro-Ruedas on Buhid women in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro in 2015 found that their average monthly income was below the poverty threshold and that a big majority did not attend formal school. Further, they could hardly send their children to a secondary school because of poverty (Declaro-Ruedas, 2015). Aside from poverty, discrimination by several non-Mangyan teachers and classmates was also endured by Mangyans in school (Bawagan, 2010). They had to bear being ridiculed, even described as having tails, in a supposedly educational environment (Bawagan, 2010).

Ascribing Meaning to Social Reality: Discrimination from the Vantage Point of Mangyan Students

Research studies and other accounts emphasize that IPs have long been marginalized and discriminated against in modern societies primarily because they have different cultures (Galindo, Reginio, Liguid, Sancon, & Advincula, 2018). They are often stereotyped as "uncivilized" (Galindo et al., 2018, p. 25) and "uneducated" (Bagawan, 2010, p. 188). The discrimination against IPs is a social reality around the world (UNDP, 2011), including the Philippines. Guided by the SCT, this study reaffirmed this reality through the narratives of young Mangyans, who shared how they were discriminated against for reasons they could think of, and how they dealt with discrimination.

The SCT privileges a view of the world that emerges from the sociality of its actors, effectively transcending a primarily material view of the world and shedding light on an abstract, collaborative conception of it (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). While the earlier section dealt with the historical phenomenon of discrimination on a population scale, this section attempts to provide an idiographic emphasis on the meanings of six Mangyan students of discrimination based on how they experienced it in their respective social worlds. As stated earlier, the dimensions of discrimination observed were the following: a) the nature of the discriminatory act; b) the perpetrators; c) their perceived reasons behind the discriminatory act; and d) their forms of resistance.

Four distinct categories were surfaced regarding the situations in which the Mangyan students felt discriminated against by others. These were as follows: a) spatial domination; b) cultural superiority; c) discursive labelling; and a) transactional deceit.

Spatial domination is the unjustified overconsumption of space as a weapon of marginalization. The Mangyan students narrated how they were unjustly driven out of fiestas or made to climb up the roof of a jeepney to make room for Tagalog passengers in a public vehicle. One of the participants said, *"Dati po kasi, kwento po ng mga magulang din po namin, example po, 'yung sa jeep—kapag po may nakatabing Mangyan, sinasabi po, 'Du'n ka sa bubong'."*

Cultural superiority, on the other hand, entails the explicit attacking of the rudiments of the marginalized group's culture such as their clothing, socio-economic status, and notions of modernity. One participant named Nini narrated how non-Mangyans laughed at her wearing the Mangyan traditional attire (i.e., lingeb) in an inter-school activity once. *"Naka-costume po kami, 'yung traditional attire po, 'yung lingeb po. Tapos po, nu'ng pagkakita po sa 'min, pinagtawanan po kami nu'ng mga estudyante, mga hindi Mangyan."*

Discursive labelling is the use of linguistic vehicles through which discrimination is communicated. One of the participants, Diren, narrated how Tagalogs in a fiesta would call them names like *langaw* (housefly), prompting them to leave. *"Sabi daw po ng [kamag-anak ng] konsehal, ang lakas-lakas na, 'Andito na ang mga langaw!'"*

Transactional deceit is the manipulation of transactions in such manner that one party becomes less important or inferior in the interaction. This often manifested in instances where Tagalog vendors would sell their goods to Mangyans at higher prices or where Tagalog jeepney drivers would charge them higher transport fees.

With regard to the enablers or perpetrators of discrimination, three categories could be derived from the narratives: a) ethnic majorities, defined as those belonging outside the Mangyan heritage who hold wield relatively more social power than Mangyans (e.g., Tagalogs); b) some Mangyan people, who have been able to attain an education and quite assimilated to the lowlander culture already; and c) institutions, which pertained to offices, agencies, or departments which have institutionalized disregard for the Mangyan people, like intrusive government interventions.

On why they were being discriminated against, three reasons could be surfaced from the participants' narratives: a) misunderstood identity; b) misunderstood behavior; and c) misunderstood social position. The Mangyans' misunderstood identity stemmed from the common misconceptions about the Mangyan people. The participants said that most lowlanders thought they were uneducated, had poor living conditions, or were intellectually inferior. These misconceptions about Mangyans were also noted by Lopez-Gonzaga (1988) and Bawagan (2010) in their studies.

The misunderstood behavior of Mangyans refers to how lowlanders often take out of context the actions that Mangyan people do. According to Diren, Tagalogs misinterpret Mangyans'

habit of taking home food from fiestas as simply acts of gluttony. But to the Mangyans, it was a way to share food with those in their community who could not attend these celebrations. Lastly, the Mangyans' misunderstood social position is about the lack of sympathy by lowlanders towards the socio-economic position of the Mangyan people, in general. Their poverty and lack of formal education made them prone to both mockery and manipulation by abusive lowlanders. One of the participants, Dayang, related that Tagalogs sometimes expressed dismay over the donations and opportunities granted to Mangyans. *"May mga tao naman pong gustong tumulong sa mga Mangyan… Mas marami sanang tumutulong sa amin, pero sinisiraan po kami. Kaya po nasasabi kong naiinggit."*

The participants dealt with discrimination in at least four ways: a) avoiding; b) dismissing; c) challenging; and d) submitting. Avoidance manifested in how they would shy away from possible confrontations with those treating them differently. This could possibly be attributed to their peace-loving cultural trait. Dismissal was the act of blatantly ignoring any form of discrimination. A challenge was any deliberate act of fighting back against discrimination, ranging from short-term acts of answering back individuals who mock them to long-term ones such as deciding to get a college education. Submission was the escapist act of breaking away from the Mangyan culture and assimilating into the lowlander culture in order to attain the perks of being well-liked by lowlanders.

The different dimensions of discrimination discussed above revealed four key meanings that Mangyan students attached to discrimination. To the Mangyan participants, discrimination: a) was an act of exclusion; b) was perpetrated by outsiders; c) was a product of perpetrators' lack of understanding of them; and d) affected Mangyan people in varying degrees.

Discrimination was tantamount to ostracizing Mangyans from society or rejecting them as co-equal members of it. The situations described by the Mangyan students as unfair

treatment of them pertained to alienation and deprivation. Those who gave them unfair treatment were outsiders, with the term outsider nominally referring to anyone who had no capability to evoke feelings of self-identification towards the Mangyan people. These outsiders lacked understanding of Mangyans, with understanding encompassing both the motivation to know more about the realities the Mangyans were experiencing and the ability to sympathize with these realities. Hence, outsiders engaged in acts of discrimination, and consequently, hurt Mangyans in different ways and extents. As recipients of discriminatory acts, Mangyans responded in varied ways.

Figure 1 visualizes the key meanings of discrimination that were surfaced through coding from the narratives of the six research participants. On the macro level, these meanings reflect the long history of discrimination against their ethnolinguistic group—their history with outsiders (i.e., lowlanders) who barely knew who they were, tried to exclude them from the development agenda of their own homeland, and marginalized them in various ways and to different extents. Both the participants' narratives and the historical accounts discussed above attest to the existence of discrimination against Mangyans and the need for the kind of education that can emancipate both recipients and perpetrators of discrimination.

Figure 1. Key meanings of discrimination derived from the research participants' narratives

Bringing Social Reality into Being: Tracing the Construction Process of Discrimination based on Mangyan Students' Accounts

Observing the process through which reality is constructed illuminates the otherwise uncharted space between the material world and people's substantive conceptions of it. An established strategy to map this process was argued by Carey (1989, as cited in Littlejohn & Foss, 2009), who held that social construction of reality has the following four key stages: construction; maintenance; repair; and change. This section of the paper attempts to trace this construction process by taking off from this recommendation.

Social actors initially create a concept and determine how it can be made concrete; this is often the first step in the construction of social reality (Carey, 1989, as cited in Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). The argument borders on linguistic determinism, one end of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which argues that language dictates the reality that people perceive. Language is often the most accessible tool communities use to organize and interpret the world (Mills, 2000). This suggests that the world construed is largely a product of the "language habits" that the community predisposes its members into (Sapir, 1956, as cited in Mills, 2000, p. 2).

Whorf, in his work *Language, Thought, and Reality* (1956), succinctly describes this phenomenon:

> *"We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way - an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language" (as cited in Mills, 2000). (p. 2)*

Vital to construction is the second stage according to Carey (1989), which is maintenance. Kay and Kempton (1984) referenced Whorf's (1956) work in their article, *"What is the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis,* "through a passing description of the

process of maintenance, albeit a largely cognitive one. Whorf claims that there is an intellectual system embedded in language that gets imprinted in the speakers' thoughts. He maintains that, "The world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which have to be organized in our minds. This means, largely, by the linguistic system in our minds" (as cited in Kay & Kempton, 1984, p. 66). This psychological definition may be contrasted to Littlejohn & Foss' (2009) interpretation, which holds that maintenance occurs not on a mental or individual level, but on a relational one. They argued that for a social construction such as "discrimination" to be maintained, people need to carry on their value from one generation to another.

Methodologically, these interpretations on the construction and maintenance processes seem to recommend two research designs. First is a cultural examination of the language habits that create and transmit people's construals of the world. This entails a thorough description of communicative processes across various levels of community assembly, such as families, schools, religious organizations, and government, in an attempt to understand the steps through which the conception of a social reality such as "discrimination" is constructed. The second is a psycholinguistic examination of members of the community which sheds light on brain activity or function during speech. None of these designs, however, was used in the discussions found on this section. What this paper intends to offer is simply an enumerative description of the social actors in the Mangyan students' immediate community that had been instrumental in their construction and maintenance of the concept of discrimination.

In the community, the idea of discrimination is discussed in various spheres of organization. The term "idea" was used here to highlight that the community might not often linguistically refer to this reality as discrimination (an English term), as they might use more locally appropriate terminologies in Filipino (i.e., *diskriminasyon, pang-aapi, panloloko*) and Mangyan. After all, it was clear from the previous section that there were glaring attributes of a discriminatory act, so much so

that they manifested regardless of any linguistic code used to refer to them. The participants revealed that aside from having personally experienced such telltale signs of discrimination, there were five other entities who had been vital in their understanding of the term as a social reality. These were: a) their parents, who taught them modesty but also steadfastness against those who violate them; b) Tugdaan Mangyan Center for Learning and Development, which provided them opportunities to listen to stories about how Mangyans were discriminated against, as well as ways to avoid and deal with conflict through their Christian Living subject; c) community leaders, who paid visits to their members' homes and shared what they knew about previous and current issues concerning the Mangyan community; d) elders, who acted as adjudicators in community meetings, especially when projects from outside intervened in the community; and e) Mangyans who experienced life outside the community, especially those who studied college in the city, who told their experiences of discrimination to the younger ones.

The second half of Carey's (1989, as cited in Littlejohn & Foss, 2009) stages of construction involve processes of repair and change. Repair assumes that social actors intermittently fix their constructions as "aspects may be inadvertently forgotten or deliberately changed over time" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, p. 892). Related to repair is change, which holds that constructions, especially those which convey messages that are no longer relevant to contemporary life, are changed for the succeeding generations. Central to these steps are the assumptions that: a) meanings attached to constructions are never inert ideas; b) for such changes in the meanings of these constructions to be successful, they need to be passed down to successors in the community; and c) to fix these constructions, a space where social actors can do so must first exist.

The third assumption provides an important suggestion—that a space to fix the construction of a term such as "discrimination" must come into being, especially if it is one that the community sees is worth replacing. To locate this site of repair and change, it is important to hark back to the four key meanings

of discrimination that surfaced from analysis of the data: a) discrimination was an act of exclusion; b) discrimination was perpetrated by outsiders; c) discrimination was a product of perpetrators' lack of understanding of them; and d) discrimination affected Mangyan people in varying degrees. It must be noted that what binds these key meanings together is that they thematically talk about an "inside" and an "outside" space. These meanings exemplify the characterization of the identity of this "outsider," which is instrumental in the mechanization of repair and change.

The first key meaning is about discrimination as an act of exclusion. The term exclusion, in itself, is implicative of spatiality, as the process of it seeks to create a dichotomy between those who belong to or have entitlement over a given space, and those who do not. While space may mostly concern geography and physical regions, space, based on the narratives of the research participants, may also refer to the intangible spaces such as linguistic space (e.g., using the term Mangyan to mean stupid), cultural space (e.g., mocking Mangyan cultural attire), or transactional space (e.g., setting higher prices of goods for Mangyan buyers).

On the other hand, the second key meaning says that the entities responsible for committing or perpetrating such acts of exclusion may be termed as "outsiders." Outsiders are not necessarily decided upon by geographical space or blood relations, but are defined by their capability, or in this case, incapability, to self-identify with or express sympathy towards Mangyans. Outsiders include mostly lowlanders who belong to ethnolinguistic majorities such as Tagalogs, fellow Mangyans who have experienced life outside their communities and turned against their culture, and government institutions which fail to provide them the social services they are entitled to.

However, one concern for the appropriation of the term "outsider" is that it is subject to varying stakeholder perspectives on the issue of discrimination. It is important for the purpose of this paper to nominally label them as "outsiders," which

principally comes from the vantage point of Mangyan individuals or from this study's attempt to approximate their perception of the discriminatory entities. Taking it from the perspective of the perpetrators would cause an inversion to this view of "outsidership," as the "outsiders" now are the Mangyan people and not them.

The third key meaning delves into how discrimination is enabled by the outsiders' general lack of understanding of the Mangyan identity and situation. The meaning still latches itself onto the character of an outsider, as the study seeks to define key reasons as to why these individuals commit discrimination. One limitation of this meaning is its exclusion of outsiders' views.

What do all of these discussions about the outside and the inside imply? The goal of this section is to trace the entirety of the construction process of discrimination, which begs the question: Where do we locate the final stages of repair and change? This paper argues that it is outside (i.e. among non-Mangyans), not inside, where we ought to situate the fixing and replacement of antiquated meanings. It is important that outsiders start deconstructing the way they have traditionally regarded terms like "discrimination" or "Mangyan" by reflexively asking the following: What does it mean to "discriminate"? What does "Mangyan" mean? Who is a "Mangyan"? A magnified image of the inside, around which the study's data revolved, merely illustrated the construction and maintenance of ideas of discrimination. Yet these meanings were apparently produced and reproduced based on outsiders' lack of knowledge about who the Mangyans were, both as a cultural identity and as legal citizens of the province. Hence, in order to address—or repair, in Carey's parlance—this ignorance, there must be a creation of spaces where this change ought to happen. The paper contends in the discussions below that educational spaces are a potent and accessible avenue to facilitate this reconstruction.

Educational Framework for the Empowerment of Mangyans

There are at least three perspectives regarding cultural education that involve IPs. First is the traditional view that ethnolinguistic minorities should be educated like the ethnolinguistic majorities. However, this view is very problematic because the burden of avoiding discrimination is shifted to its victims—that they would need to prove themselves worthy to the Tagalog majority by attaining a certain level of scholastic attainment. This implies that acceptance of the Mangyan people is contingent upon their achievement or to whatever standard of acceptability lowlanders set for them. More so, this puts an uneven burden to those who could not afford an education, as it is only a few well-off, comparatively privileged Mangyans—who have the resources to send their children to school—who get to be treated fairly by lowlanders.

In fact, this distinction of "privileged Mangyans" who have been able to step outside of their communities and assimilated with the mainstream Tagalog culture is regarded as a form of discrimination as well. As one participant of the study narrated, Mangyans who had been able to immerse themselves in the Tagalog culture become enablers of discrimination themselves against fellow Mangyans. She mentioned, *"'Pag bumabalik daw po sila, hindi na po nila pinapansin 'yung kapwa nila Mangyan. Nakapag-aral na po sa labas eh."* Such claim implies that there is a third-party impact when the responsibility to be educated is put on the victims, as the victims become further stratified and exhibit internal discrimination of their own.

The second perspective argues for the strengthening of indigenous education among ethnolinguistic minorities. In recent decades, most educational discourses and interventions have focused on an internal, community-based approach to learning. This perspective traces its roots to the Freireian philosophy on learning, which highlights people's need for self-realization of their worth and the ability to conceive an organic sense of control over their domain. While these have paved the way for transformative reforms in education, as seen in the rise of

indigenous schools and the revamp of indigenous curricula, the problem with most existing educational frameworks for IPs is that they focus solely on educating individuals within the culture, not outside.

The third perspective supports the second one, but advances critical cultural education among ethnolinguistic majorities as well. It argues that cultural education must not merely describe cultural diversity among ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines, but instead take a critical stance on the historical, political, economic, and social contexts of this diversity. This paper addresses this concern on how educational interventions, especially for those belonging to ethnic majorities, can help empower cultural minorities. Bawagan (2010), for instance, found that learning activities (e.g., video showing, reflection papers) about Mangyans in schools could help students from dominant ethnolinguistic groups understand the life and struggles of Mangyans and sympathize, if not empathize, with them.

It is noteworthy that efforts by the Department of Education (DepEd), such as IKSP and ILP, have been institutionalized in the past. However, there is a significant lack of assessment in terms of what "empowerment" means and who, essentially, should enable this empowerment. Thematically, these educational programs focus on self-empowerment of marginalized ethnolinguistic groups. But they fail to capture the missing link in arguing that educated IPs would mean the discontinuance of discrimination against them. Accounts from the study attested that far too often, despite having attained an education already, the Mangyans still experienced unpoliced discrimination by cultural majorities. The research participants were educated high school students on their way to becoming college students, yet their narratives did not quite fit the assumption that attaining an education was contra-discrimination.

To what extent does self-empowerment through indigenous education actually empower marginalized ethnolinguistic groups given that despite attaining so, the dominant cultural groups still

freely access linguistic and actual tools to disempower them? This question gave birth to the idea of a framework to help address this problematic gap—a proposal which calls for an assessment of the communication spaces where discrimination is rooted. Very little has been discussed about the spatial mechanics that influence the conception of discrimination as a social phenomenon. In this case, as the study suggests that discrimination stems from "outside" of the culture, educational interventions seeking to abort it must also be initiated from the outside.

The characterization of discrimination as an act of exclusion perpetrated by outsiders must be taken into consideration by experts who claim that education is contra-discrimination in the context of IPs. One cannot be against discrimination and institute mechanisms to prevent it if there is no grounded knowledge of what the act is, who act it out, and how it is perpetrated. As it stands, this research seeks to beef up current frameworks of cultural education, especially those which carry the promise of uprooting discrimination against IPs, through offering an addendum to existing educational frameworks. The difference is that the proposal accounts for the actual spaces where discrimination happens, which, as the results suggest, springs from the outside.

To illustrate, Figure 2 exemplifies the spatial mechanics of the genesis of discrimination and how it pervades the limits of Mangyan-outsider coexistence. This shows that there exists no educational intervention that allows an outsider to learn about the plight of Mangyans and realize their role in addressing such. This becomes the importance of Figure 3, as it displays the role of education, with due emphasis on its role on the part of the outsider, to bridge such gap and facilitate opportunities for mutual understanding.

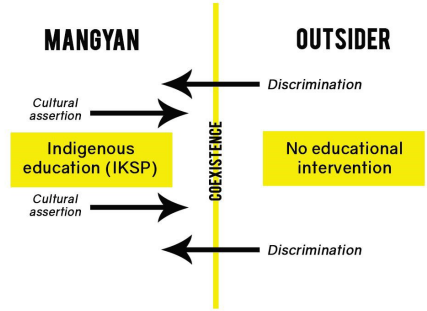

Figure 2. Current spatial mechanics of the genesis of discrimination and existing educational interventions.

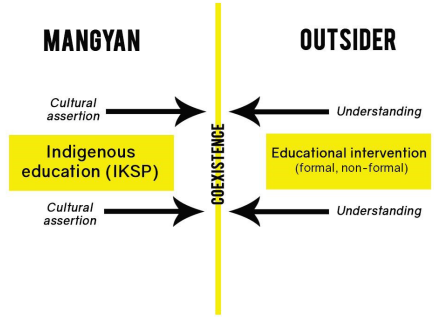

Figure 3. Proposed educational interventions towards Mangyan-outsider coexistence.

Below is the proposed education framework based on the results of the study conducted and conceptualized as an addendum to current educational efforts to diminish, if not totally eradicate, discrimination against Mangyans and other IPs. The framework loosely bases its form from Peters' (1967) argument on shifting worldviews through education. Noticeably, the framework also deconstructs the hegemony of formal education in that it has accommodated non-formal and informal education as tools against IP discrimination.

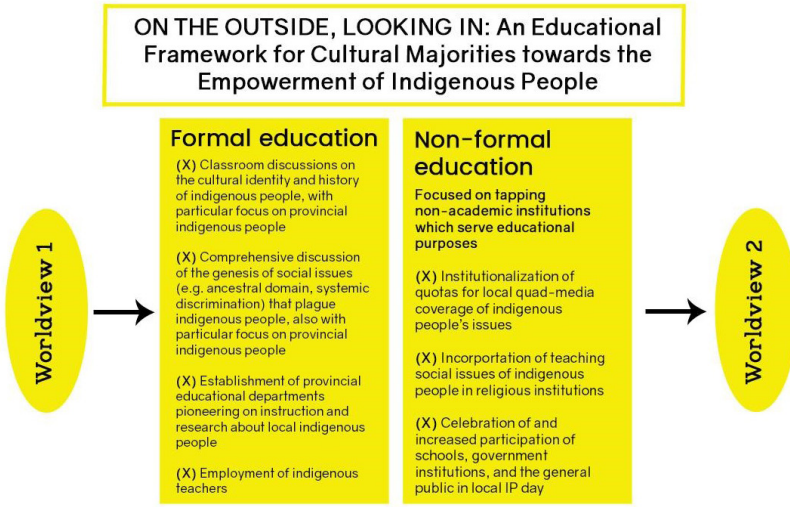

Figure 4. Educational framework for cultural majorities towards the empowerment of indigenous people.

Formal education

There is a need for mainstream and indigenous education to be reoriented to accommodate the nuanced customs and traditions of the culture, and to foster greater understanding and acceptance of them. In 2011, Department of Education Secretary Armin A. Luistro signed Department Order 62 s. of 2011, entitled "Adopting the National Indigenous Peoples (IP) Education Policy Framework," which aims to establish an educational system inclusive of the learning concerns of indigenous communities. Such argument is stipulated in Section 30 of the IPRA and Article 14 of the UNDRIP, which compel the State to give autonomy to indigenous groups over decisions pertinent to their educational system, primarily in terms of language and manner of instruction. Among the pillars of the department order are a rights-based approach in indigenous education, access to culturally appropriate pedagogy, content, assessment, learning

environment, teachers, and eradication of discrimination. This is a revolutionary attempt to make both indigenous cultural standpoints and DepEd standpoints in instruction converge for the benefit of indigenous students (DepEd, 2011).

In June 2016, the House of Representatives has approved an act mandating the teaching of Filipino-Muslim and indigenous history in basic and higher education. Senate Bill 3205, or the Integrated History Act of 2016, was seen as an initiative for a comprehensively inclusive study of the nation's history, which will involve the publication of new textbooks and materials with due consultations with experts on the additional topics.

While it is important to note that such initiative has been drafted and started to be implemented, there are a handful of considerations that need to be taken into account in order to more effectively carry out such educational initiative.

For one, the introduction of subjects or special topics must not be a blanket policy such that the same topics are discussed across all regions and provinces. There must be a careful nuancing of indigenous culture, history, and issues based on the situation of an IP group in area. While it seeks to delve into various indigenous groups across the country, the proposal suggests that there be specialization of scholastic discourse in provincial indigenous culture first. This change in perspective will pluck students out of a very general or monolithic view of indigenous issues and position them into a more realistic and community-oriented narrative of these groups.

In addition, there must be a comprehensive discussion of the cultural identity of indigenous groups, as well as an extensive academic exploration of the political struggles (e.g., land-grabbing and discrimination) that these cultural minorities face. This learning approach must look not only into their contemporary battles, but also into the deeper historical accounts which might have led to their current situation as a disenfranchised collective.

This community-centered point of view in learning gives students a richer view of their immediate communities as a take-off point for greater social action. It is espoused by the foundational principles of social studies even in the K to 12 curriculum, as evidenced by the structuration of first- and second-grade curricula to lean towards community-oriented and regionalist values.

Most importantly, there must be an establishment of local educational units or departments which specialize in the academic research on indigenous culture. In Mindoro, for instance, the co-existence of Mangyans and non-Mangyans would have been better had the latter been more conscious of the former who had been living in the island even before they settled there. In part, this failure has been a product of the lack of extensive local study which seeks to understand indigenous cultures in provinces. There are no courses offered in higher education which talk about the Mangyan people, more so in basic education. Furthermore, it was disappointing to mainly encounter existing literature about the Mangyans written by mostly foreign anthropologists or missionaries. In essence, these observations are indicative of a systemic undervaluation of the study of Mangyan people—and perhaps, other indigenous groups as well—in the academe, which this proposal seeks to counter.

Lastly, and perhaps more progressively, is the employment of indigenous teachers in the instruction of courses and special topics that concern their groups. Being able to grant representatives the opportunity to speak about their culture gives learning a certain level of depth and humanism, as discussions and examples in class are not hypothetical but these hit close to the educator's experience. By doing so, students will also have a higher incentive to explore and ask more about the cultural identity of and the conflicts faced by the indigenous group being studied out of their perceived credibility of the educator. The model also possibly addresses issues on job opportunity and financial security, especially for Mangyans who have already earned their college degrees.

Non-formal education

Education is no longer monolithic, as educating individuals may also take place outside the confines of a regular classroom (Dib, 1988; Cadiz, 2003). Hence, platforms like distance learning through radio and TV programs or correspondence learning via online courses (collectively referred to as non-formal education) and avenues like science fairs, exhibits, museums, posters, and leaflets (collectively referred to as informal education) may also be incorporated in the appropriation of education to combat discriminatory attitudes and practices.

While formal education focuses on learning occurring inside classrooms, non-formal and informal education take on learning that do not have to happen within a classroom setup. More specifically, non-formal education deals with media channels and platforms which may host a structured, modular, and systematic learning, such as TV shows, radio programs, and online courses. Informal education, on the other hand, focuses on unstructured forms of learning, which may take place through media platforms, like exhibits, posters, and leaflets.

For non-formal education, government policy concerning the use of quad-media in order to institute educational platforms to talk about indigenous issues may be explored. Quad-media, essentially, are the four dominant media platforms through which information is disseminated, namely, print, radio, television, and online media. These may be explored as possible avenues of broadcasting or publishing educational series in the form of shows, programs, or written modules which tackle issues concerning the Mangyan people, taking advantage of local viewership or readership.

To complement such educational interventions, there also needs to be greater press coverage of indigenous affairs to assimilate them into the mainstream agenda. Meadows (2005) argues that media space for indigenous journalism, which takes in the form of cultural journalistic practices, is too often isolationist, and needs to be integrated with mainstream media

in order to interact with the broader society and take positions on outside issues which influence them as well. As such, the view on indigenous journalism must not be perceived as an outlying microcosm of mainstream society journalism, but an offshoot, which is still connected to the mother journalistic base (Meadows, 2005). This bolsters the argument that even in the rise of indigenous media, mainstream coverage of their issues needs to be established, to inform the general public about these groups' growing concerns.

Cultural celebrations, like local indigenous people's day, may be looked at as opportunities for larger public engagement with indigenous people's practices and concerns, through the facilitation of celebratory programs and setting up of exhibits and museums. Clifford (1997, as cited in Witcomb, 2013) states, however, that in the creation of such public displays of indigenous exhibits, there must be "contact zones" between the creators, which mostly belong to cultural majorities, like Tagalogs, and indigenous groups. Contact zones allow for a more collaborative environment which seeks to make indigenous groups active individuals in the process of setting up these exhibits, and not only mere background entities from which cultural information and materials are extracted (Clifford, 1997, as cited in Wilcomb, 2013).

CONCLUSION

Many Mangyans in the island of Mindoro still experience discrimination from our own countrymen. Worse, discrimination happens with oppression in their supposedly ancestral domain. This long history of discrimination against and oppression of Mangyans by other Filipinos have to be dealt with. One of the many ways to address discrimination is through an emancipating cultural education, for both Mangyans and lowlanders. For the lowlanders in Mindoro and elsewhere, it is hoped that a profound understanding of historical, political, and socio-economic plight of Mangyans, through formal and informal cultural education, would one day make them advocates of Mangyan empowerment, instead of their oppressors.

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