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MIGRATION, EDUCATION AND THE CORDILLERA CULTURAL LANDSCAPE: MEMORIES, REFLECTIONS AND CHALLENGES¹

This paper and presentation is born out of the ongoing partnership between Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities (also called indigenous cultural communities in other literature) and Indigenous Peoples Apostolates (IPA) in different parts of the country. Given the specific focus of this conference on the Cordillera, experiences in the Cordillera region are highlighted.

IPAs are apostolates organized and overseen by bishops of the Catholic Church in their respective dioceses. These are generally mandated to be in solidarity with IP communities by being responsive to their needs and being a partner in reaching their aspirations. The Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (ECIP) is a commission of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) tasked to coordinate the efforts of IPAs nationwide.

INTRODUCTION

Our common notion or understanding of migration is the movement of people² from one place to another. However, it is not only people who ‘move’ in the process; with the movement of people is the movement too of their culture and way of life since this they inevitably bring with them. As the migrants interact with other people in the new locality and the bio-physical and socio-cultural dimensions of the locality itself, interaction of cultures, identities, and worldviews happens. This interaction has an impact on the identity of those involved both individually and collectively, and births competing perceptions and notions on the direction of cultural change. In the long run, the sense of identity developed and the perceptions and notions that dominate in the process of interaction will impact on the socio-economic decisions and policies designed, implemented and assented to. This last point we hope to elaborate on as this sharing develops.

¹ Sharing of the Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (ECIP) during the conference titled, “*The Faces and Challenges of Migration: The Cordillera Experience*”, held in Hotel Supreme Convention Plaza, Dec. 5, 2008

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_migration, accessed October 6, 2008

In the case of the Cordillera region, one major movement of peoples that has been happening since the early decades of the 20th century is the movement of youth from other provinces of the Cordillera and nearby regions into Baguio and Benguet because of the magnet of education. Some of them decide to settle; others return to their place of origin. Whichever choice they make, their stay in Baguio as students has, without question, contributed to their understanding of their identity and the identity of those they interacted with in Baguio-Benguet.

This sharing focuses on this particular group - the youth who come for education in Baguio-Benguet - and the following questions:

- What kind of educational experience was/is inculcated among the youth who have migrated to Baguio- Benguet and what cultural sensibilities did/do they absorb in their stay here in Baguio and more recently, Benguet?
- What cultures, identities and worldviews are interacting with the coming of the youth into Baguio-Benguet?
- What perceptions and notions about identity and cultural change do they bring with them after their years of education in the city?
- What are the impacts of these notions and perceptions that they have internalized on the cultural landscape of the Cordillera?

It would be much better if a more systematic study were done to elaborate on the questions raised above. For this conference's purposes, these questions will not be answered by a study but will be **experientially explored** through memories of the resource person³ who was born and raised in her early years in Baguio-Benguet, reflections on these and her experiences in interacting with 'lowlanders' and other cultural communities, and the reflections shared by participants during activities of ECIP in the Cordillera region over the past four years. From these reflections, some emerging challenges that call on us to respond will be enumerated, particularly in the arena of cultural change, identity formation and the impacts of these on the cultural landscape of the Cordillera.

MEMORIES: BAGUIO-BENGUET AS AN EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

As mentioned earlier, one of the major reasons for the migration of youth from various provinces to Baguio City - Benguet is because of what is perceived as greater "educational opportunities" in these localities. The disparity is seen especially at the tertiary level, and it is also for tertiary level education that many youth migrate to Baguio-Benguet. Based on the directory of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED)⁴ for 2008, the number of schools in the Cordillera provinces are as follows:

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⁴ http://www.ched.gov.ph/hei_dir/index.html, accessed Dec. 4, 2008

Province	No of tertiary schools
Abra	5
Apayao	2
Benguet	29 (19 in Baguio)
Ifugao	4
Kalinga	7
Mt. Province	3

This primary articulated reason for going to Baguio-Benguet for education also reveals a commonly held and deeply ingrained assumption: that education is equated to going to school or schooling.

To appreciate the more comprehensive influence of Baguio- Benguet as an **education environment**, it is necessary to expand the word education from the commonly held assumption of “education equals schooling”.

Education comes from the root word ‘educare’ which mean ‘bringing up or rearing’⁵. As applied to people, it is a process of acquiring competencies, a disposition in life, and other such necessary capacities for one to be a fully functional human being or person⁶. Education can be acquired in a variety of ways: formal, non-formal and informal⁷.

Formal education would involve enrolling in a school⁸. In non-formal and informal education, on the other hand, the education process also happens but not in the school setting⁹. In fact, informal education “ – is a lifelong process of learning by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences at home, at work, at play and from life itself.”¹⁰ These modes of education are not mutually exclusive and obviously, someone who goes to school is also educated informally by out-of-school experiences.

Clearly, education is not “equal to” schooling; education is a life process that happens beyond the school and it is in this sense that **education** is used in this sharing – as a process that involves technical, social-cultural, and identity formation. What kind of educational experience is inculcated and what cultural sensibilities did/do students absorb in their stay here in Baguio and more recently, Benguet? What “knowledge, skills attitudes and insights” did Baguio develop in the youth who studied/study here, especially given the mix of identities and worldviews?

To have a clearer appreciation of some reflections that emerged in response to these questions, it is first necessary to appreciate several key motifs of Baguio-Benguet as an education environment.

⁵ <http://etext.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dv2-08>, accessed June 18, 2006

⁶ see 5

⁷ Talk of Dr. Carolina S. Guerro, Director, Bureau of Alternative Learning Systems (BALS) titled, “*The Other Side of Basic Education*” during the IP Curriculum Validation Gathering, June 24, 2005, Richeville Hotel, Mandaluyong

⁸ see 7

⁹ see 7

¹⁰ http://www.lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2001/ra_9155_2001.html, accessed Dec 4, 2008

- The kind of formal education that developed in the Cordillera in general was born out of the underpinning idea of Americans civilizing the ‘pagan savages’ of these mountains¹¹. In no other place was this highly exemplified than in Baguio City where an intermediate school was one of the first institutions to be established by the Americans before 1910. Schools were also established in remoter areas of the region both by the American government and church groups, both Protestant and Catholic. Students who finished in these elementary and high schools in remoter areas ventured to go to Baguio City for tertiary or high school education. The interplay of religion and schools in “civilizing the pagans” can be seen in this historical dynamic.
- The regional cultures have been heavily influenced by American sensibilities, symbols, meanings and ideals particularly in Baguio City which was and continues to be the hub of this influence in Northern Luzon. Some manifestations of these are the following:
 - no fiesta the way it is being done in the lowlands
 - Holy Week religious manifestations do not include the Sta. Cruzan or Flores de Mayo which are popular in the lowlands
 - English as a regional language aside from Ilocano is very pronounced
 - Cowboy – cowgirl image (boots, hat, horses, etc)
 - Country music as one of the very popular music genres in the Cordillera
 - Education as the way out of poverty and one’s ticket to success; one makes one’s destiny
- In the minds of many lowlanders, Baguio was the tourist destination that was the closest local experience of a “White Christmas” – pine trees, mistletoe, cool air, frost, fog, etc. Baguio has the image of being the place where one can have the closest experience of the American way of life - log cabins, fireplace, vegetable salads, etc. Baguio was not just any tourist destination; it was a haven too of foreigners and to interact with foreigners was a common experience.
- Together with the image of experiencing the American way of life in Baguio was the equally pervading idea of “seeing the Igorots” in Baguio. Inherent in this idea is the strangeness or differentness of the Igorots and their being curiosities which was can be seen in Baguio.
- Baguio also represented for Cordillerans the urban set-up and way of life, an example of the success of the western paradigm of development including the idea that a “backward” and “native” way of life can be transformed into modernity.
- Of course, the presence of the local ethnic groups colored all of the above – we were and are here, the dominant population, and our sensibilities as a people was firmly woven into Baguio life- and our simplicity and “ruggedness” continued to be a very distinct mark that even modernity could not just easily erode.

These key motifs were part of the socio-cultural ‘air’ that shaped the consciousness of and educated the youth who came to Baguio to study. Coming from varying provinces, they also brought with them their own cultures and identities that interacted not only with these motifs but also with each other. What cultures, identities and worldviews are interacting as youth come to Baguio-Benguet for education?

Three descriptive interactions seem to predominate:

¹¹ Fry, Howard T. 2006. A History of the Mountain Province. pp. 63-69, 88-89

- *uplander meets lowlander*
The notions of uplander and lowlander are categories many from the Cordillera grow up with. **Uplander** would refer to members of ethnic groups of the Cordillera and those from outside the Cordillera but have been raised in the region, while **lowlander** would refer to those who came from provinces outside the Cordillera. Uplander would usually be associated with “natives” and the images and connotations that went with this term, while lowlander would usually be associated with “civilization”, being familiar with the modern, being more “advanced.”
- *Interaction among various Cordillera cultural communities*
Coming to Baguio for schooling became a point of interaction of various cultural communities or “tribes” of the Cordillera. Inevitably, youth from these various communities had to identify themselves according to their ‘tribes’ – Ibaloi, Kankanaey, Kalinga, etc and identity definition became a more conscious process.
- *In the more recent decades, studying in Baguio has also meant interacting with youth from other nationalities.*

Clearly, Baguio City has always played and continues to play a key role in the interaction of cultures and identities and in the formation of the consciousness of the indigenous youth in relation to their culture and identity. Also formed are lowland youth’s perceptions about and interactions with indigenous youth, and these perceptions inevitably are shared to their kababayans and thus reinforce or challenge prevailing stereotypes about the “natives” or “mountain people”. Since IP youth who study in Baguio later on became influential in their own localities, the consciousness that is inculcated in them inevitably influences the shaping of the cultural landscape of the Cordillera, its economy and politics, and how these are communicated to others.

REFLECTIONS ON IDENTITY AND CULTURAL FORMATION FROM THE BAGUIO CITY EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

Given these key motifs and the key identity and cultural interactions mentioned above, the following question can next be explored:

- What perceptions and notions about identity and cultural change have been formed in students after their years of education in the city?
Sub-questions could include the following:
 - How is being educated in Baguio shaping the identity of indigenous youth of the region and how they relate with ‘lowlanders’ of the country and peoples from other parts of the world? What kinds of cultural changes will they bring about when they go home to their localities because of their education in Baguio?
 - How is being educated in Baguio shaping the interaction of the various IP youth in the region and their views about being indigenous?
 - How is being educated in Baguio shaping the interaction of the local ethnic groups and the formation of a Cordillera sensibility?

These questions were and continue to be points of reflection during trainings, consultations and other gatherings of ECIP and its partners for the past four years in the Cordillera¹². In these gatherings, participants who come from various generations ranging from their 20s to 60s and who have studied in Baguio during their college years have shared their reflections in relation to the questions above, particularly, identity formation and perception, and cultural interaction.

Identity formation among IP youth

For those indigenous to the region, their sense of self and identity changed through time, and as a consequence, their general stance too in interacting with other Filipinos:

- *wanting to assimilate (dominantly felt in the 50s and 60s)*
IP youth who were college students in the 50s and 60s strongly felt the pressure and need to assimilate to be accepted, to prove that they too can be part of mainstream society. The underlying assumption runs in consonance with the theme of “civilizing the native” and the view that the indigenous way of life and being ‘native’ which is uncivilized and backward is to be outgrown and left behind so that the mainstream, lowland way of life was to be embraced. Lowland ways were thus to be actively studied and emulated.
- *covert inferiority (dominantly felt in the late 60s and 70s)*
There was a growing consciousness of owning one’s being an “Igorot” and being a “native” with the dominant theme of proving one’s self in one’s endeavors. For those studying at that time, academic and professional achievement became a goal not only for its practical benefits but also to prove that Igorots are also as intelligent and as capable as the lowlanders, or even better. Thus, the basis for one’s pride in being an Igorot and one’s personhood was one’s proven competency, position secured and professional achievements/accomplishments. This, theme, however, is a covert form of inferiority for its underlying assumption is that the standard for achievement and performance is still the one set by mainstream society (roughly equated with the lowlands and the lowlander) and the native is by nature below this standard but can redeem is/her personhood by performing well to meet the standard. Inferiority is still implied in this stance. Also, a relationship of competition with other peoples is implied since one had to compete to prove one’s self and one’s worth as a person.
- *identity as seen through the tourist lens (emerged strongly in the late 70s to 80s, still visible today)*
The stress on “culture” during the Marcos decades and the increased boom of tourism in the 70s and 80s brought to the fore the need to market and advertize the country’s tourist spots more vigorously. In the case of Baguio City, the presence of “Igorots” in the city and region was made a selling point, articulated as part of the unique ‘culture’ of the highlands/uplands. The highlighted definition of culture was the crafts and arts – weaving, dances, musical instruments, pottery, etc – that were commodified and made part of the tourist trade. This

¹² Activities held in the Northern Luzon region from which reflections were gathered were the following: Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP)-Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) Regional Assembly, August 14-15, 2006; Northern Luzon ECIP Consultation, February 12-13, 2007; Northern Luzon IP Education Consultation, April 16-17, 2007; Cultural Process Research Training for selected faculty of St. Louis Center, Baguio City, November 16-18, 2007; Cultural Process Research Training for selected faculty of the diocesan schools of the Diocese of Baguio-Benguet, Baguio City, April 10-12, 2008; Northern Luzon Consultation for IP Education, August 29-30, 2008

went as far as commodifying sacred artifacts and even sacred practices (an example would be making rituals a show).

Thus, one emerging dominant theme on the minds of the IP youth who were studying in Baguio City at that time was equating culture with the arts and crafts – knowing how to dance, to play instruments, to perform something “native” during programs and intermission numbers, etc.

The owning of one’s indigenous or ‘native’ identity was in the form of knowing the arts and crafts of one’s “tribe”. One’s sense of indigenous identity was thus defined by the tourist lens – ethnicity as a uniqueness to highlight marketability and showcase value, cultural products as potential commodities to be traded.

- *assertion of identity, heritage and history (emerged significantly in the early 80s, gaining ground until today)*

Overlapping with the tourist boom was the emergence of fundamental issues and concerns in the Cordillera region that touched on indigenous heritage and history. A defining concern was ancestral land and the concrete issue was the construction of Chico Dam whose major consequences were the displacement of several towns and the destruction of the culture and way of life of the peoples affected. This became a rallying point and catalyst of reflection on indigenous history, heritage and identity.

While the main geographical area of contention was in Kalinga province, the issue could not but be discussed in the academe and thus, the debates and reflections on indigenous history, heritage and identity became more pronounced in Baguio City, the academic capital of the region. Write-ups that spoke from an indigenous perspective and were previously on the margins became extra readings of students, and in time, a consciousness that asserted indigenous identity based on a rereading of Philippine history and revaluing of ancestral heritage emerged significantly in the late 70s and the 80s and continues on until today. This consciousness, being rooted in a rereading of Philippine history, inevitably clarified the relationship of “Igorots” with other Filipinos. It stressed the solidarity of the indigenous peoples with other indigenous peoples in the country, and also with other marginalized groups of Philippine society.

As mentioned earlier, the meeting of IP youth from various cultural communities in the region also brought about a more conscious effort for specific self-definition and identity articulation. Since the word “Igorot” was introduced by the Spanish as a blanket term for all peoples who lived in the Cordillera region, this term was not the natural reference point when peoples of the Cordillera met. IP youth in Baguio, when interacting among themselves and other classmates, tended to identify themselves based on the ethnic group they belonged to – Kankanaey, Kalanguya, Tuali, Ibaloi, etc. “Igorot” as an identity marker was usually assented to or used when interacting with a group that was not familiar with any other term except that, but even then, they would sometimes stress the name of their particular cultural community.

Aside from the tendency to be more definitive about one’s cultural identity, IP youth who studied in Baguio also got acquainted with each other’s cultural peculiarities and particularities. While it may have sometimes led to stereotyping, it also brought about a heightened sense of one’s specific identity (not just “Igorot”) and its ownership.

While differentiation of identities was happening among Cordillera IP youth in Baguio City, this did not prevent them from also consolidating themselves, from recognizing that they had a unique point of convergence –being “natives” or indigenous - that was not shared even with their classmates or friends who were uplanders but of lowland roots. A concrete manifestation of this was the formation of the student organization popularly known in the Cordillera as BIBAK (Benguet, Ifugao, Bontoc, Apayao, Abra, Kalinga)¹³ whose members are all indigenous youth and which had and continues to have chapters in the various universities in Baguio and Benguet. Originally named BIBKA in 1940 and reorganized and named BIBAK in 1950¹⁴, BIBAK shows that there was a growing consciousness among IP youth in the region to become consolidated and to be in solidarity with each other.

Perceptions and relational dynamics of upland settlers with IP youth

For those of lowland roots but who were raised in the Cordillera and studied in Baguio City – Benguet during their college years, their interaction with their indigenous contemporaries were largely marked by respect and understanding, a sense of solidarity with the “mountain people” and a deep affinity for the Cordilleras as home. This was inevitable since they grew up with “native” friends and playmates and even interacted with their families. For some, it even went as far as “feeling IP na rin”, and having a sense of shared heritage and history.

For most settlers who grew up in the region, relating with their indigenous contemporaries was on equal footing while recognizing cultural particularities.

Perceptions and relational dynamics of lowland youth with IP youth

For those who came from nearby lowland provinces to study in Baguio, dominant perceptions about the natives also changed through the decades.

In the 50s and 60s, the dominant view after meeting co-students and professionals who were IPs was “*civilized na rin sila*”. This they would express to relatives and friends who asked them about “those Igorots”.

Through the decades, this further deepened to a respect and understanding of the peoples and their cultures, a growing sense of solidarity, appreciating them as peoples and not as cultural commodities, and the willingness to engage the challenges of cross-cultural differences. A concrete expression of the last point was increased marriages between lowlanders and “Igorots” even if the relatives of the lowlanders reacted against the choice because of discriminatory views.

In the 50s and 60s, the view “*civilized na rin sila*” assumed that it was the IPs who should change their ways and assimilate themselves into mainstream society. This changed in time to a growing respect for indigenous identity and culture and its assertion to be practiced even if there

¹³ from <http://bibak.org/>, accessed January 9, 2009

¹⁴ as shared on January 9, 2009 by Mr. Joeference Yangyang, President, BIBAK-Benguet State University, SY 2008-2009

was still an underlying if unspoken assumption that indigenous ways are primitive and backward and the way to go is towards modernity.

**MIGRATION AND EDUCATION:
IMPACTS ON THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF THE CORDILLERA**

What are the impacts of these notions and perceptions internalized by students during their education experience in Baguio on the cultural landscape of the Cordillera?

Inevitably, the perceptions and consciousness about identity and culture formed in indigenous students during their stay in Baguio find their way to various localities in the region when the students return to their places and communities of origin. As they become major players and influential decision-makers in their communities, their suggestions in community affairs - whether in the social, political or economic arena - will be colored by these perceptions and consciousness about identity and culture. What makes the weight of their opinions even heavier is the perception that the “educated one knows”.

Will the community justice system still be used to settle a dispute or will the dispute be brought to court? Can we sell sacred artifacts? Will we plant rice on the terraces or outflow? Do we teach our children the local language or not? Should the elders’ opinions matter given that there is an elected barangay council?

Answers to these and many other community questions cannot be reached without factoring in one’s view and consciousness about identity and heritage.

- If one is of the view that IP identity and heritage is backward, then the case should be settled in court; sacred artifacts are no longer sacred and can be sold (in other cases, they are to be thrown or abandoned); we should plant what is the most income-generating cash crop; the local language is less important than English and Filipino; and there is no need to include the opinions of elders.
- If one is of the view that indigenous culture should be showcased, then the dispute should be settled in court but the community justice system could be role-played during cultural shows; sacred artifacts are no longer sacred and can be mass produced and made a commodity; terraces should be a tourist spot; the chants and songs should be memorized so that it can be performed (instead of appreciating the value of one’s language first); elders can be made to role-play how they used to meet in the ato or dap-ay.
- If one’s consciousness has been influenced by efforts to be rerooted in one’s culture, heritage and history, then the appropriate process (whether to use the community justice system or the mainstream system or a combination) given the kind of dispute will be considered; sacred artifacts should not be sold and should be re-understood for their meanings and symbolic value for the community; the local agricultural economy should be given space to flourish; local language should be taught to the children side by side with regional and national languages; elders views will be given space in community decisions.

Which consciousness is the more dominant influence at the moment in the region is hard to definitely conclude. There is no doubt however, that we see manifestations of the influences of these various perspectives in activities at the community level, and policies and directions taken by local government units. What is more important, however, is to appreciate the reality that Baguio City as an education environment and a locality marked by youth migration has this unique influence and impact in the Cordillera region. This impact should be examined consciously and reflected upon.

CHALLENGES FOR BAGUIO CITY AS AN EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT FOR THE NEXT 100 YEARS:

As Baguio City enters its centennial, recognizing its significance as a meeting point of cultures and a formator of cultural consciousness especially among the youth who have sojourned in its hills should be given its proper and appropriate attention. From this unique feature, Baguio City's key players can reflect on whether Baguio's role has indeed been nurturing of cultural integrity and the valuing of cultural heritage, history and identity.

Baguio City, being part of the Cordillera mountains and being fed by the lifeblood of the Cordillera people, needs to reflect too on its legacy over the past 100 years in the region. Have the directions and articulated visions of the City through the decades been faithful to the dreams and aspirations of our ancestors and to the soul of our cultures?

From an indigenous perspective, the struggle and journey of IPs since the colonial times has been and continues to be towards the assertion of identity, heritage and history. How has Baguio City contributed to this?

With these as preliminary points of reflection, Baguio City in the next 100 years can hopefully be better clarified: what can be done so that in the next 100 years Baguio City becomes an education environment that -

- inculcates among IP youth a deeper sense of rootedness in their culture, heritage, history and identity?
- will make our deeper sense of identity, heritage and history our basis for the development directions our youth will dream of and imagine in our localities?
- communicates that cultural communities in the region are PEOPLE, not products or exhibits or entertainment or exotica?
- articulates indigenous identity not from the lens of others but from our lens?
- contributes to the region's growing sense of being Cordillera?
- contributes to the healthy dialogue between Cordillera cultural communities and the rest of the world?

These are some of the questions that this sharing hopes to make as points of reflection and action as Baguio City looks back at 100 years of existence and forward to another century of meaningful existence.