

Socio-Political Interaction of Mangyan (Alangan) with the Lowland People (City People) of Mindoro¹

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ABSTRACT

The study looked at how the Mangyans, specifically the Alangan tribe, interacted with the lowland people (city people) of Mindoro. It showed how the enclosed society of the Alangan in the upland area of Mindoro was penetrated and affected by the different concepts of the city people. The data needed for this research was primarily done through participant observation method and interviews with selected members of the tribe. Results indicated that even in an enclosed society like the Alangan tribe, politicization was inevitable. Like the lowlanders, Mangyans also give special favors to people they are indebted to. In fact, they would even sacrifice their tribe's beliefs or culture just to please the lowlander-benefactors. Moreover, their way of life had also revealed influences from the lowland. Some Mangyans had assimilated the ways of the Tagalogs, giving importance to material possessions like money, while some, according to them, had become arrogant and boastful like the Tagalogs. There might be logical reason to assume that the same could be true with the other Mangyan tribes given that they also interact with the lowlanders.

Key Words: Alangan tribe, Mangyan, politicization, Mindoro

The politicization of things has been a major facet of different systems in and around the world. From the international set up of world politics to the local hierarchy of tribes, politicization has always been present. Multiple studies directed to understand the workings of politicization were made; however, the essence of its phenomenal threat has never been fully scrutinized.

According to Gates (1992), "Politicization can manifest itself in many ways, but in each case, it boils down to the same essential element: Almost all agree that it involves deliberately distorting analysis or judgment to favor a preferred line of thinking irrespective of evidence." The above statement implies that politicization is something that has been present in almost all facets of politics and solutions cannot be provided instantaneously neither can preventive course of actions alleviate the ill effects of such phenomenon. In addition, the statement

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collectively indicates that most people, scholars and experts alike share the same connotation about politicization whose essential meaning has something to do with the deliberate distortion of judgment that favors a line of thinking.

Another aspect of understanding politicization is the fact that it also cuts across even the most ordinary circumstance in a person's life. "Most consider classic politicization to be only that which occurs if products are forced to conform to policy maker's view. A number believe politicization also results from management pressure to define and drive certain lines of analysis and substantive viewpoints" (Gates, 1992). The statement clearly points out that the phenomenon of politicization goes beyond politics as it is likewise felt in the vast array of realities in the modalities of human existence.

Given the definition of politicization, the next question to be asked is what causes politicization to take place? According to Rixen (2010), "from a society-centered perspective it has been argued that the process of socio economic development and modernization triggers politicization, first on the national, and eventually on a global level. It is a bottom-up story and it has its roots in society, and is carried "upwards" to the political system. Two complementary hypotheses can be distinguished; one pointing at the importance of interdependence, the other focusing on the opportunity structures provided by civil society organizations." This statement would help us to trace the roots of politicization and can also provide us with a hint as to how this can be prevented. However, the circumstance might give some discrepancy, thus making it again difficult to provide solutions in the problem of politicization.

Alangan Tribe

Many studies have been directed towards the Mangyans; however, there has not been a formal study that looks at the Alangan tribe of the Mangyans. The Alangan tribe is one of the many Mangyan ethnic groups. They live in the wide area around Mt. Halcon. The tribe occupies the northern part of Occidental and Oriental Mindoro.

People of the Alangan tribe are medium-built, with round face, and long, straight hair (Oracle Education Foundation, n.d.). The women traditionally wear a skirt called *linge*. This is made of long strips of woven nito (forest vines), and worn around the abdomen. This is worn together with the g-string called *abayen*. The upper covering is called *ulango*, made from the leaf of the wild buri palm. Sometimes a red kerchief called *limbutong* is worn over the *ulango*. The men wear g-strings with fringes in front (Mangyan Heritage Center, n.d.).

The economic life of the Alangan tribe is primarily based on the upland agriculture or commonly known as the *kaingin* system². The Alangan Mangyans practice swidden farming, which consists of eleven stages. Two of them are the firebreak-making (*agait*) and the fallowing (*agpagamas*). A firebreak is made so the fire will not go beyond the swidden site where the vegetation is thoroughly dry and ready for burning. Two years after clearing, cultivation of the swidden is normally stopped and the site is allowed to revert back to forest (Quiaoit, 1997).

Mangyans are also known for betel nut chewing (also known as “nganga”) (Leykamm, 1979). They chew the betel nut with great fervor from morning to night because this makes them not to feel hungry.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Tribes have been known to be a closed part of society that is not usually penetrated by different ideologies and beliefs. However, this connotation is about to be challenged. This study aimed to look into the concept of politicization among the Alangan³ Mangyans.

Specifically, the following will be looked into:

- The political structure of the Alangan tribe;
- The interactions taking place between the Alangans and the lowland people (city people) of Calapan, Mindoro;
- The internal interaction of the Mangyans with fellow Mangyans;
- The influences of the political structure of the Alangans both to the Mangyans (Alangan tribe) and to the lowland people of Mindoro.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A survey of existing literature showed that there was no direct account about politicization however; its process may be extracted through careful analysis of previous data. The majority of literature written about the Alangan focused on their culture (Banta, 1985; Quiaoit, 1997; Mariquina, 2001), history (Helbling and Schult, 2004; Javier, 1987), society (Banta, 1985; Quiaoit, 1997), economy (Banta,

² The Tagalog term *kaingin* is used to describe the upland farming systems in several Filipino languages. Olofson (1980) notes ‘there is utter confusion in the use of the term’, which is also used to refer to permanent hillside farming. This study explores farmers’ own interpretations of *kaingin* and words from their own language, Cebuano, is used as the key to understanding their farming system.

³ The Alangan of Mangyan here will only include the Areas of Banilad, Sanguilen, and Quilingon.

1985; Caraan, 2001; Lopez-Gonzaga, 1983) and politics (Kikuchi, 1984; Kikuchi in Kikuchi, 1989; Banta, 1985; Helbling in Kikuchi, 1989).

Banta (1985) looked at the “effects of changes on the socio-cultural and economic life of the Mangyan Alangan as brought about by changes introduced by the government and the religious missions.” She also compared the “traditional” Alangan and the “marginal” Alangan in terms of: (1) “the *community* that included their settlement patterns and physical environment, political life (structure, leadership, laws and external relations), social life, interfamily relationships, socialization and communication, economic life, and other cultural aspects, such as religious life and amusements; and (2) the *Family* that discussed their physical setting, intra-family relationships, kinship, family beliefs and customs, property and ownership, decision making, and leisure (Banta, 1985).” According to Banta (1985), the impact of changes on socio-cultural life led to: (1) “change of indigenous settlement of the community (*balay-lakoy* to individual household units); (2) change of location of residence (from interior mountain site to lowland); (3) introduction of a foreign organized religion into the new settlement; and (4) transformation of indigenous political structure to the government introduced concept of a barangay.” Furthermore, she concluded that the impact of changes in indigenous political leadership led to: (1) “change in who qualifies as the top leaders of the community; (2) change in who selects and the manner of election; and (3) change in the leaders’ function and responsibilities which indicate the level of involvement the leaders have with the people and how intense the people interact and support him (Banta, 1985).”

Another comparative study of the traditional Alangan and the “acculturated⁴” Alangan was that of Quiaoit’s (1997) socio-economic study of the Mangyan Alangan. Quiaoit (1997) did a descriptive and ethnographic study on the “changes in the patterns of the man-land relationship” of the Mangyan Alangan, that of the traditional community and an “acculturated” community. The author also differentiated the “traditional” community practicing “swidden cultivation” from an acculturated one oriented towards “sedentary farming.” The study also compared: the “ideo-religious⁵”; socio-political⁶ and economic⁷ aspects. The study concluded that in the traditional community, “belief in the spirits and preservation of the natural environment are closely interrelated and effectively filter out possible outside social influences” while in the acculturated community, the “presence of adjacent lowlander communities, government land

⁴ Marginal Alangan in terms of Banta’s definition.

⁵ land rituals, taboos, sacred grounds

⁶ land ownership and regulation

⁷ subsistence activities and plant and animal life utilized

regulations, the cash economy and the presence of religious missionaries have, over the years, brought about the alteration of the natural environment and adaptive modifications in land concepts and practices (Quiaoit, 1997).” These are all concrete instances of politicization as the shift from “what used to be Alangan in practice,” evolved into “what lowlanders practice and observe” as the tribe slowly became subservient into the lowlanders practices.

A more culture-centered study is that of Mariquina’s cultural documentation of the Alangan in Paitan. Mariquina (2001) provided a description of the culture and the arts of the Mangyan Alangan including their indigenous architecture, indigenous costumes, indigenous accessories, the *balanan*, traditional celebrations, music and dance, myths and stories. The study also described the swidden agriculture practiced by the Mangyan Alangan which served as the guide in studying the culture of the Mangyan Alangan (Mariquina, 2001).

In terms of historical study of Alangan, the most recent is that done by Helbling and Schult (2004). Helbling and Schult (2004) described the Mangyan Alangans’ “survival strategies” through tracing the history of the Mangyan Alangan since pre-colonial times until the post-EDSA period. Helbling and Schult (2004) also provided a snapshot history of Mangyan relations between lowlanders and missionaries. They argued that the peacefulness of the Mangyans was “the result of a relation to the neighbouring population being politically and militarily far superior in the lowland...which evolved in pre-colonial times (and)... became more accentuated in the early Spanish times.” During colonial times, the Mangyans stayed outside Spanish control and were called “*Manguianes infieles* (Helbling & Schult, 2004).” Even when the Spanish colonizers forced the Mangyan to settle in the plains or lowlands, the Mangyans “reacted with withdrawal and retreat, the same pattern of reaction as to attacks and other threats from the lowlands (Helbling & Schult, 2004).” According to Helbling and Schult (2004), this was the recurring reaction pattern of the Mangyans throughout Philippine history starting from the Moro attacks, the Philippine war of independence against Spain and later to the United States of America and even during the Japanese invasion in the Second World War.

In terms of a socio-economic development study, Caraan (2001) compared the indigenous (Mangyan Alangan) and state-sponsored systems of community based rattan utilization and management⁸ (Caraan, 2001). Caraan (2001) also mentioned the importance of rattan as a source of livelihood for the Mangyan Alangan in Oriental Mindoro. It was concluded that: “the infringement of state

⁸ i.e. actors and the social organization of activities in each system

policy caused changes in rattan utilization and management behavior and the dissolution of the indigenous knowledge, practices and systems on rattan,” and that “rattan depletion is a political economic issue since it involves the market, the state and the Alangan Mangyan as direct-land-use decision makers (Caraan, 2001).”

Studies on the indigenous political structure and organization and kinship of the Mangyan Alangan politics were conducted by Kikuchi and Helbling (in Kikuchi, 1989). Kikuchi’s theses on ethnic relations among the Mangyan Alangan and the emergence of the formal political leaders and local kin group in the societies which have no unilineal descent group were established in separate articles in different publications. One focused on the Paitan and Bugayan group of the Mangyan Alangan and the examination of the “emergence of the pan-Alangan association (Kikuchi, 1984)” while the other focused on the emergence of formal political leadership in bilateral or non-unilineal societies in both the Alangan and Batangan (or *Taubud*) tribes (Kikuchi, 1989). Helbling’s (2004), on the other hand, looked at the “relation between kinship as the basis of political culture and politics⁹ and the reproduction of the local group as a political unit (Helbling & Schult, 2004).” Kikuchi (1989) concluded that there is “a close and definite connection between kin segments and political factions as well as the relevance of the political ideology for the political relations.”

From the different literature mentioned above, we can see the variety of studies done about the Alangan Mangyan. However, there has been no direct study¹⁰, as to how the phenomenon of politicization is absorbed in a closed structure such as the Alangan tribe.

METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative study, as defined by Shank, in Ospina (2004), “is a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning. By systematic, it means “planned, ordered and public”, following rules agreed upon by members of the qualitative research community. By empirical, it means that this type of inquiry is grounded in the world of experience. Inquiry into meaning, according to Shank (2002), implies that researchers try to understand how others make sense of their experience (Ospina, 2004).”

Given the degree of difficulty in dealing with the subject of the study, the qualitative form of data gathering was deemed to be an appropriate tool in collecting data. It utilized key-informant interviews, participant observation, and feedback forms.

⁹ authority and factionalization

¹⁰ But there are data wherein the phenomenon of politicization can be extracted.

The interviews were conducted at the following immersion sites: *Banilad, Sanguilen, and Quilingon.*

The interviews were conducted with two groups of participants: the Mangyans and the non-Mangyans who had close interaction with the tribe people. At least four (4) households¹¹ from the Mangyan group participated in the interview. These were the tribe's elders and the so-called "council of elders"¹². Interviews with non-Mangyans included people that constantly interact¹³ with the Mangyans. Other informal interviews were also conducted from people in the city proper who have interactions with the Alangans.

The goals of the interviews, observations and feedbacks were to gain insights into the tribe's attitudes, behaviors, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture and lifestyles. The data that came from the different methods were collated into themes so as to facilitate the extraction of meaning and valuable information. The process of collecting and analyzing this unstructured information could be messy and time consuming, thus it constitutes as the limitation of the study. However, the first hand data collected which provided for a more comprehensive and straightforward analysis of the phenomenon of politicization is considered as one of the study's strengths.

This research further explored a phenomenon called "influence" which is rarely given attention to by academicians. It added rich details and valuable insights to the analysis of politicization. Moreover, the attempt to "understand" this phenomenon based on the perspective of the actors involved rather than merely taking into account an outsider's point of view led to a more substantiated discussion and evaluation of politicization. Finally, attempting to prove that the complexity of "influence" is not limited to the political perspective of events but extends to the general scheme of things around us might be difficult but it can provide a new lens in understanding the circumstances surrounding politicization.

RESULTS

This section discussed the results of the immersion with the Alang Mangyan and interviews with selected people from the tribe and the lowlanders who interacted with them.

¹¹ Interview with the Mangyan is composed of at least 4 household because given the small number of people living within the said area interview with the household is better and will provide a substantial response from the Mangyans.

¹² The council of elders which refer to the group of previous leaders of the tribe.

¹³ People from the Mangyan Mission, Mangyan Heritage, and SVD Missionaries.

Demographics

The latest census conducted among the Mangyans by the ASSI Foundation (2005) indicated a total population of approximately 60,000¹⁴. In terms of the Alangan tribe, the population distribution is as follows:

Table 1
Population Distribution of Alangan Tribe in Oriental Mindoro

Town	Population
Baco	1787
Naujan	4270
Victoria	367
TOTAL	6424

The table shows the distribution of the Alangan population in three (3) different towns. Naujan is the area most populated by the Alangan Mangyans since their tribe originates from that town. Though they are all Mangyans, they tend to separate themselves from others and form a homogeneous group joined in by tribe members with similar background, interests, preferences, culture, and the like. This explains why the majority of Alangans reside in the town of Naujan.

Alangan

Etymology of the term

The Alangan Mangyans are found within the municipalities of Naujan, Baco, San Teodoro, and Victoria in Oriental Mindoro, and in the municipality of Sablayan in Occidental Mindoro. The name Alangan was derived from the name of a river and mountain slopes in the upper Alangan Valley.

¹⁴ The total population based on their last census. This only shows those that have been part of the census.

Hierarchy of Leaders/Rulers

In terms of the political structure, the Alangan Mangyans are related to the individual communal house. This is the basic socio-political unit. It consists of several families, all kins to the leader of the communal house¹⁵. For each *balay-lakoy*, there is a council of elders called *aplaki* headed by one of them. The *aplaki* members are usually four in number corresponding to the four corners of the house. Two other members of the political structure are the *polis* and the *sarhento*¹⁶.

As the basic socio-political unit in the traditional world of Alangan Mangyans, *balay-lakoy* serves as the primary planning and implementing unit of the people's activities. It attends to the needs, requests and complaints of the members of the *balay-lakoy*.

The Leader Aplaki

There are no standard rules for the recruitment of the *aplaki* in the traditional world of the Alangan Mangyans. However, they seek a leader who at least has the following qualifications: 1) wealthy in terms of cultivated land i.e., land that has been cleared for cultivation; 2) old or one who is already a grandfather; 3) has experience in dealing with people particularly in settling disputes within the *balay-lakoy*.

The leader *aplaki* is selected by the people in the *balay-lakoy*. There must be a general consent from the members before one becomes an *aplaki*. There is no fixed term of office for the leader-*aplaki*. In the event that the leader-*aplaki* dies, gets physically incapacitated or voluntarily resigns, his eldest son will take his position, with the approval of the members in the *balay-lakoy*. In case he has no son, a relative considered to be a good man takes the position provided that the members like him. If this is still not possible, any *aplaki* member can be selected by fellow members with the consent of the people in the *balay-lakoy*.

The leader-*aplaki* in the *balay-lakoy* may be suspended or removed from office on any of the following grounds; 1) violation of Alangan laws; 2) abuse of authority; and 3) proven guilty of complaints against him such as dishonesty and oppression.

The leader-*aplaki*, being head of the *balay-lakoy*, implements laws. He has the following responsibilities:

- enforces all the traditional laws of the tribe;
- negotiates on behalf of the people in his *balay-lakoy*;

¹⁵ This can be likened to the lowlanders very close family ties/extended families.

¹⁶ Looking at these two terms we can clearly see that there is a direct similarity with the lowlanders' term towards their authorities.

- maintains peace and order within the *balay-lakoy*;
- presides over the meetings of the *aplaki* members in the *balay-lakoy*
- commands the youth to plant and to harvest;
- acts sometimes as medicine man (*balaonan*);
- decides whether a stranger will be permitted to enter the house;
- executes punishments to violators of the law;
- manages and supervises the distribution of the harvest to the people in the *balay-lakoy*;
- performs *kaingin* rituals (*agdipa*);
- takes charge of the general welfare of the members of the *balay-lakoy* like in time of sickness and famine;
- weaves “side-kit” and *birao* to be used during harvest time;
- allocates space for each nuclear family in the *balay-lakoy*;
- asks members to contribute food for visitors; and
- acts as *taong-bahay* when the rest of the family is out in the fields.

The leader-*aplaki* in the *balay-lakoy* does not receive any monetary compensation. However, he is entitled to the following privileges: receives the biggest portion from the harvest of the *kabataan* (families); receives things he needs like blanket, bolo (*pisaw*), ax (*wasay*) and firewood (*ragaw*) from the *kabataan* (families), and; is exempted from working in the fields.

Aplaki Members

Like the leader-*aplaki*, there are no standard rules in choosing the members of the *aplaki*. However, one important qualification of an *aplaki* member is that he/she should not only be knowledgeable in issues in the society but should also be experienced in decision making. In other words, to be a member of the *aplaki*, one should be old and matured enough. They believed that the older one gets, the more experienced and knowledgeable one becomes as his/her experiences make him/her well-informed.

From our perspective, their criteria for choosing members of the *aplaki* seemed too limited because the basis was mere experience but after living with them, we clearly understood their logic. Experience

proved to be a very important aspect of their culture because it is how they learn the majority of the things they need in life.

Procedural Process of Trial/Decision-Making

One of the outstanding aspects of Mangyan society is its peacefulness. The Mangyan has high regard for peaceful and gentle behavior and strongly disapprove of aggressive and boastful conduct. However, this does not mean that their life is free of conflicts. Adultery, theft, damage of someone's reputation, suspicion of sorcery among others cause conflicts both within and between groups. Conflicts within a local group are settled either bilaterally between the opponents or within the family, with the mediation of older family members or male relatives. But conflicts can also escalate and endanger the peace and quiet of the whole settlement. In such a case, the members of a local group are summoned to a meeting (*usapan*) led by older men. All married men actively participate in the discussion whereas women only speak when they have to give some information about the case, as witnesses or when being accused. According to the general opinion shared by men and women alike – politics is men's business, although in some instances women may also gain some political influence (Helbling, 2001). During a meeting, the details or the severity of the crime are discussed and the compensation for the victim or the punishment and fine for the wrongdoer is negotiated. These negotiations may last for several days, until, finally, the emotions have calmed down and an agreement has been achieved. Not always, however, can a conflict be settled. In such a case, the help of an outsider is asked for. He must be neutral and have a reputation as a skilled and cunning arbitrator. These regionally active mediators were called *tanongan* in former times. Today they are often called as *capitanes* or highly respected persons (Helbling 2004, pp.10-12).

As far as the relations between the local groups are concerned, they are not warlike but not free of conflicts either. Besides theft, sorcery or adultery, infringement of group boundaries or rights on rattan may cause conflicts. In cases of conflicts, meetings are summoned where the older men of the settlements involved discuss the case. These older men are also responsible for the solution of problems between local groups because of their high status within their respective communities and their wide network of friends in other settlements. People from other settlements, which are not directly involved in a conflict and outside arbitrators, may also take part in these meetings. The discussion about the committed crime often leads to an emotional outburst.

Involvement of Society in Different Processes

The Mangyan society has their own individual activities and tasks to do. However, most of the time, these tasks are not properly fulfilled due to the different influences that they see and get from their interactions with the Tagalogs.

By practice, the male Mangyan are in-charge of farming and providing for the family, while the female Mangyan is expected to take care of the household and support the male in farming and provision for the family. This is the expected role of the male and female Mangyan in their families. However, this role is not properly carried out all the time due to the influences that the Mangyans see from the Tagalogs. Instead of assisting the male in farming, the female deviates from this role as she is now too busy to provide for the family, usually through selling of goods or commonly known as *sari-sari* stores.

In terms of interaction with other households, it can be described as a typical interaction where they would share simple jokes and laughter as they enjoy each other's company. On the other hand, their interaction with fellow members of the society is similar to how people in an ordinary society in the lowland area deal with one another.

Politicization and Influence

Politicization and influence manifest themselves in ways unimaginable. It can even permeate areas of society where it is least likely to occur. Such is the case with the Mangyans. This local tribe, native to Mindoro is believed to be a closed and an impenetrable community. However, the exact opposite appears to have occurred as evidenced by the various manifestations of politicization and influence in the Alangan community. One of these is seen in the event of decision making when an Alangan Mangyan is being held under trial. Under this circumstance, if the Mangyan is known to be an influential person, he/she can be spared from the horrendous forms of punishments imposed to determine whether or not he/she is guilty of a crime.

Another instance is when elders usually grant, without hesitation, the requests of a Mangyan who is identified or closely linked with the Tagalogs or any group that provides crucial support to their community. Politicization is also shown when a Mangyan, who is closely associated with an elder, can just easily get away from the crimes committed. The idea discussed in the earlier statement points to the concept also known as "Sakop." This notion can best be explained by this statement: "The Filipino is person-oriented. He thinks of himself

as belonging to, and identifies himself with a group (*sakop*), and considers the success and welfare of the group as his own fulfilment.¹⁷”

The above concept showed that the Filipino (referring to the Mangyans) is less individualistic because he wants to be in harmony with his fellow men, meaning, he would rather be associated with his fellow kind rather than be separated from them. This can also be the same reason why the Mangyans would want to have constant interaction with the Tagalogs because they feel that they form part of the large Filipino community and that there is a need to interact with fellow Filipinos. Another important area of the *Sakop* (tayo-tayo) behavior is a “personal alliance that is differentiated primarily from personal kindred because the former includes non-kinsmen. The membership of an individual’s person alliance is integrated through kinship (real and ritual), reciprocal obligations, associational ties, and proven friendships. Such personal alliances form a crucial link between the average citizen and the country’s elite (Hart, 1971).”

Another form of influence is manifested through the concept of *utang na loob* wherein they cannot detach themselves from the Tagalogs who have helped them in one way or another. For the Mangyans, these Tagalogs are viewed as a hand from above who will alleviate them from the depths of the uncivilized world and introduce them in the whole new world of modernity and civilization. This concept of *utang na loob* has been a common recurring response from the Mangyans even if such practice is not innate among them and in their culture. In more than one occasion, they expressed that they cannot simply ignore the opinion of the person whom they are indebted to because he/she has helped them in many ways possible. It is interesting to note here that they are willing to give importance to this person even if at times that person’s decision is in contrast to the beliefs and customs of the Mangyans. This is also true with how they regard organizations helping them. They followed the rules imposed by these organizations so that they will continue receiving support from these groups.

These examples of politicization could provide a snapshot on how the small intricacies of the Tagalog’s lifestyle penetrated an enclosed system like that of the Mangyans. The phenomenon of politicization that is taking place within the Mangyan community should be looked into, for its scope and coverage is vast. The same is true with the phenomenon of influence as its coverage is far and wide. This phenomenon has been very dominant in every household of the Alangan community in both *Sitio Banilad and Sanguilen*, and this has been clearly demonstrated even during interviews. The responses from the households all pointed to the idea that due to the needs provided by

¹⁷ A consensus statement from the participants in the Tagaytay Seminar on Filipino Thought 1971.

certain influential people, the Mangyans are forced to embrace the influence of the Tagalogs and succumb to the power of politicization.

Based on our observations, there were a lot of people involved in the process of politicization, though this may be denied by them. From the leaders down to the ordinary Mangyans, influence and politicization were evident.

Mangyan under Influence and Politicization

Influence and politicization can take place for many reasons. In the case of the Mangyans, these concepts persisted primarily for survival and development. This means that such practices have become prevalent in their community because they need to survive and progress in life. With the influence that they experienced, the majority of the Mangyans' responses clearly pinpointed a specific person as the source of both politicization and influence, and the wrong concept of *utang na loob* and she was "Ate Sally"¹⁸. According to the Mangyans, they feel that they need to do good deeds to Ate Sally because she has done a lot to help improve not only their way of life but also provide them with the things that they cannot have. Some examples of such help would include the following: (1) extending assistance in soliciting donations from international agencies for the benefit of their community;¹⁹ (2) mediating in talks with the local government where they express the needs of their community, and;²⁰ (3) facilitating their access to and completion of their tertiary education.

These examples would prove how much "Ate Sally" has contributed to this community. It is easy to say that through her efforts, the Mangyans are now given the opportunity of getting a fair chance in life, rather than being secluded and continuously living up in the mountainous area of Mindoro. However, despite the extent of help given to them by "Ate Sally", they perceived that some of her efforts are not directed for the benefit of the entire community, but rather for her own materialistic gains. Majority of the Mangyans have stated that in the beginning, they saw that she was initially helping the Mangyans but as time has passed, they noticed that she has changed and such changes would show the individualistic goals she had.

¹⁸ "Ate Sally" is very much known to the Mangyan community in Sitio Banilad for she has been helping the Mangyans for more than a decade already. She is also seen as a person to whom the Mangyans feel they are indebted to.

¹⁹ BANILAD Community of the Mangyans

²⁰ The local government of Baco through "Ate Sally" was able to create a school, a basketball court and a water system that clearly helped the Mangyans and facilitated a much easier way of living in the mountain.

“...pinapa-aral nga niya yung iba pero kailangan naman nila magtrabaho kay Ate Sally...” – Mangyan #1

“...palibhasa sya lang ang may kakilala sa mga donors ginagamit nya kami para yumaman pa sya, kasi dati wala naman syang sasakyan tapos biglang meron na saan naman manggagaling yun.” – Mangyan #2

Given these statements from some respondents, we can clearly see that this Ate Sally is manipulating the Mangyans to her advantage. Another potential problem that the community seemingly accuses “Ate Sally” of is her alleged intervention on matters of decision-making that involves the community.

“...dapat hayaan na nya mga aplaki sa mga problema dito sa komunidad...” – Mangyan #3

“...para tuloy kaming sunod sunuran sa kanya at sa mga gusto niyang mangyari sa aming pamayanan...” – Mangyan #4

“...may mga dapat parusahan dahil sa kanilang maling nagawa subalit hindi sila napaparusahan dahil malakas o may impluwensya galing sa may kapangyarihan...” – Mangyan #5

These statements showed the dismay of the Mangyans towards her intervention in the decision making of the community. Instead of coming up with free and unbiased decisions, the community feels that she simply makes them followers of her will. As a result, the community loses its independence.

The above statements can also be related to the philosophy of *Sakop* mentality especially the *Padrino* style wherein linkages and connections (filial or non-filial) could influence almost all aspects of the society. This *Padrino* style still exists even up to now and has been an abusive force that permeates the system of every nation.

The Mangyans also stated that “Ate Sally” now wields a great extent of influence over them wherein she is now an important person that needs to be considered in crucial decision-making processes. However, despite this problem, Ate Sally might have been given the cloak of authority over the Mangyans because she has an annex school built in Banilad with the same name as the school she manages in the city.

“Ate Sally” indeed, had a great impact on the lives of the Mangyans, and she has become a venue for them to embrace and slowly

incorporate the concept of influence into their own system. In fact, when we asked them if we could do certain favors for them, their immediate response was that they had to consult Ate Sally first.

In addition to this, the influence of the Tagalogs over the Mangyans extends to the different forms of abuses and differentiation that they experience from the Tagalogs in the mainland. These include the following: discrimination Mangyans suffer due to their smell, and; refusal to be dealt with.

According to the Mangyans, whenever they would go down to the town proper, people or the Tagalogs would refuse to interact with them or if some will deal with them they would want it to be done as fast as possible.

“...*ayaw nila kami makausap kasi may amoy daw kami...*”

– Mangyan #6

From the above statement, one can infer how badly the Tagalogs treat the Mangyans. This has affected them tremendously that any chance of interacting with the Tagalogs can be too emotionally adversarial, hence, further widening the rift between the two cultures. Other forms of abuse and discrimination include:

- *The unequal treatment in terms of pricing the goods “kalakal²¹” of the Mangyans.*

The Mangyans have clearly felt being discriminated as manifested in the manner by which their goods are priced in the town proper. They have said that their goods will simply be appraised at a very cheap price as compared to the same goods the Tagalogs would sell in the town market²².

- *The rumours that the Mangyans have black magic powers.*
When the Tagalogs were asked why they treat the Mangyans differently, their response was: “*sino ba naman hindi tatrato sa kanila ng iba ...eh baka makulam ka at kung ano pa mangyari sa amin...*” This response showed that they fear the Mangyans. However, the Mangyans clearly rejected this idea and pointed out that the Tagalogs would say this just to make an excuse for not treating them equally in society.

²¹ *Kalakal* would refer to the local products of the Mangyans; common *kalakal* of the Mangyans include the following: tanlad (lemon grass), root crops (kamote and onion), fruits.

²² One example of this is the product or *kalakal tanlad*; *tanlad* or commonly known as lemon grass is priced at 5 pesos per *tali* for the Mangyans but if it was a Tagalog it will be 25 pesos per *tali*.

- *The lands that the Mangyans freely cultivate are being grabbed by different people²³.*

This occurrence of land grabbing creates more problems for the Mangyans because they rely heavily on farming and agriculture. The Mangyans are greatly dependent on farming as most of their needs would be provided by land resources. The land grabbing usually takes place after the Mangyans are able to make the land suitable for agriculture.

The Mangyan's constant attempt to interact with the Tagalogs and the abuses suffered by them have greatly affected not only their lives but also their way of living and manner of dealing with their fellow Mangyans. From the observations and interviews, it showed that due to their close interaction with the Tagalogs, the Mangyans have adopted certain attitudes and internalized the character of the city people. "Ka-Ademar" is one concrete example of this phenomenon.

Ka-Ademar is a Mangyan who would constantly interact with the Tagalogs in the town proper, and as what his fellow Mangyans have said, he has already assimilated the attitudes of the Tagalogs. Below were their comments about Ka-Ademar.

- *"Si Ka-Ademar ay mayabang na at mapagmataas pa palibhasa ang nakakasalamuha niya ay puro Tagalog kaya ang pakiramdam na niya ay Tagalog sya."*
- *"Dati naman hndi siya ganun... maintindihin sya. Ngayon, iba na. Mahalaga na sa kanya ang may pera at gusto niya siya ang laging bida... hindi naman siya and aplaki sa komunidad."*
- *"Mapagsarili na siya ngaun at hindi na iniintindi ang kapwa Mangyan niya"*

These were some of the comments about Ka-Ademar and it can be affirmed by the researchers because every time they would talk to him, it seemed that he was very much familiar with the Tagalong culture.

The empirical data confirmed that the concept of politicization and influence can also penetrate even a closed society like the Mangyans. Somehow, it has validated the veracity of influx and social penetration which consequently disrupts their domestic lifestyle.

²³ People grabbing their lands are those in government. When they see that the Mangyans have made the lands fertile and suitable for farming and planting they would try to grab the land following the legal process, a process alien to the Mangyans.

Concepts of *Utang na Loob* and *Sakop*

The concept of politicization and influence among the Mangyans and Tagalogs can be traced from the concept of *utang na loob* and *sakop*. However, in order to fully understand how this phenomenon impacts the Mangyans, we should try to dissect and analyze these two concepts.

The idea known to us as *utang na loob* is considered to be a dysfunctional concept in philosophy, because it is considered to be an act that is from the inside going out. However, based on our understanding, it is a concept wherein we act because we feel that we need to reciprocate the goodness shown to us by other people. Another reason why this concept is considered to be dysfunctional is the fact that as Filipinos we have recognition that another person is also a *loob* which clearly answers the question of why we need to do good to another person.

Another important aspect stated by Mercado (1993) is that the Filipinos have a naturalist tendency wherein we attribute everything to nature.²⁴ As a result of our tendency to attribute things to the Lord, we view others as persons that give importance to God and individuals with their *loob*; allowing us to understand that their *loob* should also be respected, since they are also persons of God.

Given this idea, the concept of *utang na loob* should therefore be seen and understood as “*kagandahang loob*”, wherein people act/respond to actions because they see that another person is and also has a *loob* and not for reasons that they feel indebted to the other person.

In addition, another important aspect of *loob* as a concept is the idea that as human beings, we never forget to give back to God, and given that we all identify others as a creation of God, we respect them and respond accordingly without any expectations for reciprocation or the fact that the other has done good deeds for you because they see God in you.

Another very interesting concept that can be gleaned from the responses came from the vernacular *sakop*, which, if translated would mean the desire to be part of or belong to one community. This is further proven by the following responses:

- “...*Pilipino din naman kami kaya’t alam at nais naming na kasama kami dito...*”

²⁴ From history man tends to view nature as god in different forms. In addition given that the other person is also a creation of God there is the need to respect the other person.

- “*nais namin at alam namin kasama dapat kami... subalit ang mga Tagalog ay hindi ito pinahihintulutan*”
- “*bilang mga Mangyan ay inaasam din naming na mapabilang kami sa komunidad ng mga Tagalog dahil alam naming na meron din kami karapatan dito*”
- “*alam namin na parte kami ng komunidad ngunit hindi lng kami nabibigyan ng pagkakataon na makisama... alam namin kung ano ang mga dahilan nila kaya't hindi kami isinasama*”

These responses would all point to the idea that the Mangyans do prefer to be part of the community where the Tagalogs socialize in, because they feel and know that they should be given the right to do so because they are also Filipinos. However, due to some cultural differences this sense of belongingness is not permitted. The certain smell which the Tagalogs identified the Mangyans with is one example of such difference: “*May amoy ang mga Mangyan na hindi kanais nais.*” This statement would summarize the other reasons why the Mangyans are literally segregated and looked down upon in society. However, it is important to understand that such differences can never be the reason why we do not give importance to our ethnic groups.

CONCLUSION

The study found out that indeed, politicization and influence existed in the Alangan Mangyan tribe. It is worth noting that the Tagalogs, through their dealings with the Mangyan had influenced the latter's culture. In fact, some of the tribe people had assimilated the attitude of the lowlanders. It was evident on how they interacted with their fellow Mangyans. Some had become arrogant and obsessed with material possessions.

Interviews with different households in the Alangan tribe had also shown how politicization was embraced by the Mangyans. Like the lowlanders, their rules could also be swayed by influential people. In fact, in our observations, we found out that elders usually grant, without hesitation, the requests of a Mangyan who is identified or closely linked with the Tagalogs or any group that provides crucial support to their community. In addition, a Mangyan, who is closely associated with an elder, can just easily get away from the crimes committed.

The study had also found out the existence of the concept *utang na loob* and *pakikisama* among the Alangan Mangyan. Like the lowlanders, the Mangyans also give favors to people or groups who had

given them assistance. In fact, as explained in the results, they would even give in to what certain individuals or groups demand of them just to be assured of a continuous assistance from these people.

Although the Mangyans appreciated what the Tagalogs or the lowlanders had done for them, there were times when they had expressed their disappointments with the latter because of the way these lowlanders had treated them. For one thing, they were tagged as having a bad smell. For another, their products were always valued lower than that of the Tagalogs. The Mangyans felt that they should be accepted as part of the society because they are also Filipinos.

These findings suggest that this ethnic group of Mindoro is not given proper attention or are simply ignored and neglected in society. The same could be true with the other Mangyan tribes given that they also interact or deal with the lowlanders.

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