

Indigenous Communities (En)Countering the Faces of Oppression: Elucidating Some Political and Ecological Struggles

Nathanael V. NAVARRO¹

Abstract: I will argue that the Lumads, Kankana-eyes, Iballoys, and Aetas are indigenous communities who need social group representation in the wider practice of democratization toward the sustainability of their environment and the development of their lifeways. Human rights violations, however, are not merely perpetuated by direct acts against Indigenous peoples, as these are also reinforced by the norms, social structures, stereotypes, behaviors, and assumptions that fuel the aggressive existence of consumer society and its adoration of rationalistic and manipulative subjectivity. I will explain the significance of Iris Marion Young's theory of the five faces of oppression – exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence – to demand a more meticulous, philosophical, and democratic understanding of the conditions and factors that perpetuate structural oppression.

Central to this project is the rethinking of the dominant system's understanding of "development," "growth," and "prosperity," which have become, in reality, predominantly profit-driven, highly individualistic, and destructively manipulative, as opposed to the indigenous cultures to be discussed. Without examining these underlying sources and conditions of oppressive culture, the Philippine society remains hostage to "practical consciousness" and "double consciousness," in which the citizens do not think that they can learn valuable lessons from the indigenous communities' understanding and praxis of consumption and production, much less support the furtherance of "politicized cultural discussions." It is only in this way that we can critically evaluate, despite the seeming overlap of

¹ College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines – Diliman, The 50 percent International, The Club of Rome. Email: nvnavarro@the50percent.org

subliminal and palpably conscious forms of oppression that perpetuate the climate crisis, environmental destruction, and human rights violations.

Keywords: Indigenous peoples; Iris Marion Young; oppression; development; politicized cultural discussions; environmental destruction

Introduction

Difference, as an abstract notion, more often than not, is tagged as something negative. But as we sideline what we believe to be “negative,” we might not realize that some differences in society are innate, which we cannot and should not eliminate. Some differences are not simply a matter of eliminable unpleasant feelings, deficiency in knowledge, or negative habits, among others. We realize this, for instance, whenever we realize that it is morally reprehensible to treat black people as slaves simply because they belong to the minority within a majority of white people, or because of an oppressive prejudice that someone’s “black” skin symbolizes one’s dirt and inferiority as opposed to the so-called “purity” of white people. This is because we come to realize that we are inherently equal, irrespective of where we come from. It is in this sense that we come to realize that we must judge other people not merely based on the difference that we perceive, using nothing but abstract categories and brackets of qualities that we attach to people, but because of our shared moral understanding. Hence, we encounter not the complete demarcation of the idea of “difference” and “unity” but the question of how we can create a reasonable space for political understanding to thrive, one that can meticulously understand that some differences are to be preserved, if not to be positively recognized, while other perceived “differences” are to be dissolved by our outpouring insistence for social justice.

Iris Marion Young helps us clear our vision by acknowledging that some blind sense of “equality” will only lead to social injustice. As we have already seen, the problem is not merely determining whether some issues are black or white; it also corresponds to the normative undertaking in which we are situated – a factor that cannot be completely removed from moral reflections and political evaluation. To the extent possible, Young opens our

eyes to the fact that we will always be situated in political discussions, but this does not necessarily mean that we cannot and should not intend to clarify and correct our biases, especially if we do not appreciate how emancipatory social relations become possible after we merely “applied” so-called “impartial” principles and “rationally constructed” laws.² That is how, according to Young, a belief in an idea operates ideologically. We neglect the crucial part of the issue, which is to know that it is not inconceivable that the privileged position of some becomes hypostatized from a so-called “universal” and “neutral” point of view. For instance, one might acquiesce to the idea that scholarship grants should only be allocated selectively to “deserving students.” But if we uncover the normative grounds in defining who are the “deserving ones,” we might stumble upon the fact that many cannot reach the “academic standard” as a requirement to obtain a scholarship grant, say, a benchmark imposed on the consistency of highfalutin grades, because of historical injustices and social conditions that hamper students from studying more efficiently, conducively, and effectively. Why do we expect students with rumbling stomachs due to extreme poverty to be able to absorb the lessons he/she studies? How come we expect high grades among the youth who help their economically poor parents in the wee hours to work for their daily income, which they need for daily sustenance? Is it reasonable to expect students who have no electricity in their shanties to be able to carry out their studies with ease? These questions are wanting in social theories that assume that social description can be purely value-neutral. It is in this spirit that Young espouses critical theory as a mode of discourse: “*Norms and ideals arise from the yearning that is an expression of freedom: it does not have to be this way, it could be otherwise. Imagination is the faculty of transforming the experience of what is into a projection of what could be, the faculty that frees thought to form ideals and norms.*”³

The discursive energy given by the politics of difference will help us to holistically and compassionately understand why some marginalized people are trying to destroy the Earth because of the

² Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 1st Printing (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 112.

³ *Ibid.*, 6.

absence of choice or the lack thereof. According to Agustin Martin Rodriguez, many of the marginalized people in the Philippines are not primarily concerned with issues about the environment and sustainability because they are subsumed under the dominant system that further pushes them to unsustainable and destructive ways of living. This means that the privileges of some affect the choices of other marginalized people to address environmental concerns, as they are mainly attentive to the immediate concerns of economic adaptability and survival. What this political sensitivity to positional differences capacitates us is the understanding of some important social phenomena in the Philippines: many informal settlers in urban areas throw bodily refuse into waterways because of their lack of financial resources, economic agency, and spatial freedom to build hygienic and safe toilet facilities; why many swidden farmers or kaingeros choose slash-and-burn method to immediately clear forests for their economic capability as they were displaced out of their areas; and why many fisherfolks pollute ocean through cyanide and dynamite fishing to increase the volume of their catch to earn sufficiently as the middlemen undervalued their catchment.⁴ Padmapani Perez argued that we need to avoid stigmatization and essentializing through expert-exclusive decisions by delving into the lifeworlds of the Indigenous peoples rather than simply labeling them as “stewards” and reducing their potential to be economically independent. For instance, while the DENR saw the bulldozers in Mt. Pulag National Park as a threat to environmental destruction, the Tawangan Kalunguya, Kabayan Ibaloy, and Kankana-eyes argued that this is contrary to their history of becoming economically independent, as they were making a livelihood there long before the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) restricted their economic potential to subsistence-only livelihood.⁵ According to many indigenous peoples near Mt. Pulag, the DENR’s control to halt the use of bulldozers in the area prevents them from leveling their lands for vegetable

⁴ Agustin Martin Rodriguez, *Repentance and Rebirth at the End of Life as We Know It* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2021), 52.

⁵ Padmapani L. Perez, *Green Entanglements: Nature Conservation and Indigenous People’s Rights in Indonesia and the Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2018), 109.

gardens, clearing roads to serve as commercial routes for transportation, and reopening roads due to typhoon-caused landslides. In view of the foregoing, this research, consistent with Young's philosophical approach, uses relational logic rather than a reification of identity politics.⁶ It is important to understand why many problems are not to be privatized, for it concerns social structures, the configuration of political power, and equity in influencing decision-making in political affairs. Perspectives from the lived experiences, worldviews, and struggles of social groups will also capacitate us to see the wider systemic predicaments about the climate and ecological crisis, which involves collective awareness of and compassion for humanity – contradicting the claims that Young's theory of democratization is merely a pretext to the ascendancy of self-absorbed interests. In this light, political correctness is no longer confined to any single identity traditionally presumed to possess a monopoly over universal truth and scientific authority.

A democratic public arrives at objective political judgment from discussion, not by bracketing these differences, but by communicating the experiences and perspectives conditioned by them to one another. Communication of the experiences and knowledge derived from different social positions helps correct biases derived from the dominance of [a] partial perspective over the definition of problems or their possible solutions. Such differentiated communication also enables a public collectively to construct a more comprehensive account of how social processes work and therefore of the likely consequences of proposed policies. Not only does the explicit inclusion of different social groups in democratic discussion and decision-making increase the likelihood of promoting justice because the interests of all are taken into account. It also increases the likelihood by increasing the store of social knowledge available to participants.⁷

⁶ Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 86.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

The perceived dichotomy between economic growth and development, on the one hand, and environmental protection, on the other, seems to come to a head as we speak about the politics of difference. This kind of confusion is why Young has been critical of the reduction of politics to distributive concerns that merely deal with the political insistence on the freedom of individuals, no matter how these carry forward oppressive practices and stave off collective transformation.⁸ For instance, distributive concern seems to override the issue of socio-cultural change and re-examination when carbon dioxide emission quotas or permits have become tradable under the Kyoto Protocol.⁹ Allowances for high emissions can now be purchased from countries with unused emissions to spare. The social and environmental costs appear to be segmented and taken out of political priorities. There is no way to be lenient about this concern to change human behavior and consumptive aspirations to reduce carbon dioxide-emitting production, since it is already undeniable that carbon dioxide has a greater mass than any other greenhouse gas and has a longer residence time in the atmosphere to trap heat than water vapor.¹⁰ It is high time to change the rhetoric of “sustainability” to be complacent with the threats to civilization’s hastening end. We need to understand that entropy is a reality, as it is not merely a contingent by-product of consumer society that can be completely removed through “sustainable” technologies, as it is essentially part of the available and finite energy in a material.¹¹ We need to understand that we are also in a philosophical crisis, one that fails to grasp our own mortality and suffering, as we fail to radically challenge the norms, social structures, ideologies, biases, and culture that hold measurable growth and calculable success as the true measure of achievement. In this essay, my concern will be the application of the

⁸ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 86.

⁹ John J. Berger, *Climate Myths: The Campaign Against Climate Science* (Berkeley, California: Northbrae Books, 2013), 57-8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 40-1.

¹¹ Richard McNeill Douglas, “The Ultimate Paradigm Shift: Environmentalism as Antithesis to the Modern Paradigm of Progress,” in *Future Ethics: Climate Change and Apocalyptic Imagination*, ed. Stefan Skrimshire (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 201-3.

politics of difference, not as a singular approach to fight against environmental destruction, human rights violations, and oppression, but as a catalyst for cultural changes through its discursive potentials. I will argue that we can learn from the indigenous groups in the Philippines, such as the Kankana-eyes, Ibalays, Aetas, and the Lumads, to redefine how we understand “development” and how our dominant perception of “growth” has become destructive rather than supportive of collective well-being.

The Five Faces of Oppression & Some of The Indigenous Groups in The Philippines

As we have discussed, social group oppression, according to Young, is experienced at different levels. Critical theory, as a mode of discourse, can help us not to create an unyielding theory of oppression that should be fitted in every social analysis, but help us reflect – to be persuaded and refuted – why a claim that a certain social group is oppressed can be justified based on an objective assessment.¹² Recall, however, that this climate of objectivity does not commit Young to a value-neutral sort of philosophical critique, for the historical and relational bearing of oppression must always be understood as an enterprise that cannot be reduced to cold descriptions of analyzed facts. A clear indication of this would be the way Young identified five faces of social group oppression without necessarily pinpointing a more fundamental one over the other, nor does she venture into saying that one group cannot go through an oppressive experience without the combination of two or more faces of oppression. Against the idea of reductionism in segregating social facts and values, Young sees the possibility of uncovering the interconnections between the five faces of oppression, as there is nothing in the oppressive experience that is a necessary condition for oppression to be made possible.¹³ It is in this sense that Young envisions her philosophizing to avoid the objectifying tendencies and essentializing ideologies of social analysis, for the identification and examination of perceived “differences” should not be a blanket signal to project reasonable

¹² Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 64.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 142.

and democratic exclusion,¹⁴ which has been consonant with her critique of Republican Philosophy, as propounded by Rousseau and Hegel, seeking to eliminate women in the public space of citizenship simply because they are perceived as “*caretakers of affectivity, desire, and the body*” that can liquefy the solidification of so-called collective and homogenizing interests.¹⁵ Aiming to be holistically critical, this is how Young tried to counteract the artificial cleavages of so-called “political correctness” between reason and desire, body and mind, affectivity and discipline – that are actually schemes in erecting prejudices and devaluation – that only push for the reinforcement of oppressive control and further manipulation of the “Other” using a normalizing reason of unjust social hierarchy and unjustified segregation.

Young’s brand of critical theory exposes and opposes structural oppression that is not necessarily imposed by legal instrumentalities, nor is it palpably intentional. Meaning to say, Young’s idea of critical social theory is to help us find out the causal conditions that contribute further to the perpetuation of oppression “*embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules.*”¹⁶ Expansive and penetrating, Young attempts to demolish the walls that, at first glance, create a boundary between the public and the private, but which actually serve as a legitimizing instrument to tolerate discriminatory stereotypes, subtle reactions against groups, and the normalization of aversive and condescending behaviors borne out of unjust privileges. In other words, social emancipation, according to Young, is not merely the replacement of new government officials or those who occupy the higher echelons of the bureaucratic structures; nor does it merely entail the creation of new laws and modification of old ones without questioning the values and norms that continue to feed off oppressive measures in a particular environment and social relation. The question of social justice is not merely to be dominated by a voice from a particular interest group that has no eye to justify its claims based on reasonableness and a certain amount of

¹⁴ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 169-70.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

publicity, whereby people from different social locations get to understand the issues and participate in deliberating about them. While Young promoted a structured and principled type of political affairs, this kind of democratization does not mean merely adopting a rough-and-ready form of political discussions, as it not only unrealistically fears so-called “inherent” conflicts of interest, but is also hooked on unrealistic fantasizing of the complete eradication of indeterminacy in the discursive aspect of politics.¹⁷ While participatory discussion about and in group representation, according to Young, must alleviate conflicts that do not allow other people from diverging social positions to be heard and voice out their political sentiments, it is not to be equated to the claim of completely eliminating stalled decision-making process due to political-stand-offs in contending claims of social groups, for the reason that not all railroaded voting and decision-making are just and is a probable promise to quench oppression effectively. The institutionalized mechanism for a democratic public is not merely a puppetry of the majority nor of the privileged class, which only invites mindless divisiveness and a sense of “belongingness” for bigoted and self-serving motivations.

The shifting, fluid, and energetic characteristics of this political vision must not be forgotten as predicated in Young’s idea of social ontology, which, for her, is also necessary to be examined in any normative claim about justice and society. According to Young, without investigating social ontology, we cannot investigate, say, the atomistic bias behind distributive paradigms by which we can thoroughly examine “*what people are doing, according to what institutionalized rules, how their doings and havings are structured by institutionalized relations that constitute their positions, and how the combined effect of their doings has recursive effects on their lives.*”¹⁸ One can surmise that Young provides an ethical demand and a philosophical caveat to theorists who seek merely to foster an assimilationist kind of political domain, as they are disoriented by the belief that they are the all-wise class of cerebral individuals who can produce a panacea for social ills. This is why Young clarifies that appreciating group differences does not lead to political

¹⁷ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 189.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

exclusion. As an effective way to counter oppression that marks out the other as an “Other” who is merely “perverted,” “deviant,” “deficient,” “inferior,” and an “irrational” individual or groups thereof, the positive affirmation of group specificity allows us to understand the deeper dynamics in power relations – not merely borne out of a static and dyadic relationship of powerful spheres.¹⁹ It is as if we are forcing some groups to play by the rules of the game that, in the first place, they do not want and/or cannot to play; and the so-called “deviation” from the participation in the standardized game that was designed by the historically privileged groups or individuals was not, in the first place, justified to all social group identities. It is a situation that can be likened to a bunch of erasers only meant for pencils trying to make the ink from a ballpoint pen vanish. It is similar to a situation in which we measure the strength of the elephants in climbing a tree when it is merely meant for the agility of the monkeys. To avoid trivializing and essentializing Young’s idea of social groups, however, it is important to note that the positive assertion of group difference is a continuous creation and construction in a social process. It is a kind of membership that is not blocked by an air-tight definition, as it is a “*function not of satisfying some objective criteria, but of a subjective affirmation of affinity with that group, the affirmation of that affinity by other members of the group, and the attribution of membership in that group by persons identifying with other groups.*”²⁰ It is, therefore, worth quoting a lengthy elucidation from Young to appreciate how social groups are not merely formulated to further domination and oppression in society:

A social group is defined not primarily by a set of shared attributes, but by a sense of identity. [...] Though sometimes objective attributes are a necessary condition for classifying oneself or others as belonging to a certain social group, it is identification with a certain social status, the common history that social status produces, and self-identification that defines the group as a group.

¹⁹ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 166.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

Social groups are not entities that exist apart from individuals, but neither are they merely arbitrary classifications of individuals according to attributes [that] are external to or accidental to their identities. Admitting the reality of social groups does not commit one to reifying collectivities, as some might argue. Group meanings partially constitute people's identities in terms of the cultural forms, social situation, and history that group members know as theirs because these meanings have been either forced upon them or forged by them or both. Groups are real[,] not as substances but as forms of social relations.²¹

The Aetas

Over half the size of Metro Manila, the New Clark City (NCC) is being constructed within the 35,000-hectare free port zone, covering the areas of Tarlac, Pampanga, and Zambales. It was initiated through the collaboration of Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA), Japan Overseas Infrastructure and Investment Corporation (JOIN), Singapore's Surbana Jurong, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), among others. Through a public-private partnership, a 200 billion-worth mixed-use urban city will be established over the course of 50 years, developing residential, commercial, industrial, and governmental zones. Even before we raise our brows to this development, as it might be environmentally disadvantageous, the then BCDA CEO and President, Arnel Casanova, had asserted its potential to be a widely promoted alternative to the "unsustainable urbanization" in Metro Manila, which has been troubled by its swelled and congested cityscapes and overburdened thoroughfares.²² NCC was also marketed as adopting a Green Building System and using

²¹ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 44.

²² Tonette Orejas, "Apl.de.ap is Clark Green City Endorser," *Inquirer.net*, September 09, 2014, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/636304/apl-de-ap-is-clark-green-city-endorser>.

renewable energy sources, such as solar panels and hydroelectric dams.²³

One may ask, are we not against the noble idea of development if we oppose the construction of NCC, which ultimately aims for a city-based lifestyle that is claimed to be “environmentally friendly” and “sustainable?” To answer this question, it is important to know the varying interests and political forces that shape this project. While some believe that NCC will be financed through a combination of government funds, private investments, and Official Development Assistance (ODA) funds, some also argue that it is actually a build-transfer-operate (BOT) project rather than a Public-Private Partnership (PPP).²⁴ Critics pointed out that Malaysian joint venture partner, MTD Capital Berhad, will have to be repaid by BCDA after the last installment in a 5-year period, a total sum of PhP 11.1 billion, after the former invested in the construction agreement amounting to PhP 8.51 billion. The question remains, however, whether MTD Capital Berhad retains the right to earn half of NCC Sports Hub's income for 25 years, with the option to extend for another 25 years. What is more shocking is the human rights issues that beset this so-called “development” project as it inevitably drives away Aeta communities and local farmers. The BCDA's efforts sought to erase this oppressive fact by claiming that NCC would be built on uncultivated and unused lands, even though it is historically proven that many farming families and Aetas inhabit the area and have advanced agricultural systems to make the land productive.²⁵ It should be noted that the Aetas and local farmers were first displaced in the area when US armed forces erected a military air base in 1947, which was legally reinforced by the 1947 Mutual

²³ Krista Garcia, “Is Clark Green City the Future of ‘Smart Cities’ in PH?,” *Rappler*, July 15, 2014, <https://www.rappler.com/brandrap/profiles-and-advocacies/63302-is-clark-green-city-future-ph/>.

²⁴ Lian Buan, “Even with BCDA Repayment, New Clark Sports Hub Still a Joint Venture – OGCC,” *Rappler*, December 5, 2019, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/246473-ogcc-says-bcda-repaying-new-clark-city-sports-hub-still-joint-venture/>.

²⁵ “As Landlessness, Land Grabbing Intensifies, So Does Agrarian Unrest,” last modified June 11, 2018, <https://www.bulatlat.com/2018/06/11/landlessness-land-grabbing-intensifies-agrarian-unrest/>.

Defense Treaty between the Philippines and the United States. Despite the US abandoning the area in 1991, the BCDA overtook the lands as the Bases and Conversion Development Act of 1992 deemed the land inappropriate to be distributed, as these may still serve as military reservation areas of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. BCDA justifies the conversion of abandoned lands into estate prime lots as it will produce financial revenues.

These socio-political phenomena encircling the Aetas and other farmers can be attributed to what Young identifies as marginalization, which is the most dangerous face of oppression, as it expels a social group from useful participation in social life and enmeshes them in material poverty,²⁶ and it even exterminates a social group from productive undertakings of social cooperation and the means of responsible consumption. The government, through its exclusivist intelligentsia and policy implementers, might retort that this project actually distributes job opportunities to the marginalized people, as it might create approximately 925,000 jobs in the area, and it can generate an estimated amount of PhP 1.57 trillion annually to the national economy.²⁷ According to Young, people can still be deluded into further marginalization by making them think that tokenistic welfare provisions, job opportunities, and other material goods are given to them. This assumption of so-called “de-marginalization” puts enclosed within its stronghold the real value of the struggles of the marginalized, which is to think about “*the deprivation of cultural, practical, and institutionalized conditions for exercising capacities in a context of recognition and interaction.*”²⁸ Subtle as it may be, this form of marginalization is legitimized politically and legally when the government fails to think outside the nodes of powerful, profit-generating forces within the economy. It deprives the marginalized of the chance to create, to a certain reasonable extent, an independent chain of production and consumption beyond the mere imposition of a threshold in wage systems. The area’s landscape has been severely altered by extensive excavations that have flattened mountains, cleared forests, and rerouted rivers to make way for highways linking

²⁶ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 53.

²⁷ Orejas, “Apl.de.ap is Clark Green City Endorser.”

²⁸ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 55.

nearby provinces.²⁹ Conspicuously, Mount Susong Dalaga, a protruding peak, has been worryingly excavated as part of these developments in NCC.³⁰ The construction of roads in Mt. Dalin disrupted Aeta communities, such as those in Sitio Calangitan, by cutting off access to their banana plantations and fruit trees, which can be compared to their previous situation in which the Aeta thrived on the plentiful resources of their ancestral domain, leaving them little need for financial transactions. This is the very reason why democratization has been defended by Young as too important to be manipulated by interest groups. Democracy, according to Young, has an instrumental value in knowing the politics of difference between genuine needs of social groups and overly subjective, self-absorbed, and socially destructive demands hiding under the cloaked, alleged “needs” of interest groups, especially those who can wield financial and social leverage. As Young sees the value of participatory political processes: “*Democratic [decision-making] tends to promote just outcomes, then, because it is most likely to introduce standards of justice into [decision-making] processes and because it maximizes the social knowledge and perspectives that contribute to reasoning about policy.*”³¹ Democratic settings in political participation, as envisioned by Young, will surely usher the Aetas in letting the public know how they value their environment and how such a profound relationship with nature cannot be merely outweighed by the dominant perception of “economic growth.” With this political condition of freedom, the Aetas, as “de-marginalized,” will be unhindered in arguing that their way of life and flourishing are not merely measured by their investment in wanton consumption and destructive construction projects.

²⁹ Arnisson Andre C. Ortega, “Counter-mapping for Urban Social Justice: Notes from the Urban Periphery in the Philippines,” *Centre for Sustainable, Healthy, and Learning Cities and Neighborhoods*, last modified October 27, 2020,

<https://www.centreforsustainablecities.ac.uk/news/counter-mapping-for-urban-social-justice-notes-from-the-urban-periphery-the-philippines/>.

³⁰ Noreen H. Sapalo, “Whose Land Is This? Constructing Counter-narratives Through Maps,” *Global Ethnographic*, last modified December 10, 2019, <https://globalethnographic.com/index.php/whose-land-is-this-constructing-counter-narratives-through-maps/>.

³¹ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 93.

The Lumads

As the biggest indigenous group in the Philippines, the Lumads constitute 18% of the nation's population.³² Consisting of 13 ethnolinguistic groups, these non-Moro and non-Christianized indigenous peoples make up 63% of the indigenous groups in the Philippines. Although it is public knowledge that the Lumads are the poorest minority group in the country, with almost nothing but inadequate access to social services, intense militarization and large-scale mining operations seem to be the response of the Philippine government. In May 2017, after former President Rodrigo Duterte declared Martial Law in the entire Mindanao, the government warmly received the presence of mining companies and other investors in Mindanao as a so-called "response" to rising insurgency and to exploit the rich deposits of copper, gold, and nickel in the area.³³ Based on the report of Save Our Schools (SOS) Network, 9 out of 10 Lumad children are deprived of access to education.³⁴ To address this social inequity, 233 alternative schools were created, such as the Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development (ALCADEV), to give indigenous children an alternative and culturally appropriate learning system.³⁵

³² "INFOGRAPHIC: Who Are The Lumad?," *Rappler*, August 9, 2017, <https://www.rappler.com/moveph/178181-infographic-lumad-indigenous-peoples/>.

³³ Rina Chandran, "Driven From Home, Philippine Indigenous People Long for Their Land," *Reuters*, April 19, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/driven-from-home-philippine-indigenous-people-long-for-their-land-idUSKBN1HQ033/>.

³⁴ Satur Ocampo, "Lumads Sustain Fight to Save Their Schools," *Philstar*, March 18, 2017, <https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2017/03/18/1679995/lumads-sustain-fight-save-their-schools>.

³⁵ *Catapa*, "The Struggle of Indigenous Students Against Large-Scale Mining Industries in the Philippines," last modified February 18, 2019, <https://catapa.be/en/the-struggle-of-indigenous-students-against-large-scale-mining-industries-in-the-philippines-the-case-of-alcadev/>.

From May 2017 to July 2019, SOS recorded more than 500 incidents of military violence against Lumad schools.³⁶ Due to fear, they were forced to run away from their ancestral homelands. These military presences and violent operations were legitimized by signing the Department of Education Memorandum Order 221, issued in 2013. These intimidation, suppression, and displacements were inflicted on many students, teachers, and families to the point that they decided to find shelter in Lumad *Bakwit* (Evacuate) Schools distributed across the Philippines. Lumad Bakwit (Evacuate) Schools persevere in instilling in students the value of protecting nature and advocating for climate justice. This has been an educational endeavor, even though Lumads' alternative schools were being accused of nestling and recruiting for the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).³⁷ While they desired to go back to their ancestral land, the Lumad were overwhelmingly hesitant due to what happened to Datu Kaylo Bontulan, a Manobo leader who was gunned down when he attempted to return to Talaingod, Davao del Norte.³⁸ The government indiscriminately labels schools critical of environmental destruction and displacement of indigenous communities, such as the *Salugpungan Ta'Tanu Igkanugon Learning Center Incorporated* (STTILCI), as protectors and enablers of rebel groups.³⁹ Based on a dubious report that schools were teaching children communist ideology, 55 Salugpungan schools were suspended from operating by the regional DepEd office in 2019.⁴⁰

³⁶ *The Organization for World Peace*, "Fighting For an Education: Lumad Schools in The Philippines Under Attack," last modified March 2, 2021, <https://theowp.org/reports/fighting-for-an-education-lumad-schools-in-the-philippines-under-attack/>.

³⁷ "Lumad Children to DepEd: 'Ban Soldiers from Schools'," last modified November 29, 2014, <https://www.bulatlat.com/2014/11/29/lumad-children-to-deped-ban-soldiers-from-schools/>.

³⁸ Mart Sambalud, "Tribal Leader Slain in Bukidnon Crash," *Inquirer.net*, April 11, 2019, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1105721/tribal-leader-slain-in-bukidnon-clash>.

³⁹ John Rizle Saligumba, "IPs to DepEd: Don't Close Schools We Built," *Bulatlat*, June 04, 2015, <https://www.bulatlat.com/2015/06/04/ips-to-deped-dont-close-schools-we-built/>.

⁴⁰ Mart Sambalud, "DepEd Heeds Esperon Report, Suspends 55 'Lumad' Schools," *Inquirer.net*, July 14, 2019,

Similar to the Aetas, the Lumads are also vulnerable to the threats of powerlessness due to the government's utter neglect in providing basic social services, such as high-quality, inclusive, and holistic education. Young defines powerlessness as the designation of "*a position in the division of labor and the concomitant social position that allows persons little opportunity to develop and exercise skills.*"⁴¹ Intentionally or otherwise, the capitalist market order is undemocratically situated, which renders the Lumads powerless in gaining self-respect, a sufficient amount of self-determination, and freedom from the parasitic relationship inherent in the dominant scheme of the division of labor. The paucity of avenues for recognition, professional development, and capacity-building leaves the Lumads powerless, as the dominant system of education does not align with their worldview, which mainly views them as "not technically aligned," "economically backward," or "incapable of contributing to innovation." They are, in the process, pushed by the system to occupy lower-ranking positions in organizations and other workplaces. Despite the perceived difference in the likelihood of occupying higher organizational positions between indigenous peoples and those who are not, its strangeness, let alone wrongness, is not critically discussed, as the estrangement from alternative modes of educational empowerment is not appreciated. Injecting a certain "norm of respectability," the Lumads are usually harassed and excluded from the majority, as evidenced by the violence and baseless accusations hurled at them, even though the Lumads have been educationally disadvantaged and uncared-for for so many years.⁴² As we have discussed, not only does the government perpetuate neglect, but it also violently disparages civil society organizations, community leaders, and other non-government organizations trying to help the economically and educationally disadvantaged Lumads. While some may argue that the violence inflicted, as another face of oppression, on the Lumads was rational in the sense that it was really brought about by the intention to displace them for the sake of mining ventures, the social practice of

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1141596/deped-heeds-esperon-report-suspends-55-lumad-schools>.

⁴¹ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 56.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 57.

violence becomes irrational yet deeply embedded and rationalized when it repeatedly “*deprives the oppressed of freedom and dignity, and needlessly expends their energy*” as tampered by the lingering anxiety “*shared by all members of oppressed groups that they are liable to violation, solely on account of their group identity.*”⁴³ Former President Duterte even unabashedly threatened the Lumads “to go extinct” if they tried to tie allegiance with communist ideologies,⁴⁴ and this was after a series of threats to bombard and shoot in flames the Lumad schools, which were suspected of siding with the CPP-NPA.⁴⁵ With the head of state irresponsibly tampering with words of vilification and flimsy accusations against the Lumads, the normalization of their identity being misrepresented and defiled by unproven claims of bonds with political subversion only fuels the violent motivations extensively. The problem is worsened by merely letting the hands of private developers and investors play the game of growth-countering and economic-preventing strategies against rebellion and insurgencies, which is supposed to be the equitable social development that the government must implement through its democratic decision-making.⁴⁶

The Ibalays and Kankana-Eys

The *Ibalays* and the *Kankanaeys* are two different ethnolinguistic groups dwelling in Itogon, Benguet. Historically, before the *Ibaloy* people became economically dependent on *balitok*

⁴³ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 62.

⁴⁴ Kiko Demigillo, “President Duterte Warns of Extinction of Lumads if They Continue to Side with Communists,” *News 5*, December 01, 2020, <https://news.tv5.com.ph/breaking/read/threatening-lumads-president-duterte-warns-of-extinction-of-lumads-if-they-continue-to-side-with-communists>.

⁴⁵ Dharel Placido, “Duterte Threatens to Bomb Lumad Schools,” *ABS-CBN News*, July 24, 2017, <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/07/24/17/duterte-threatens-to-bomb-lumad-schools>.

⁴⁶ Carlos H. Conde, “Duterte Plan Against Rebels Ignores Tribal Community Concerns Government Should Hold State Forces Accountable for Abuses,” *Human Rights Watch*, last modified February 06, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/06/duterte-plan-against-rebels-ignores-tribal-community-concerns>.

(gold), they were swidden farmers and hunters.⁴⁷ While they continued to clear forest patches to cultivate bananas and root crops, they learned to mine gold and barter it in the lowlands for their sacrificial cattle. The Ibalays tunneled with their torches as far as the oxygen could reach, but the disappearance of the gold ore vein meant they had to kill a cattle to be sacrificed to the gratification of the God of gold. It must be noted that most of the Kankana-eyes migrated from Mankayan.⁴⁸ Several owners of the estancias permitted the Kankana-eyes to dwell in Itogon because the Ibalays believed that *Balitok* (related to the work is a spirit that can be dissatisfied if one becomes selfish, not to share gold ore (*nava*), which causes the vanishing of gold ore veins.⁴⁹ In short, nobody owns the gold individually, as it is meant to be shared even outside the Ibalays' community.

Mining exploits entered Itogon during the time when the Ibalays began to engage in wet rice cultivation. There was a time of overaccumulation of gold surplus in the village of Antamok. Meanwhile, the village of Acupan had its gold reserve diminishing. In the middle of the 19th century, most of the *abiteg* and *baknang* Ibalays shifted in channeling their revenues from mining to building irrigation systems and creation of *payeow* (rice paddies).⁵⁰ American mineral concessions were allowed to occupy the area and introduce faster mineral production. This resulted in the shortfall

⁴⁷ *International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs*, "Philippines: Gold Mining and Indigenous Peoples in the Cordillera," last modified August 31, 2023, <https://www.iwgia.org/en/news/5255-philippines-gold-mining-and-indigenous-peoples-in-the-cordillera.html>.

⁴⁸ Lani T. Montreal, "Cordillera Vignettes: Lepanto Mining and Life in the Cordillera," *Bulatlat*, <https://www.bulatlat.com/news/3-11/3-11-lepanto.html>.

⁴⁹ Michael Armanda Paredes Canilao, "Transformations in Ibaloi Gold Extraction from the Protohistoric Period to the Current Era (14th c. – 20th c.)," *AghamTao* 20 (2011): 156-7, [https://pssc.org.ph/wp-content/pssc-archives/Aghamtiao/2011/7-%20Transofrmations%20in%20Ibalaoi%20Gold%20Extraction%20from%20the%20Protohistoric%20Period%20to%20Current%20Era\(14th%20c-%2020thc\).pdf](https://pssc.org.ph/wp-content/pssc-archives/Aghamtiao/2011/7-%20Transofrmations%20in%20Ibalaoi%20Gold%20Extraction%20from%20the%20Protohistoric%20Period%20to%20Current%20Era(14th%20c-%2020thc).pdf).

⁵⁰ Michael Armanda Paredes Canilao, "Fording Upstream in Search for Balitok Ibaloi Diaspora into Benguet (Part 1)," *Hukay* 14 (2009): 95-6, <https://journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/asp/article/download/4120/3744/>.

of water for their irrigation, curtailment of their freedom to access mining territories, and clearing of their forests. Starting from Antamok, mining companies extended mining claims to other parts of Itogon, making them organize the Benguet Consolidated Mining Company (BCMC).⁵¹ The old people of Itogon (*adahay*) did not know that letting foreign companies exploit the subsurface of the soil would also destroy water tanks and groundwater paths for their irrigation. The Ibalays and Kankana-eyes were forced to work in the mining companies as their rice paddies turned desiccated. Even if the indigenous peoples resisted by opening up pocket mining activities, the Philippine government seems to side with the BCMC after the latter invoked its patented mineral claim as its so-called legal right to prohibit small-scale ball mills. In fact, the Mining Act of 1995 permitted big mining concessionaires to obtain licenses by owning 100% of their operations, such as water rights, easement rights, and timber rights up to 16,200 hectares (only for corporations) for a period of 50 years.⁵² Until today, the indigenous peoples in Itogon continue to experience discrimination, oppression, and economic exclusion. One month after the destruction of typhoon Mangkhut (Ompong) in the town of Itogon, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) started suppressing small-scale mining (SSM) activities and closed down at least 500 *adits* (underground mine entrances), as it was believed that the SSM activities were to be blamed for the landslides in the area.⁵³ Philex Mining Corporation and Benguet Corporation, on the other hand, continued to exist legally as opposed to the struggling small-scale miners still bouncing back from the catastrophe.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Lulu Gimenez, "The Struggles of Mining Communities in Itogon," *Northern Dispatch*, October 28, 2018, <https://nordis.net/2018/10/28/topic/mining/the-struggles-of-mining-communities-in-itogon/>.

⁵² *Amazon Web Services*, "Philippines_Mining_Act_of_1995_English," https://113dstor001.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/Community+Development+in+Mining/Philippines/Philippines_Mining_Act_of_1995_English.pdf.

⁵³ Lauren Alimondo, "Itogon remembers 'Ompong'," *Sunstar Philippines*, September 13, 2019, <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/baguio/local-news/itogon-remembers-ompong>.

⁵⁴ Lauren Alimondo, "Indigenous Knowledge Vital During Disasters," *Sunstar Baguio*, February 1, 2019, <https://www.pressreader.com/>. Also see

As I have mentioned in the previous section of this essay, Young understands oppression as not simply reducible to distributive dilemmas, for it also involves cultural, political, and other matters that pester and dominate genuine and just social relations. As such, exploitation, as another form of oppression, is also not diverging from this understanding. Young sees exploitation as consisting of “*social processes that bring about transfer of energies from one group to another to produce unequal distributions, and in the way in which social institutions enable a few to accumulate while they constrain many more.*”⁵⁵ Coercive forces and social relations do not mean, in this understanding, merely as fragments of power that can be sliced and spliced, which also boils down to nothing but distributive issues. The mining companies in Itogon, Benguet, exploited the hospitality and generosity of the Indigenous peoples to welcome them in their place, but at the expense of the very environment that supports the flourishing of the lifeworlds of the Kankana-eyes and the Ibalays. Eventually, this pushed the indigenous peoples to work for and be subservient to manipulative businesses. The abusive mining companies seem to have fooled the Indigenous peoples by building a railroad, appearing they do not have any other way, and as if it was paved with good intentions, only for the exploited people to find out that they are heading for a ravine. In effect, not only are the indigenous peoples forced to take up “menial jobs,” but their autonomy is also in the grip of desperation as they work for their survival and for the destruction of their environment. The importance of critically developing a discussion on exploitation is that it gives a disillusioned view regarding the “[s]ocial rules about what work is, who does what for whom, how work is compensated, and the social process by which the results of work are appropriated [and] operate to enact relations of power and inequality.”⁵⁶ This helps us rethink the freedom that democracy bestows on us, which seems to be an elusive and illusory one, as it also fosters class division by limiting the sources of

Maria Elena Catajan, “Philippine Mines Continue Unhampered 4 Years After Gina’s Shutdown Order,” *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism*, January 31, 2021, <https://pcij.org/2021/01/31/philippine-mines-continue-unhampered-4-years-after-ginas-shutdown-order/>.

⁵⁵ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 53.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

economic power and job opportunities to an exploitative few. In the abovementioned cases, the indigenous peoples have to endure the lip service of “democracy” that it is ready for a deliberative discussion about capacity-building and economic empowerment, when in fact, it merely listens to the dominant and privileged ones to dictate what is a “safe” and “environmentally aligned” business without any equitable steps to help the Kankana-eyes and the Ibalays to have a sustainable economic power, much less to listen to the recommendations of the underprivileged.

In the next section, we will try to understand why we need a cultural revolution that comes not only from those participating in the dominant system, but also from diverse and similar experiences in social groups that experience oppression. By making the Ibalays, Kankana-eyes, Aetas, and Lumads participate in democratic discourses, we will be able to realize that there are alternative modes of consumption and production and different ways to have a meaningful relationship with nature. While the four faces of oppression described above seem too violent, experiential, and obvious to be ignored, cultural imperialism, one that causes and reinforces the system of oppression, can sometimes be ignored, especially “[i]f social philosophy assumes that intended and deliberative action is the primary focus of moral judgment, it risks ignoring or even excusing some of the most important sources of oppression. Only moral judgment that extends to habitual interaction, bodily reactions, unthinking speech, feeling, and symbolic associations can capture much about oppression.”⁵⁷ According to Young, cultural imperialism allows dominant groups and individuals to stamp oppressed groups with an “essence” and confine them in stereotypes attached to their bodies and way of life.⁵⁸ Cultural imperialism can be internalized, which makes social groups feel oppressed and influences the status quo. It can also be seen as so pervasive that it becomes normal to simply tag indigenous peoples as “unclean,” “uncivilized,” “unreasonable,” “illogical,” among other forms of devaluation. This only makes it hard to realize that we are supporting a consumer society that

⁵⁷ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 150.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

normalizes the devastation of our environment, leading to ecological collapse.

The Value of Politicized Cultural Discussions to Counter Oppression

While we have discussed the importance of understanding Young's idea of cultural imperialism as a claim of universalization of norms and oppressive entrenchment of meaning, values, and experiences of the dominant groups and individuals to the underprivileged social groups, we must also recognize the fact that Young does not want the reality of oppression to be lost in the humongous shrubberies of cultural difference. It is important to note that oppression, especially cultural imperialism, also operates surreptitiously or subliminally because, according to Young, "[o]ften without noticing they do so, the dominant groups project their own experience as representative of humanity as such. [...] Since only the dominant group's cultural expressions receive wide dissemination, their cultural expressions become the normal, or the universal, and thereby the unremarkable."⁵⁹ Pointing out that our critical impulses and discourses can be caged in a cultural setting and frame of thinking, Young argued that her brand of politics of positional difference should be distinguished from the normalizing tendencies and leniency in cultural promotion behind the politics of cultural toleration. The politics of positional difference that Young propounded cannot be merely reduced to cultural differences found in ethnic groups and other cultural minorities, as it defines social justice in terms of structural inequalities to deeply criticize power imbalance in social relations, respect, economic privileges, and opportunities for self-development that social groups suffer from.⁶⁰ Even though Young admitted that the politics of cultural difference that Will Kymlicka defended can philosophically investigate the oppressive tendencies of nationalist assimilation and absolutist

⁵⁹ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 59.

⁶⁰ Iris Marion Young, "Structural Injustice and the Politics of Difference," in *Justice, Governance, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Difference: Reconfigurations in a Transnational World* (Distinguished W.E.B. Du Bois Lectures 2004/2005), ed. Engelbert Habekost (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität, 2007), 103-4.

approaches in nation-building,⁶¹ she also reminded that “[w]hat is at stake in many of these conflicts is not simply freedom of expression and association, but substantively equal opportunity for individuals from marginalized groups to develop and exercise their capacities, and to have [a] meaningful voice in the governance of the institutions whose roles and policies condition their lives.”⁶² Using a creative and hypothetical example, Young argued that it is also important to recognize that there could also be an essentializing slant by merely treating people with shared comportment, linguistic expression, and habits as living in a so-called “community” without historically understanding that they are merely victims of residential segregation, whereby they were dislocated and merged to a location far from lucrative ventures and other economic opportunities.⁶³ Just as we should not allow teenage girls to be tied to the oppressive arrangement of marriage nor to the forceful mutilation of female genitals,⁶⁴ it is also important to be on our toes that oppression might be lurking in the limitedness of our discursive landscape, as we are merely fenced inside a cultural imperialism.

As we face the cultural barriers in critical theorizing, it is important to return to what is “cultural” in Young’s theory, which she even saw as wanting in Kymlicka’s project. The politics of structural injustice and positional politics is cultural in the sense that it questions the routinely pitched public-private dichotomy that neglects how civil society can be a source of and a factor in the perpetuation of injustices, as well as a possible stimulus for fighting against social injustices. As Young observed: “*Framing questions of the politics of difference largely in terms of what the state should or should not do in relation to individuals and groups, however, ignores civil society as an arena both of institutional [decision-making] and political struggle, on the one hand, and processes of structural differentiation, on the other.*”⁶⁵ For instance, in a certain reputable documentary by Kara David, it was revealed that there had been a long line of social injustices among the rape victims in a

⁶¹ Young, “Structural Injustice,” 100.

⁶² Young, “Structural Injustice,” 105.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

certain Teduray tribal community in South Upi, Maguindanao.⁶⁶ There are four identified factors leading to the forceful “settlement” of injustice between the rapist and the victim, in which the option of “paying the dignity” of the victim is highly tolerated and even recommended, and in much worse cases, the community allows the marriage between the rapist and his victim. First, people rely on tribal councils to settle conflicts because government institutions are not accessible. Second, the filing of cases in legal courts is too costly for the community to pay. Third, the community also wants to avoid the violent tradition called “*rido*,” as the families can retaliate against each other, even those who are not directly involved in the original conflict, until their lineage vanishes. Lastly, there has also been a prevalent perception in that tribal community that the accusation of “rape” is merely a strange concept that “misunderstands” the intention of an alleged rapist, which is to give “pure love” to a rape victim, as “courtship” can be “taken off track.” Does this mean that we should merely let the victims suffer the cycle of sexual abuse, as we might commit cultural imperialism when we attempt to change their views and forms of “settlement” about rape cases? It must be noted that Young pushed for a “dual system of rights” in democratic cultural pluralism. Young’s ideal of cultural pluralism must be constantly deliberated and clarified in a democratic setting so that people can freely participate in weighing group-conscious policies and national laws. Young carefully warned that “[g]roup-conscious policies cannot be used to justify exclusion of or discrimination against members of a group in the exercise of general political civil rights.”⁶⁷ The inclusivity in public discussion, whereby even the seemingly private and domestic matters can be discussed, will pave the way to make the inaudible manipulation and abuses heard by the public ear so as to develop awareness and the gathering of critical contributions to counteract norms, stereotypes, and institutional baggage that only ensure the lasting echo of oppression. It is in this sense that the politics of difference, through democratic cultural pluralism, must not give in to the show of force in cultural abuses, which are not to be equated with

⁶⁶ ‘*Kapalit ng Katahimikan*,’ director by Kara David (2024), I-Witness, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgzEyaDGakU>.

⁶⁷ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 174.

committing cultural imperialism, as this is merely serving a protective semblance for the interest groups and abusive individuals to dodge accountability and liability.

To reiterate, what this essay has been belaboring to point out is not merely to measure success based on a certain spirituality nor to simply prove the infallibility of a certain social group. In fact, this essay supports Amartya Sen's thesis that violence and conflict cannot be simply resolved by analyzing them in terms of cultural and religious variance, but by considering other factors that constitute individuals' identities. For instance, during the war in Europe between 1914 and 1918, Christianity, even though the predominant belief of the British, the French, and the Germans, was not powerful enough to become a shared identity bound to stop the sanguinary conflict, as all were mainly centered on nationalism.⁶⁸ Nor can a peaceful society be achieved, as Sen argues, by escaping the empirical and historical understanding and simply reducing the problem to economic poverty and other issues about material deprivation. Case in point: The city of Calcutta, which is one of the poorest cities in the world, has a very low incidence of homicide, based on 2005 data, compared to Paris, London, New York, Los Angeles, Mexico City, Johannesburg, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, and Singapore.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, through politicized cultural discussions, various dimensions of the society can be brought to the table of evaluative discourse and meticulously – rather than reductively – search for the interconnected sources of conflicts and oppression. In this sense, conflict is not necessarily thought of as negative, as it will help people and various groups claiming to be oppressed to show why certain things matter for them and to compel the whole society to support them in that cause. It also creates a fruitful discussion for society to view their pre-reflective biases and opinions that not only support or cause economic oppression, but also the oppression that removes the freedom of others to thrive in tolerable lifeways that do no harm to their society. Hence, it avoids unnecessary violence out of cultural conflict by trying to understand what should be tolerated from what

⁶⁸ Amartya Sen, "Violence and Civil Society," in *Peace and Democratic Society*, ed. Amartya Sen (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2011), 14.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 17-8.

is not, rather than becoming impulsive to separatist and extremist claims whenever social differences are encountered, which makes social solidarity impossible, as in the case of the climate crisis, whose causes are to be resolved effectively and effects are to be understood more comprehensively when acted upon, to a greater extent, with social solidarity. We must realize that our political affairs, despite the layers of associations, affiliations, organizations, and identities attached to ourselves, we still must have a range of choices to go beyond the identity passed down to us in a manner that does not compromise the social well-being and political resources that ensure public welfare, which ultimately means not taking as our so-called “destiny” the socio-political maladies that we or what other people experience.⁷⁰ It creates a space that justifies toleration rather than advocating for absolute relativism and sectarianism of all dimensions of human life, especially concerning socio-political affairs. For instance, Richard Rorty aggrandized the role of individualism in society by saying that “*poetic, philosophical, scientific, or political progress results from the accidental coincidence of a private obsession with a public need.*”⁷¹ This prompted Rorty to even favor relativism by taking to the extreme the internal perspective that we should simply tolerate rather than something to be critically examined. To be sure, we need to listen to the articulation of those we consider “bad,” “immoral,” “criminal,” and whatnot in order to understand them and create realistic and effective solutions. For instance, in a Freudian sense, Rorty seems to normalize “*sexual perversion, extreme cruelty, ludicrous obsession, and manic delusion,*” by making us “*see each of these as the private poem of the pervert, the sadist, or the lunatic: each as richly textured and ‘redolent of moral memories’ as our own life.*”⁷² The problem is when we reduce politics to merely an amalgamation of private interests and the fencing of compromises. Due to this indifference and self-absorbed rationalities, we are not alarmed that the rapidity of deforestation is one of the major causes of global

⁷⁰ Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2006), 18-39.

⁷¹ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 37.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 38.

warming, as the absorption of carbon dioxide becomes less and less effective than needed.⁷³ This is not to say that logging should be perpetually banned, but we should be worried about the neoliberal culture that reduced everything to freedom and personal interpretation to the point that we no longer see how the destruction of forests is not merely about the strength of humans nor about personal accomplishments, for these lines of thinking must be accompanied by the thought of its negatives tendencies, such as the possibility of uncontrolled landslides, flooding, and loss of natural habitats for many species. As such, social knowledge is not necessarily given but is co-created through critical, dialogical, and reflective interactions of actors and social groups in a society: “(1) *an understanding of their position, and how it stands in relation to other positions; (2) a social map of other salient positions, how they are defined, and the relation in which they stand to this position; (3) a point of view on the history of the society; (4) an interpretation of how the relations and processes of the whole society operate, especially as they affect one’s own position; (5) a position-specific experience and point of view on the natural and physical environment.*”⁷⁴

Not necessarily to act as a quick fix, Young characterized critical political theory as “cultural” insofar as it examines cultural elements that contribute to the generation and reinforcement of oppressive practices, beliefs, values, norms, and other cultural underpinnings. While it may start from the questioning of a fully conscious or simply a doubtful individual, Young’s idea of cultural revolution can spark a fire that ignites the transformation of personal habits and broadens the horizon of awareness about oppression.⁷⁵ Thus, whether one directly participates in the continuation of a dominating system or simply benefits from systemic oppression in one way or another, one has the potential to also transcend cultural obstacles by participating in and facilitating democratic discussions about social groups, thereby truly changing one’s heart and mind. It is here that we can confront what seems to outrun our individual and social consciousness – by carefully

⁷³ Cf. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 38.

⁷⁴ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 117.

⁷⁵ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 152.

applying a spirit of caution and thoughtfulness in our undertakings, even those that we consider as simply prosaic to be taken for granted. As Young writes: “*The requirements of justice, then, concern less the making of cultural rules than providing institutional means for fostering politicized cultural discussion, and making forums and media available for alternative cultural experiment and play.*”⁷⁶ Aligning oneself with this critical politics of positional difference means not only recognizing that culture is not unchangeable, but also that one should not merely lobby for policy-making bodies and other government institutions. It is a challenge to change and develop one’s consciousness about oppression through active involvement in discursive philosophical practices.

As we have seen, one of the common denominators among the indigenous groups discussed above is that they are all facing the oppression of displacement – with a much disheartening fact being that the government is one of the culprits of this oppression. It is worth noting that the Philippine government, through Republic Act No. 8371, also known as the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA), can serve as an instrument to propel equity in property ownership among indigenous peoples. A Certificate of Ancestral Land Title (CALT) can be issued by the government to individuals, families, or clans for their agricultural lands, forests, and/or residential lots, while an ancestral domain, including natural resources and other areas used for production and activities related to the lifeways of the indigenous community, can be given by the government to a certain tribe or entire community by issuing a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT).⁷⁷ While this creates a protective layer of legality with the “Free and Prior Informed Consent” standard in the IPRA in which the use of any resources in the area by external agents must be under the consensus of all the members of the Indigenous Cultural Communities/ Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs),⁷⁸ it must be noted that the IPRA works under

⁷⁶ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 152.

⁷⁷ *National Commission on Indigenous Peoples*, “NCIP Administrative Order No. 01 – Series of 2020,” https://ncip.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/ncip_admin_order_01_2020_rules_on_delineation_titling.pdf.

⁷⁸ *National Commission on Indigenous Peoples*, “Republic Act No. 8371,” <https://ncip.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/IPRA-LAW.pdf>.

an assimilationist agenda. In fact, in Section 22 of Article II of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, the State is mandated to recognize and promote “*the rights of indigenous cultural communities within the framework of national unity and development.*”⁷⁹ The phenomenon of merely peddling legal matters about property settlement while ignoring the deep relationship of many Indigenous peoples with their natural environment and the community seems to trample the value of cultural integrity. For instance, the Bagobo-Clata tribe (part of the Lumads in Mindanao) complained about the entry of lowlanders into their territory, invoking the so-called “land title” in their hands; but the tribe did not engage in a dialogue because of their unfamiliarity with individualistic sense of human rights and they believe that they own the land as they and their ancestors before them has occupied it since time immemorial.⁸⁰ The process of indigenous people also seems to be an onerous task, not only because of cultural barriers to the idea of ownership left unaddressed but also because the government fails to question its own assumptions that all those who desire to apply for land titles can appreciate Western legal concepts and are literate enough to understand documents written in a language foreign to them, let alone acknowledge that the financial resources of the applicants, as well as their time, are so minimal and precious to be engaged in the process.⁸¹ This process of land titling, according to Jose Mencia Molintas, seems to be a throwback to the Maura Law, one of the laws during the Spanish colonial government, that reinforced the legal fiction of Jura Regalia or the Spanish Royal Law (also known as the Regalian Doctrine) in which the Crown of Spain owned all lands: the Article 4 of the Maura Law states that landowners were given only a year in order to be exempted from the forfeiture of their

⁷⁹ *Official Gazette*, “The Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines,” <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/constitutions/1987-constitution/>.

⁸⁰ Michael Teodoro G. Ting et al., “Modernity vs. Culture: Protecting the Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines,” *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies* 1 (2008): 91, <https://arastirmax.com/en/system/files/dergiler/25821/makaleler/1/1/arastirmax-modernity-vs.culture-protecting-indigenous-peoples-philippines.pdf>.

⁸¹ Jose Mencia Molintas, “The Philippine Indigenous Peoples’ Struggle for Land and Life: Challenging Legal Texts,” *Arizona Journal of International and Comparative Law* 21 (2004): 292, <http://arizonajournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Molintas.pdf>.

ownership as all lands in the Philippines were deemed protected and would all revert back to the state after 1880.⁸² Sections 2 and 3 of Article XII of the 1987 Philippine Constitution still adopt the remnants of the Regalian doctrine, but the confiscatory powers of the state do not mean absolute power for land-grabbing as it is directly counterbalanced by Section 5 of Article XII of the 1987 Constitution: “*The State, subject to the provisions of this Constitution and national development policies and programs, shall protect the rights of indigenous cultural communities to their ancestral lands to ensure their economic, social, and cultural well-being.*”⁸³ But our minds can be encircled with suspicion if we do not define what “development” is, or at least the dominant view of it, for the Filipino nation. It was also noted by Melanie Pimentel that the IPRA has a paternalistic nature that does not necessarily provide full legitimacy to the native title of indigenous peoples since the state still claims itself to be a *parens patriae* in which it “*merely granted, but not fully acknowledged that their rights exist in the absence of Government’s formal recognition.*”⁸⁴

To clarify what is the dominant meaning of “development” prevailing in Philippine society can also be a boon to demystify what Young calls the ideology of “expertism” in which the fiscal, legal, and managerial aspects of the capitalist welfare society are merely dictated by the so-called “experts” as they are the only ones “knowledgeable” to understand the complexity behind the planning, production, and legislation in political affairs.⁸⁵ The exclusivist perception of knowledge, therefore, becomes a legitimizing instrument to perpetuate the anti-questioning tendencies of oppression, rather than treating knowledge formation as a powerful process to engage everyone. This also has the tendency to use bureaucratic structures to impede the application for a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT), as in the case of Aetas, who would be affected by the NCC project despite the fact that they have

⁸² Molintas, “The Philippine Indigenous Peoples’ Struggle for Land and Life,” 284.

⁸³ “The Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines.”

⁸⁴ Melanie P. Pimentel, *The Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act: Commentaries and Guide in Practice* (Manila: Rex Book Store, 2021), 1.

⁸⁵ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 80.

repeatedly applied for a CADT since 1999.⁸⁶ It must also be noted that the issuance of CADT, as upheld in Philippine Jurisprudence, does not mean that only at the time of certification is the ownership of land given to the indigenous peoples occupying it since time immemorial; on the contrary, the titling of any ancestral land is merely a legal recognition of a historical fact of indigenous people's ownership.⁸⁷ Without CADT, the indigenous peoples cannot legally assert their free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) in the construction of NCC, which, in turn, brought destruction and displacement to their environment. Furthermore, the Indigenous peoples contend that the FPIC requirement in IPRA is an unalterable decision, which may allow alien companies and investors to exploit natural resources in the area, as the papers were deemed to be corroborating their claim that the Indigenous community or tribe has already acceded to the written agreement.⁸⁸ Another bastardization of the right of the indigenous communities to self-determination would be the massive irony behind the Whole-of-Nation approach, which aims to push for the collaboration of various government and non-government institutions to fight against insurgencies, but only resulted in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) being a cuddler and sponsor of fake tribal leaders that are also responsible for mobilizing and supporting paramilitary groups harassing Lumad schools and killing Lumads.⁸⁹ For

⁸⁶ Tony La Viña and Joy Reyes, "[ANALYSIS] Aetas and New Clark City: Trampling on Human Rights of our First Peoples," *Rappler*, December 10, 2019,

<https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/246881-analysis-aetas-new-clark-city-trampling-on-human-rights/>.

⁸⁷ *The Lawphil Project*, "Delfin Lamsis et al. vs. Margarita Semon Dong-E (G.R. No. 173021),"

https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri2010/oct2010/gr_173021_2010.html.

Also see Pimentel, *The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act: Commentaries and Guide in Practice*, 37-48.

⁸⁸ Mark Ambay III, "Unjust: Why Indigenous Peoples are Marching in the Philippines," *Bulatlat*, October 16, 2016,

<https://www.bulatlat.com/2016/10/16/unjust-indigenous-peoples-marching-philippines/>.

⁸⁹ Raymund Villanueva, "'Fake' Datus Leaders of US-backed Paramilitary Groups," *Bulatlat*, September 27, 2015,

<https://www.bulatlat.com/2015/09/27/fake-datus-leaders-of-us-backed-paramilitary-groups/>.

instance, a fake tribal leader named Joel Unad was even lauded by former President Duterte as participating in the government's counterinsurgency effort without truly understanding who was backing him up and tracing the lived experiences of his purported "tribe," if at all there is to be found.⁹⁰ Many demand that tribal dealers must not be equated to tribal leaders, as the former are merely after the huge amount of bribes from environmental plunderers and exploiters responsible for enticing people to apply for a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADT) and legally legitimize environmental destruction.⁹¹ This is the reason why Young is against the view of assimilationist ideals that there is a singular and neutralizing measure where the government can push for the smashing of so-called "group divisions" to promote nationalist "integration." Young even traced that what is at play at the core of this assumption is not actually pushing for solidarity, but rather an individualistic stance about self-making, which is founded on the idea that groups are simply an assemblage of different individuals vying for attention and interests.⁹²

To summarize what we have discussed: First, Young argued that the assimilationist assumption is unrealistic, portraying a single, static, and harmonious polity that only breeds the construction of unrealistic needs, which are actually the limited wants of dominant groups and individuals. Second, not only does the assimilationist norm put an economic disadvantage on the lives of the oppressed social groups, but it also requires and/or indirectly pushes the dominant social groups to unjustly change their identity. Third, it only exposes, according to Young, the tendency of the dominant system to shun away from the political discussion of various cultural settings and group experiences. It is as if the dominant system assumes that there is nothing to be learned from

⁹⁰ Raymund Villanueva, "Lumad Group: Duterte's 'Manobo Leader' is Fake, Crooked," *Bulatlat*, November 29, 2018, <https://www.bulatlat.com/2018/11/29/lumad-group-dutertes-manobo-leader-is-fake-crooked/>.

⁹¹ Mart D. Sambalud, "Lumad Death Squads Facilitate Economic Plunder-PASAKA," *Davao Today*, November 28, 2018, <https://davaotoday.com/politics/lumad-death-squads-facilitate-economic-plunder-pasaka/>.

⁹² Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 165.

other oppressed social groups or from the very meticulous investigation and political discussion about social and positional differentiation. Ultimately, the learning process and democratic clarification that can be had are ignored by failing to realize that “[p]lacing a normative value on homogeneity only exacerbates division and conflict, because it gives members of the dominant groups reason to adopt a stance of self-righteous intractability.”⁹³

It becomes clear that Young tries to avoid an obsession with a defense of sheer “social variations.” Instead, Young invites us to an ethical way of thinking, a democratic engagement with cultural differences, where we can learn from one another, as it has been a venue for political evaluation and appreciation. This was the case when former BCDA president Casanova merely dismissed the plight of the Aetas by saying: “*I am not aware of 60,000 people being displaced. For more than 20 years, no development has happened in that area. It is time for all of us to unite to bring inclusive development to Tarlac and the entire region.*”⁹⁴ But now that we are becoming aware of the displacement of the Aetas as well as the environmental destruction that the construction of NCC has brought to the place, do we simply label this project as an approach to “inclusive development,” or is this an act of running away from what is really fundamental and developmental to human flourishing? A primer posted on the website of the BCDA proudly presents and advertises the Filipino workforce to foreign investors as “*young, English-proficient, and highly educated.*”⁹⁵ Not far from such an advertisement of the Filipino workforce is the exalted average growth domestic product (GDP), amounting to 6.4% from 2016 to 2019.⁹⁶ This kind of “development” seems not only to put Aetas in the peripheries, but they are being trampled as “economically useless” and “uneducated” in the name of “economic growth.” With this “ideology of merit,” as Young puts it, the qualifications and criteria for performance, competence, evaluation, job opportunities, among others, are clutched in the hands of the

⁹³ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 179.

⁹⁴ “Apl.de.ap is Clark Green City Endorser.”

⁹⁵ *Bases Conversion and Development Authority*, “2022 New Clark Primer,” <https://bcda.gov.ph/sites/default/files/2022-01/2022%20New%20Clark%20Primer%20.pdf>.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

few, only reinforcing their privileges and domination.⁹⁷ It must be pointed out, however, that this face of oppression not only displays exploitation in undemocratic workplaces but is also oppressive, as it seeks to impose cultural imperialism on the meaning of merit and professional advantage. Locked in this limited lens, we become too enamored with a so-called neutral view of growth and merit that we de-politicize the root causes of qualification, such as unequal access in the dominant system of education, the powerlessness of the disadvantaged to shape the educational landscape through meaningful and humane values, or the lack of democratic deliberation about the meaning of economic productivity and consumption. Avoiding so-called “complexity” and “subjectivity,” we are driven by the logic of consumer society to adopt GDP as a bracket of development. Measuring progress according to the GDP does not actually create a space to include the holistic well-being of Filipinos. Clive Hamilton noted that the aggregative and reductive nature of GDP that “*implicitly assumes that the distribution of income is perfect and that it does not matter whether the richest family or the poorest family receives the extra income [that] economic growth generates.*”⁹⁸ As the GDP adopts a highly consumer-oriented measure of economic development, it only becomes defensive as it can even justify spending, say, on insurance premiums or defensive expenditures on security technologies due to the prevalence of crime. It is also possible that the GDP may function to count as growth the environmental costs of profligate logging, be it legal or illegal. Because GDP only captures what the market has placed a monetary value on, other social contributions to holistic well-being are ignored, such as community cleaning drives, reading programs for children, teaching children about the importance of arts from indigenous communities in relation to their deep respect and relationship with their natural environment, among others.

Many years have passed by, but the narrative of the BCDA remains, that is, even if they plan to establish an ethnobotanical learning facility for the Aetas, it is still hinging on the logic that all “believed-to-be idle” lands must be productive, which, in this case,

⁹⁷ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 210-12.

⁹⁸ Clive Hamilton, *Growth Fetish* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 56.

is to be a site to “*learn more so we can earn more.*”⁹⁹ The problem with this so-called “model for food forests” is that it is too alienating for the system of production and consumption that the Aetas have been accustomed to – one that escapes scarcity even if they are not necessarily engaged in the intensive agricultural system to harvest high-yielding crops. This multi-story setting for a “food forest” is not only too artificial but is also contrary to the consumption habits of the Aetas, which are actually sustainable, as they regulate their hunting and gathering activities. Historically, the Aetas only learned how to be “survival farmers” as their forests were desecrated by colonial rule, mining companies, and wealthy families.¹⁰⁰ This does not mean that we should neglect their other financial needs, especially in light of the Mt. Pinatubo eruption, but it must not also be taken to mean reducing everything to the power of consumption, which only renders them powerless in the face of an oppressive consumer society. While we also need to learn to innovate in agriculture, to a reasonable extent, we should also be concerned about the meaning of “prosperity” that we apply in our everyday lives, especially if it heavily relies on a highly consumptive model of growth. Furthermore, we must worry about the threats of industrial monoculture in agricultural practices, especially when artificial food forests aim to destroy immense spaces that serve as the natural habitat of biodiversity. The negative impacts of monoculture arise from its focus on efficiency and profit, which encourages the repeated planting of a single crop, removes natural biodiversity, and creates fragile farming systems that depend heavily on chemicals, intensive inputs, and uniform practices. Although monoculture enables efficient large-scale production, its continuous reliance on a single crop progressively depletes soil quality, diminishes biodiversity, heightens susceptibility to pests and diseases, and weakens resilience to climate stress, ultimately

⁹⁹ *Bases Conversion and Development Authority*, “BCDA, DA, Pampanga Uni to Establish Ethnobotanical Learning Facility for Aeta Farmers,” <https://www.bcda.gov.ph/news/bcda-da-pampanga-uni-establish-ethnobotanical-learning-facility-aeta-farmers>.

¹⁰⁰ Karin-Ulrike Nennstiel, “The Lifestyle of Indigenous People from the Perspective of Sustainability. The Example of an Aeta Tribe in the Philippines,” *European Journal of Sustainable Development* 13 (2024): 166-170, <https://ecsdev.org/ojs/index.php/ejsd/article/view/1595/1556>.

resulting in reduced yields and increased dependence on chemical inputs.¹⁰¹ Moreover, having a greater variety of plant species strengthens ecosystems by limiting the spread of harmful pathogens – as shown in an experiment by Morris Schnitzer where plants grown in low-diversity soils suffered significant disease-related declines in productivity, while those grown in highly diverse plant mixtures experienced little to no pathogen impact – ultimately supporting healthier soils and more stable growth without heavy reliance on chemicals.¹⁰² While there is, indeed, a pledge plan to augment energy efficiency technologies as well as other environmentally friendly technologies,¹⁰³ it is somehow greatly offset by the fiscal incentives and deductions offered by BCDA itself for investment.¹⁰⁴ This is what Tim Jackson calls the process of “creative destruction” by Capitalism, whereby the relative sense of “decoupling” can be seen as the investors still participate in the “circular flow of the economy” in which the finances saved through energy efficiency are invested in other material goods and services for profitable return.¹⁰⁵ This profit-driven motive can be gleaned in the 2022 primer of the BCDA that tries to pull in investors by taking pride in the NCC’s proximity to Metro Manila, educational institutions, and the large number of college graduates annually produced.

¹⁰¹ Yasmine Elouattasi et al., “Agroecological Concepts and Alternatives to the Problems of Contemporary Agriculture: Monoculture and Chemical Fertilization in the Context of Climate Change,” *Journal of Agriculture and Environment for International Development* 117 (2023): 45-7, <https://www.jaeid.it/index.php/jaeid/article/view/14672/12420>.

¹⁰² Timothy E. Crews et al., “Is the Future of Agriculture Perennial? Imperatives and Opportunities to Reinvent Agriculture by Shifting from Annual Monocultures to Perennial Polycultures,” *Global Sustainability* 1 (2018): 6-7, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/0F69B1DBF3493462B4D46EB8F0F541EE/S205947981800011Xa.pdf/is-the-future-of-agriculture-perennial-imperatives-and-opportunities-to-reinvent-agriculture-by-shifting-from-annual-monocultures-to-perennial-polycultures.pdf>

¹⁰³ Jonas Reyes, “Green Map for New Clark City Unveiled,” *Daily Tribune*, August 15, 2024, <https://tribune.net.ph/2024/08/14/green-map-for-new-clark-city-unveiled>.

¹⁰⁴ “2022 New Clark Primer.”

¹⁰⁵ Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet* (London: Earthscan Publications, 2009), 92-6.

The destruction of the environment seems to have driven us all the more towards “creative destruction” by making us feel anxious, inadequate, and vulnerable to various environmental hazards – such as climate change, flash floods, extreme heat, and strong typhoons – but only to make us believe that the solution is the possession of properties that the consumer society advertises. It seems that there is no escape from consumerism, even in the face of the threats to the survival of the human race. Oftentimes, not knowing the difference between authentic needs and uncontrollable and unnecessary desires, the ideology of materialism in consumer society makes us suffer from what Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss call “affluenza,” whereby people “*do not know what they want, yet want everything.*”¹⁰⁶ We are deprived of our autonomy to think about our reality and our choices, as the market dictates a wide range of choices and highly accelerated innovation of products and services. But what is advantageous about democracy is that we should not delude ourselves that the answers to our questions are all in our heads. The politics of difference show us that we need to expand our horizons of understanding. It is in this realm of evaluating and appreciating positional differences of social groups and ways of life that we can understand why “having less” is not only to be equated and marketed as “feeling more,” but to appreciate being less per se as beneficial to our collective and individual well-being. We have seen this in the lifeways of the indigenous groups in Itogon Benguet, whereby the sharing of resources, known by Ibaloy as “sagaok,” is not seen as something unusual nor to be taken with distrust.¹⁰⁷ It is not seen with suspicion that the act of customary wealth-sharing in which those who reached a rich gold mine have the obligation – and not merely the privilege – to open the tunnel to other disadvantaged members of the community, such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, and the students in need of money, is a normal part of the economic scheme among small-scale mining team. In fact, the residue of the sluicing

¹⁰⁶ Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss, *Affluenza: When Too Much Is Never Enough* (London: Earthscan Publications, 2009), 92-6.

¹⁰⁷ Judy Cariño-Fangloy, *Indigenous Earth Wisdom: A Documentation of the Cosmologies of the Indigenous Peoples of the Cordillera* (Baguio: Maryknoll Ecological Sanctuary, 2015), 45-6.

procedure, known as “lining,” must also be shared by the miners, whereby they encourage women, children, and the elderly to make the final processing of gold more efficient – the gold accumulated is also shared with those who helped in the processing and those in the community who are in need. Not only did the Ibaloy allow the Kankana-ey to build small-scale mining in Itogon, but they were even given a share of the uncovered gold. The Ibaloy and Kankana-ey primarily live in harmony as they find meaning in inter-community solidarity, tribal cooperation, and deep respect for the environment rather than letting themselves be eaten by greed and individualism. The Ibaloy and Kankana-ey are not mainly interested in the measure of success based on what one has accumulated or how one can present prestige and importance by disadvantaging others and making oneself different. They are also concerned not just for the people they are with in the present, but also for those who have made it possible for them to reap the benefits of their natural environment, as protected by those who came before them and will give forward by taking care of their environment for future generations. This way of life, which not only “advertises” sustainability but is a guiding point of communal development, is far different from big mining companies that have created tailing dams near riverbeds across Benguet but are not leak-proof, thus damaging the Antamok River, Bued River, Agno River, and Abra River, making traditional fishing very limited. Open-pit mining that was done in Benguet has been highly destructive, including the elimination of entire mountains, excavation of deep pits often over 2.5 kilometers long, and the displacement of vast amounts of earth, clearing of forests, diversion of drainage systems, and the generation of large amounts of dust.¹⁰⁸ Deep mining and drainage tunnels not only cause land subsidence but also disrupt groundwater paths, leading to long-term reductions in water tables. In 1937, Atok-Big Wedge's tunnels drained the water from Gumatdang's irrigation sources (Itogon's oldest rice-producing area), and in 1962, Benguet Corporation's drainage

¹⁰⁸ *United Nations*, “Case Study on the Impacts of Mining and Dams on the Environment and Indigenous Peoples in Benguet, Cordillera, Philippines,” https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/workshop_IPPE_cpp.doc.

tunnel between Gumatdang and Antamok further depleted water from a key irrigation source, drying up rice fields.

We need to understand that not only are the corporate-driven market system and the lowlanders-managed convenience stores subverting the Lumad lifeworld,¹⁰⁹ but also the forceful intrusion of the ethos of individualistic accumulation of material wealth that undermines the reciprocal exchange in the kinship mode of production and way of life.¹¹⁰ In the past, for instance, a datu's ability to meet the expectations of their community was a key to creating a harmonious bond among the Manobo tribe (a tribe belonging to the Lumads, an Indigenous group), which made them committed to collective development rather than an atomistic one.¹¹¹ Contrary to the common notion that tribal communities are completely dictatorial in their political management, an exploration of a particular Manobo tribe that anthropologist Karl Gaspar documented will show that they are not legalistic nor militaristic, but were able to carry out communal activities, such as fishing, hunting, farming, and house-building, based on voluntary agreement. While not having a circulating monetary value to guide barter or exchange of goods, the Manobos were able to create a reciprocal kind of commerce "*with neighboring peoples on a [small-scale] [as] one of their traditional customs; such exchanges led to the acquisition of animals like carabaos and horses, valuable commodities blades and gongs, and goods such as salt and sugar.*"¹¹² Gaspar also noted that while land can be acquired by virtue of occupancy to avoid forceful occupancy, it is not absolute, for the datu might forfeit such ownership if the land was already abandoned.¹¹³ This has the implication that other people may use the property rather than waste its productive potential, which is also for communal gain. Private properties are not looked at as absolutely

¹⁰⁹ Karl M. Gaspar, *Panagkutay: Anthropology and Theology Interfacing Mindanao Uplands* (The Lumad Homeland) (Quezon City: Institute for Spirituality in Asia, 2017), xxii.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 82.

¹¹¹ Karl M. Gaspar, *Manobo Dreams in Arakan: A People's Struggle to Keep Their Homeland* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2012), 22.

¹¹² Ibid., 27.

¹¹³ Ibid., 30.

for one's benefit alone, for it is deemed as a violation of *batasan* (Manobo tribe's complex system of laws) not to share the fruits of one's properties.¹¹⁴ It has, of course, the implication that fruits and vegetables that are already ripe could be shared with the community rather than being wasting their nutrients. In fact, owning land property in the Manobo tribe, according to Gaspar, should first be qualified by the supportive spirit of that particular member; that is, it should be proven that one has shown instances of being a generous member of the tribe. Anthropological studies like these are important granaries of experiences that help us understand their unique lifeways, which were previously sidelined on the fringe of what Young calls the "discursive consciousness."¹¹⁵ The comparative and contrasting approaches that we create by juxtaposing social positionalities invite the articulation of differences that have the potential to reveal both sufferings and effective ways to surmount oppressive challenges. It is in this manner that Young believes that the "practical consciousness" that merely "goes with the flow" of inundated biases and prejudices can be brought as a public concern for political rethinking.¹¹⁶

Colonization and corporatizing inroads had brought massive destruction in Mindanao and in Lumad's ancestral domain.¹¹⁷ Deforestation and excessive logging caused 30 million hectares of forests to be ruined annually in the 1960s and 100,000 hectares yearly during the 1990s. Mining was also pushed during former President Benigno Aquino's term, garnering US\$640.22 million at the outset of his administration alone. Aside from pervasive militarization in Lumads' dwelling places, for instance, CADC was acquired by Sagittarius Mines, Inc. by provoking armed confrontations among the B'laans, creating two factions that support and reject mining activities, which were falsely claimed to trickle down and generate income for the indigenous peoples sufficiently.¹¹⁸ Another frustrating social reality for Mindanao is that despite the global awareness that the burning of coal releases

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 29.

¹¹⁵ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 131.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Gaspar, *Panagkutay*, 39.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 93-4.

air pollutants, such as nitrogen oxide and sulfur oxide, that cause PM2.5 airborne toxic particles that pose health hazards, as well as the filling up of heat-trapping gases causing global warming,¹¹⁹ the Philippine coal mining industry is still increasingly extracting approximately 16 million metric tons, as its supposed industries, such as metal mining and processing, food and beverage, and cement industry, are still cradled for its supposed economic development.¹²⁰ It seems that we have yet to realize the need to limit consumption and production, for despite the fact that there are degraded forests in Mindanao, logging continues with the State's Industrial Forest Management Agreement (IFMA), as financed by ADB's commercial tree plantation covering thousands of hectares.¹²¹ Our dominant system continues to insist that our planet is not a finite one, yet fails to realize, or at least does not want to, that human-made capital cannot supplant natural capital. While we can say that power saws and carpenters, no matter how many or how few, can still possibly create a house, but "*when we come to substitution across the roles of transforming agent and material undergoing transformation (efficient cause and material cause), the possibilities of substitution become very limited and the characteristic complementarity is dominant.*"¹²² This only means that, with a lack of lumber, no matter how many carpenters and pieces of equipment we have, we cannot completely build a house. We should not let destruction take over our ability to create a better world. A good start to this journey is to engage in consciousness-raising by becoming more tolerant of positional differences, which allows us to understand the complexity behind structural injustice. Discussing our cultural and positional differences politically will give us different standpoints, perspectives, and angles to challenge and be challenged, as we understand the dominant view that allows oppression, which, on most occasions, only seems subtle, normal, or harmless.

¹¹⁹ Karl M. Gaspar, *Diwang Balaan/Banal: A Decolonial Discourse on Pinoy Spirituality* (Quezon City: Institute for Spirituality in Asia, 2022), 261-3.

¹²⁰ Gaspar, *Diwang Balaan/Banal*, 257.

¹²¹ Gaspar, *Panagkutay*, 91.

¹²² Robert Constanza et al., *An Introduction to Ecological Economics*, Second Edition (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2015), 119.

As we have discussed, the critical elucidation of the meaning of “development” and “prosperity” in our dominant system permeates not only the legal realm but also the unconscious feelings, behaviors, norms, normalized reactions, and practices that support cultural imperialism.¹²³ We cannot expect politicized cultural discussion to be held out in the open when we are still lingering in our biases against the worldviews of indigenous peoples, which are mostly appreciative of affectivity, relationship, spirituality, and non-individualistic terms of the economic framework. This modern subjectivity, according to Young, creates a manipulative bent in our productive undertaking and processes, which, in turn, interprets and understands nature based on calculative and strategic thinking, no matter how damaging these are, so long as they can show the force of rationalistic dominance. Cultural imperialism, as philosophically reviewed by Young, “construct[s] this modern subjectivity by fleeing from material reality, from body’s sensuous continuity with flowing, living things, to create a purified abstract idea of formal reason, disembodied and transcendent. With all its animation removed and placed in that abstract transcendent subject, nature is frozen into discrete, inert, solid objects, each identifiable as one and the same thing, which can be counted, measured, possessed, accumulated, and traded.”¹²⁴ Manipulative ventures are easily justified, as we have seen, when we bring the value of success with too abstract a notion of success, such as higher GDP, or based on too objectifying a notion of success, such as infrastructure projects or materialistic and consumeristic culture. The oppressed indigenous groups are entrapped with what Young calls the “double consciousness” in the exclusionary political state of affairs. The oppressed subjectivity internalizes the dominant subjectivity that makes them ripped apart between appreciating themselves as they are not out of the ordinary and there is nothing to be feared with them,¹²⁵ on the other hand, the oppressed social groups also feel devalued by dominant stereotyping and objectification, which makes them react as if they want to completely withdraw from being themselves as they see themselves

¹²³ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 150.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

as inferior and as an Other.¹²⁶ The social life that is merely commanded under the wishes of the dominant groups, defines the very injustice of cultural imperialism. Callous determination of economic development becomes all the more hardened by simply labeling opponents of oppressive commercial and corporate measures as “terrorists,” “backward-thinking,” “technologically incompetent,” and “uneducated,” among other instruments that normalize marginalization and powerlessness. To Young, the challenge is not merely “blaming” those who are directly responsible for inflicting oppression as an outward show of critique, Young’s politics of difference demands the democratization of culture that makes us tackle the deep crevices and recesses of our desires, aspirations, and even measure of “development” and “growth.”¹²⁷ Young’s critical philosophy of positional difference invites us also to criticize ourselves as we appreciate the inward and reflective aspect of our responsibility to fight against oppression, which makes us re-think how we, to some degree, might be supportive of a culture of domination.

Conclusion

In all the challenges and political maladies presented in this essay, Young gives us hope that we can use our imagination and feelings to be true to our socio-political struggles. This can be achieved by rightfully challenging a dominant rationality that leads us to believe we are thinking the right way, until we encounter different positionalities. Instead of aiming for a bird’s view to merely shower the seeds of distributive justice equally, Young invites us to be grounded and see where to place the seeds appropriately. It is in this contextual, experiential, and equitable way that we can know the reality of oppression – and how we can begin to create politicized cultural discussions. Spaces such as this allow us to acknowledge our limitations respectfully and appreciate that a change of one’s heart and mind is key to sustainably fighting against cultural domination, which, more often than not, we hardly realize until we encounter and tolerate positional differences. When

¹²⁶ Ibid., 60.

¹²⁷ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 151.

cultures and other social differences engage in dialogue with one another, we create democratic arrangements that make us more evaluative and critical of structural injustices perpetuated by interests that dominate other acceptable social differences. This, according to Young, is the reason why we need to adopt a social ontology in political theory: one that makes us realize that culture is continuously being refined, shaped, appreciated, and reevaluated. We need to understand that we have a hand in changing the position of seeds placed in acidic soil that is supposed to be nurtured in fertile land. We need to understand that we can collectively attempt to understand the experiences of one another and bring social justice to those who need it, especially the vulnerable indigenous communities who are disadvantaged by the dominant system that makes it difficult to transcend oppressive instruments of their exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, violence, and marginalization.

There are, to be sure, some hindrances that make us fenced in a certain form of cultural and systemic domination. However, it must be noted that Young is not in any way saying that it is not hard, so to speak, to determine whether we are already out of the matrix. It is not simply a thing to be questioned, much less to be aware of, because somebody offered a magic pill for us to see everything oppressive all at once. As oppression is constructed based on the movements of social relations, culture, and social structures, Young envisioned her politics of difference to be also cultural and relational in the sense that people have to take difference not only with mere suspicion or a contemptuous mindset, but with mindful criticality as empowered by a politicized form of cultural discussions. Democratic spaces like these will provide social groups with an opportunity to share their experiences of oppression and recommend changes for socio-political improvement. It is here that we transform sheer practical consciousness into a more discursive consciousness, one that seeks a proactive engagement with the exchange of ideas to break down the barriers of cultural inhibitions, bigotry, and misguided social judgments about particular social groups. In this essay, it has been argued that the norms, economic standardization, ideologies, and culture that the consumer and individualistic society have brought

to us can be vigorously questioned by realizing that the indigenous peoples, as a social group in the Philippine society, are also potential sources of effective resistance to create social change in the face of environmental degradation and human rights violation. This only shows that the act of emancipating from double consciousness is not only imperative for the social groups themselves to conveniently live their lifeways as their struggles are also a huge part of our collective adversities. Instead of simply practicing what the dominant system imposed on us, through politicized cultural discussion, we can also overcome the rigidity of the double consciousness asserting a so-called “neutral” yet oppressive benchmark of correctness, prosperity, and development. It is here that we realize that we need to protect our common home not by othering the social groups and treating them as strangers or as foreign obstacles to the dominant view about development; as we see ourselves as not exempted in our tendency to make an error and capacity to correct an error, we try to divest ourselves with the protective shields of estrangement and embrace the other as they help us reimagine a different world: a world that is truly for a just and meaningful flourishing, no matter how finite we are.

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