Scales in Negotiation

A case of legacies, practices, and imagined futures in mother tongue-based education in Baggao, Cagayan, Philippines

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Chapter One

Introduction

In 2009, the Department of Education of the Republic of the Philippines ushered in its Order 74, the Department of Education Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy (Department of Education, Republic of the Philippines 2009), which began implementation in classrooms nationwide in 2012 (Department of Education, Republic of the Philippines 2012). This policy arises in direct response to decades of advocacy across scales for the rights of indigenous and minority peoples confronting the schools and society at large (Victor & Yano 2016). Stakeholders cite compelling research in education which purports the academic and social benefits of culturally-relevant education models, including increased literacy and learning outcomes (Minter, Ke & Persoon 2012). While these policies are imagined to overturn colonial legacies in the schools and facilitate increased educational access for marginalized and indigenous groups (Osborne 2015; Republic of the Philippines 1997; UNESCO 2001), they also participate in reproducing scales of value for languages and cultural knowledge systems, as well as framing the future through models of cultural conservation and language revitalization.

Through MTB-MLE legislation, the Department of Education officially seeks to develop a “generation of Filipinos who are multilingual but remain deeply rooted in their unique cultures” (Castillo Llaneta 2018). This legislation is complemented by 2011 Department of Education Order 62 “Adopting the Indigenous Peoples Education Policy Framework Philippines,” (Department of Education, Republic of the Philippines 2011) which marks the “first comprehensive rights-based educational policy framework” for indigenous peoples in the country (Victor & Yano 2016: 133). Both of these policies stem from The Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act of 1997, which commits the state to formally recognizing indigenous peoples’ rights to ancestral domains, self-governance and empowerment, equal protection under the law, and cultural integrity. This act also establishes the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) to “recognize, protect, and promote the rights” of indigenous cultural communities (Republic of the Philippines 1997). In this way, mother tongue-based education participates in the broader renegotiation of indigenous and minority peoples’ rights and roles at the national and “global” scales.
By the mother tongue-based model, students “ideally” receive instruction in their respective native languages from entry into the public school system through grade three, with the official languages Filipino and English taught as second and third languages (Department of Education, Republic of the Philippines 2012). In grade four, Filipino and English become primary languages of instruction and the mother tongue is phased out (Assessment Curriculum & Technology Research Centre 2018). Importantly however, MTB-MLE only officially accommodates for instruction in twelve languages, including eight “major languages”, (Department of Education, Republic of the Philippines 2012) of the more than one hundred and seventy languages and dialects in the country (Philippine Commission on Educational Reform, 2000). These circumstances not only pose barriers to implementation, but also frame contests of scale between distinct cultural, ethic, and linguistic identities and knowledge systems in the classroom and society (Burton 2013; Metila et al. 2016; Tupas & Lorente 2014).

Social and academic relevance

In addition to instruction in the “mother tongue”, the policy set investigated in this study calls for a comprehensive culturally-relevant education which honors the heritage of its students and includes content tailored to the social contexts of their communities; MTB-MLE legislation takes explicit stake in this matter, naming “socio-cultural awareness which enhances the pride of the learner’s heritage, language, and culture” among its “four areas of development” (Department of Education, Republic of the Philippines 2012: 3). As multilingual and postcolonial societies around the world address issues of linguistic and cultural multiplicity in the classroom both formally in national law and informally on the local level, the Philippines’ model has garnered international attention, including recognition under the United Nations’ call for “education for all” (Burton 2013). UNESCO (2001) describes its promotion of culturally-relevant, mother tongue-based education in its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which reads: “[a]ll persons have therefore the right to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice, and particularly in their mother tongue; all persons are entitled to quality education and training that fully respect their cultural identity”.

While the mother tongue-based model began implementation across the Philippines in 2012, it remains in the process of execution; the country’s diverse linguistic, ethnic, and cultural composition complicates policy practice (Burton 2013; Metila et al. 2016; Tupas & Lorente 2014). This is certainly the case in northeast Luzon, where dozens of distinct linguistic, cultural,
and ethnic groups, both indigenous and non-indigenous (Persoon et al. 2009), form schools’ student populations. As multilingual and multiethnic communities interact with the schools, they not only pose challenges for implementation but also frame questions of hierarchies inherent in the invocation of distinct languages, cultural knowledge systems, and ideologies of scale (Tsing 2000) in the classroom. Further, they highlight the role of policy in establishing, maintaining, or shifting these hierarchies.

Altogether, the international movement for culturally-relevant, mother tongue-based education emerges through legacies of the colonial past, contexts of the present, and framing of the future by actors across scales. Herein, this study seeks to analyze the interaction between the national policies and localities through the lens of language and culture education. Through the case study of two distinct sitios in Baggao, Cagayan, Philippines, it becomes possible to dissect these broad policies and their social implications in practice. By principal methods of observation and semi-structured interview, this study investigates current practices, interpretations, and implications of culturally-relevant, mother tongue-based education policies and their proponents in small, primarily indigenous communities in the Northern Sierra Madre. It also seeks to contextualize these policies and practices within their historic and social contexts and the imagined “local” and “global” futures they frame.

**Contexts**

This multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) centers itself in two villages in the foothills of the Northern Sierra Madre mountain range in the municipality of Baggao, Cagayan within the Cagayan Valley administrative region of Northeast Luzon, Philippines (Figure 1). The villages, Mansarong and Malisi, are closely located and connected by a now defunct logging road, extending through the mountain forests until the coast. While in close proximity, these villages are home to distinct ethnic, linguistic, and cultural communities, drawn into conversation by the road which connects them, as well as their shared natural environment, threatened livelihoods, and economic interrelationships. Further, the sites are situated within the remaining Sierra Madre forests, where environmental protection, infrastructure development, agricultural encroachment, and logging have impacted and continue to impact ways of being for peoples in the region (Deprez 2018; Persoon et al 2009).
Malisi is a fairly homogenous ethnolinguistic community; its residents are almost exclusively Agta and speak the Agta dialects Labine and Duperinan. Elders here reported that they have historically made their livelihood through hunting, fishing, and gathering, though now they practice a varied economy supplemented by agricultural work and seasonal labor. Mansarong’s ethnic and cultural makeup is more varied; its residents migrated to the area from across Northern Luzon and represent a myriad of cultural and linguistic heritages not limited to Igorot (Ibaloi and Kankanaey), Ilocano, Ibanag, and Itawes. Among these, the lingua franca of the community is Ilocano. The people of Mansarong make their livelihood through farming, though other activities, such as entrepreneurial efforts, gardening, and hunting are also practiced. Importantly many people of Malisi are employed by Mansarong area farmers as tenants or laborers. These distinct yet interrelated economies and ecologies pose illuminating complexities and points of comparison in terms of the interaction between education, language, cultural identity, natural environment, and ways of being and doing.

Within these sites, the research centers at the schools: Mansarong Elementary School and Malisi Elementary School, where routine observations and interviews were held. The schools themselves are distinct in terms of student and staff populations, size, resources, and educational practices. From the schools, the research extends to the community context to include observations in the community and interviews students’ parents and village elders. From these
two locales, the study then widens its focus to discuss the regional, national, and international
actors invested in the promotion of the policies and practices observed and reported and analyze
the implications of their involvement.

Object of study

This study seeks to investigate localized practices and interpretations of culturally-relevant,
mother tongue-based education and the policy’s imagined role in framing the future. It also seeks
to understand how this policy effort emerges from legacies of the past and is adopted and
propagated by actors across scales in the promotion of distinct agendas. Centrally, the study asks:
how are policies of culturally-relevant, mother tongue-based education practiced, interpreted,
and imagined at sitios Mansarong and Malisi of Baggao, Cagayan, Philippines and how do these
policies and practices participate in broader future-framing agendas across scales? To answer this
question, the following sub questions are investigated: how are the schools organized? How do
practices in the schools reflect the broader social, cultural, and linguistic contexts of the
communities? How are distinct systems of knowledge prioritized in the school context? What are
the locally relevant motivations and expected outcomes of the policy practice and how do actors
across scales promote these goals? And finally: how does this movement in education relate to
shifting ways of being and doing for peoples at the sites of study? The following chapter will
elaborate the practice of research in answering these questions, including methods, ethical
practices, framing of the communicative context, and positionality of the researcher. It will also
elaborate on the place and space of the study and introduce key informants within these spaces.
Chapter Two

Research practice: methods, ethics, and contexts

In this chapter, I will describe the practical aspects of the study, including methods, ethics, positioning of the researcher, and framing of the communicative context. I will also contextualize the sites of study by introducing the physical setting of the villages and the space of the schools, as well as some daily procedures within the school setting. As this study centers itself at the schools, I will further describe these social spaces by introducing key informants, namely teachers, who provide an introduction to the space. In chapter three, I will provide a detailed account of the social and community contexts in which the schools are encapsulated, through accounts given by elders in both villages.

Methods

This study made use of various methods in the documentation of its ethnographic truths. These methods included semi-structured and unstructured interview, observation, review of material culture, and auto documentation through the solicitation of drawings. Of these, the most central are semi-structured and unstructured interview. In both Mansarong and Malisi, most interviews held with parents and elders are best described as semi-structured; I presented a similar set of questions to most informants, centering on the informant’s personal history, language use, cultural and ethnic affiliations, educational experience, interaction with the school and teachers, aspirations for their children, and imagination of the future. The majority of these interviews were facilitated by an interpreter and held in Ilocano, though a small number of informants in Mansarong, exclusively community leaders and elders, preferred to communicate in English. In these cases, the interview did not necessitate an interpreter. The resulting one-on-one format enabled in a less structured interview, and typically increased access.

While I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers at Mansarong Elementary School and Malisi Elementary School toward the beginning of the study, I quickly adapted to unstructured interview or informal conversation. As all teachers at these schools spoke English comfortably, unencumbered by translation, informal conversation was an effective and accessible method. This format established a fluid communicative context, enabling spontaneity and increased rapport between researcher and informant. These conversations took place one-on-
one, in small groups, or altogether with the school staff, in whichever configurations formed organically. Notably, this method was successful due not only to shared language, but also to my positionality as a peer to these informants.

This framing of the communicative context was similar in interviews with teachers and MTB-MLE coordinators at urban schools, as well as teacher trainers in Manila. Originally, I had intended to interview Department of Education representatives, administrators, or officials, but despite numerous scheduled appointments, visits to their offices, and efforts for contact, representatives did not make themselves available. It should be noted that this behavior reflects and underscores the organization’s top-down structure and closed channels for communication described to me by teachers across schools. As I waited at the offices of these officials, located in urban schools in the area, I struck up conversations with teachers and MTB-MLE coordinators. Like teachers in Mansarong and Malisi, these informants spoke English and were enthusiastic to share their experiences and perspectives, resulting in informal one-on-one conversations and loosely structured interviews.

This format and the more structured method practiced with most parents and elders produced different levels of rapport and access, and therefore different results. It is undeniable that there existed more constraints upon the communicative contexts with (most) parents and elders than with teachers and trainers; with the former, I typically required an interpreter, which facilitated a more formal interaction. Secondly, the constraints of translation/interpretation limited access to particular registers and the spontaneity of the interaction (Borchgrevink 2003). Third, with parents in particular I often had significantly less previously established rapport than I had with the teachers, with whom I spent a significant portion of my time and shared a language and peer status. Finally, it is undeniable that my positioning as a foreign researcher, accompanied by guides and interpreters influenced the communicative context and impressions on informants (Berreman 2007; Borchgrevink 2003; Bourgeois 2007), more so with parents and elders than with teachers. Altogether, these conditions positioned me at a distance from respondents with whom I did not share a language, and even in a hierarchical structure with them, while positioning me closer to respondents with whom I shared language and status.

Finally, I interviewed students as well, but quickly determined that, even in a group setting, they were too reserved to speak freely. It was clear that pursuing this method was, more than unlikely to be productive, potentially concerning ethically. Therefore, I discontinued this method.
Nonetheless, as the school is an organization of and for children (Suremain 2014), I was interested in the perspectives of the students, so I experimented with a visual, auto documentation method, in which I provided paper and crayons and students illustrated their schools, communities, and daily activities. This “participatory ethnography” approach facilitated ethical collaboration between researcher and child informants (Suremain 2014) and yielded useful data, through both the product of the exercise and the observation of the exercise in practice. While this method is fairly peripheral compared with the more central methods of the study, it allowed consultation of a perspective otherwise inaccessible.

In addition to interview, a second primary method of this study was observation. At Mansarong and Malisi, I conducted routine daily observations in the schools and communities. In the schools, I was typically present at the sites from the morning hours before classes began to the early evening after classes ended. During instructional periods, I rotated between classrooms, typically following activities for a lesson period before transitioning to observe a different class. This allowed me to track a variety of behaviors and interactions throughout the school day. During class observations, I positioned myself at a student desk toward the back of the student set, where I could observe procedures with minimal disruption, while participating in group activities when relevant and appropriate. During break periods, as well as before and after school hours, I split time between conversing with the teachers and observing in common spaces, such as the schoolyard or lunch locations. I also accompanied teachers and students in their non-curricular activities both during after school hours. This included visits to the sari-sari shop, preparing lunch and coffee, playing games in the schoolyard after hours, and joining nature walks and gardening activities.

Observations in the community were less structured and more informed by chance encounter with relevant phenomena during daily rounds at the sites. On weekends, mornings, and evenings, I frequently observed in communal spaces, such as the church, sari-sari shop, and basketball court in Mansarong, and the schoolyard and road in Malisi, in both cases, positioning myself to interact with informants who visited the sites. Like my practice at the schools, these observations were typically not participant by default, though I participated where relevant. While these observations have informed a significant portion of the research, they were less convenient as a standalone method than interview, especially in the community context. Because of my lack of Ilocano language skills, observations in the school and community were primarily visual, with linguistic cues often excluded. Even when accompanied by an interpreter, it was arduous to
engage language in a meaningful, yet discrete manner during fast-paced interactions. I found that my observations were most beneficial in informing interviews, complementing the data gleaned from these more communicative methods.

A final valuable method, related to observation, was review of material culture of the classroom, including textbooks, teacher training materials, classroom décor, and other instructional materials. I photographed, transcribed, and documented the schools’ posted class schedules, teachers’ handbooks, Department of Education statements, motivational and educational posters, and school publications, as well as relevant passages from textbooks and reading materials, among many other sources. Especially as I was unable to speak with representatives of the Department of Education, the data produced from their materials and publications was beneficial in approximating the official objectives and goals of the administration.

**Ethical practices**

This study has honored the seven core principles outlined in the American Anthropological Association’s (AAA) 2012 Statement on Ethics, while also accommodating relevant critiques of these guidelines (Bourgeois 2007; Deloria 2007), and incorporating a code of ethics specific to indigenous and historically marginalized communities (Persoon & Minter 2011). Bourgeois (2007) and Deloria (2007) call upon the anthropological element of humanism (Sluka & Robben 2007) to argue that ethics must go beyond the more methodological guidelines of the AAA (2012) to encompass historical responsibility, especially in “traditional” (i.e. colonized and historically marginalized) research settings (Bourgeois 2007: 290). In the production of relevant global ethnographic knowledge, ethnographers must grapple with the “larger moral and human dimensions of political and economic structures” omnipresent in their research settings (Bourgeois 2007: 289-290). Confronting these structures not only establishes a more comprehensive ethical practice but also critical context (Bourgeois 2007); this study approaches these structures by tracking histories of colonization and systemic oppression, hereby invoking Marcus’ (1995: 114) concept of the circumstantial activist, who navigates personal conflicts and self-identification in accordance with situational commitments.

In the following section, I will describe specific ethical concerns pertaining to the methodology of this study, beginning with consent. To the best of my ability, I ensured interlocutors were well informed about my objectives and affiliations, their freedom to decline to participate, the
possible implications of their involvement, and the findings of my work and their significance (AAA 2012). These processes, however, are complex and delicate in the contexts of the research sites, where some informants are not literate, where most lack access to academia and its registers, and where power structures between researcher and informant are inherent (Minter, de Brabander, van der Ploeg, Persoon & Sunderland 2012).

In order to establish meaningful consent with informants, I sought assistance from Mabuwaya Foundation, an environmental conservation organization which maintains long-standing personal and working relationships at the sites. In Malisi, Mabuwaya’s staff introduced me to the mayor and vice governor and assisted in organizing a town hall meeting at the elementary school to discuss my research and its goals, establishing an open forum to discuss community members’ interest or concerns. In Mansarong, Mabuwaya introduced me to prominent elders, including the councilman, and facilitated discussions about my study. They also accompanied me to the school, where I met the teachers and shared my research goals. In both communities, I obtained the approval of community leaders, who discussed my research with their constituents.

Before each interview in Mansarong and Malisi, I restated my research objectives and asked informants individually if they were interested in participating. Still, it is without a doubt that as a foreign, white, English-speaking researcher, I was often positioned in a hierarchical relationship with my informants (Bourgeois 2007); ethnography’s colonial roots imply an inherent hierarchy that cannot be ignored (Pels 2014: 211). This power dynamic was likely compounded by the presence of translators and guides, especially in the case of Malisi, where those translators were not as closely known to the informants as they were in Mansarong. Here, I worked to establish a more egalitarian setting between researcher and informant by arranging interviews so that informants approached me as volunteers. The mayor, vice governor, teachers, and interpreters made it known to the community that I would be available to host interviews with those who desired to participate. Ultimately, I also sought to minimize the “interpreter effect” by working together with multiple interpreters offering different sets of access and with the most “local” guides and interpreters available (Borchgrevink 2003). These included a native and current resident of Mansarong, a native and current resident of Pagapag (the neighboring village of Mansarong), Mabuwaya Foundation employees, and a health worker in Malisi, all of whom had familiarity and rapport with informants in the communities. It should be noted that, due to languages spoken, no Malisi residents were available to translate, though several participated in the research as field guides.
On a broader level, this research is critically concerned with unequal power relationships and histories of violence (Bourgeois 2007: 290). As a Western academic working among indigenous peoples, my presence at the sites of study symbolizes a colonialist heritage culturally, linguistically, and academically (Deloria 2007). Both Bourgeois (2007) and Deloria (2007) assert that the ethnographic practice of reflexivity concerning these issues is simply insufficient. Rather, the anthropologist must position herself to establish the equal power status of the research participants (Bourgeois 2007) and subvert the academic tradition of studying marginalized communities to produce “useless”, inaccessible knowledge (Deloria 2007: 189) in favor of ethical/ social/ historical responsibility. In terms of publication, a significant challenge is the lack of access Malisi and Mansarong informants have to the results of the study (Persoon & Minter 2011). I will continue to work with Mabuwaya Foundation to discuss avenues for sharing data with informants and opportunities to utilize the findings for the benefit of the communities and the promotion of their distinct goals (Greenberg 2007).

Finally, it should be noted that this study is multi-sited, tracing “complex cultural phenomenon” across distinct settings (Marcus 1995: 106). While it may investigate a national and international policy movement in education, it should not be considered representative of the policy practice, interpretation, or implications in contexts beyond the sites of study. Marcus (1995: 99) warns against extrapolating multi-sited ethnographic data to the global scale, stating that such practice is “antithetical to [the] very nature” of ethnography, which is inherently localized and interpersonal; the data and conclusions developed in this study would be diluted and “attenuated” by extrapolating them beyond the specific contexts of research.

Research contexts

Now that I have detailed the methodology employed in this study, the practice of ethics, the positioning of the researcher, and the framing of the communicative context, I will further detail the place and space of the study. As this study centers at the schools as sites of social, cultural, and linguistic interface, promotion of policy, and framing of the future, teachers were among the most key informants. In the following section, I will present a preliminary description of each sitio and its school, followed by perspectives shared by a teacher at each school. The experiences of these informants provide insight into the sites of study as well as key differences between the schools, communities, and student populations.
Toward Mansarong

Leaving from the urban center of Baggao, I often traveled to Mansarong with Ignacio, a local driver and resident of Mansarong’s neighboring village, Pagapag. For the duration of one hour’s motorcycle ride, we passed through corn farms and rice paddies in the direction of the Sierra Madre’s foothills. Along residential streets, harvests of corn kernels dried in the shoulder lanes on both sides of the road, lining the highway into the distance. Seven kilometers out from Mansarong, we would cross a river, wide but shallow enough to pass as the wet season ended. Frequently as the motorcycle crossed, it became lodged, requiring the assistance of bystanders. During my time in the field, a pedestrian footbridge crossing the river was in construction. By my final treks to and from the sites, it was opened for use.

Once across the river, the road climbed in elevation. Ignacio and I continued on the motorcycle when possible for the remaining seven kilometers to Mansarong. Though often, even when the road was fully dry, large stones and trenches prevented many sections from being passable by vehicle. The time required to reach Mansarong from the river varied greatly depending on the weather and road conditions: as few as twenty-five minutes on dry land and as much as a few hours in the mud. In this time, I observed rolling hills dominated by crop fields, corn crops neatly aligned in steady rows. Multiple clusters of houses situated themselves intermittently, broken up by interspersed swaths of bare earth and patches of tree cover.

I observed Mansarong to consist of about fifty households. Most houses were constructed of wood and roofed with galvanized sheets, though a few were constructed of concrete. The village was equipped with electricity, cables and posts lining the sides of the road. When the road was dry, Mansarong buzzed with sounds of motorcycles bumping down the road, American music and television shows echoing out of homes and sheds. Hammers, drills, and generators buzzed through the village as new buildings and homes were constructed. Rice mills ran throughout the day as farmers prepared their crops for market. Backyard water pumps screeched and clicked as groundwater was extracted. Distant chainsaws could be heard somewhere in the mountains.

One of the first buildings of the village along the road was the school; stone steps directed the eye towards a bright green metal gate and a hand painted sign, which read: “Welcome Mansarong Elementary School”. The gate was flanked by concrete walls painted with murals and the slogans “Honesty is the best policy. It begins with me.” and “This school is a zone of peace”. The school
consisted of seven classrooms—one for each grade—divided amongst four distinct concrete and wooden buildings, with a fifth concrete building in the final stages of construction. Each classroom was equipped with electricity, student desks, a teacher’s desk, fans, and bookshelves stocked with textbooks and supplies. In addition to Department of Education issued textbooks, all classrooms included many handmade books in English, Filipino, and Ilocano. Many of the classrooms featured a printer and television screen. In the grade six classroom, each student desk was outfitted with a computer.

In Mansarong, classrooms were covered wall to wall with posters. Each room displayed a photograph of President Duterte in the front center, immediately above the chalkboard, and accompanied by Department of Education statements. All classrooms displayed posters describing each subject taught in the grade assigned to the room, a “teacher’s corner” in which the teacher displayed her image, a short biography, teaching qualifications, school calendars, parent-teacher association information, student government officers, class rosters, and a teacher’s prayer. Other wall decorations were instructional, educational, or motivational in theme, including the alphabet, numbers, parts of speech, rules and standards, inspirational quotes, the rights of children, and images of Department of Education officials.

Figure 2: Students pass through sitio Mansarong on their way to Mansarong Elementary School from Kilometer Nine. Photograph by Mallory McGoff, 23 January 2019.

I soon learned from speaking with the teachers that the school was staffed by seven instructors, including a head teacher, and served around one hundred and twenty students from Mansarong
and surrounding sitios including Pagapag, Kilometer Nine, and Kilometer Ten (Figure 2). Teachers at Mansarong Elementary School came for various sitios, both near to and far from the school. Three teachers stayed on the school grounds during the week due to long commutes from the urban center, while the other four lived close enough to travel home each evening by foot or motorcycle. The teachers varied in age, from early twenties to mid-forties, and years of teaching experience from zero to more than ten. All teachers at Mansarong Elementary School spoke Ilocano as their native language, though some of their ethnic identities were mixed; they reported that the case was the same for their students.

I observed that the teachers structured their classes and lessons flexibly, making use of a variety of methods and materials, including textbooks, videos, and multimedia. During these lessons, students participated eagerly to answer questions, recite in unison, or complete assignments in their individual textbooks. Students frequently worked independently while teachers conducted individual tutoring, wrote reports, or developed materials on their laptops. After the school day was finished, students walked home to their respective sitios and teachers socialized with community members at the nearby shop. Those teachers who commuted daily rode home with their husbands on motorcycles, while the teachers who stayed in Mansarong looked after neighbor children and organized nature walks with local students. They were also observed to visit the homes of Mansarong residents to distribute school information, promote fundraising efforts, collect items from shops, socialize, or attend community events.

**Susana, Mansarong Elementary School Teacher**

Across three months, I shared in countless conversations with teachers at Mansarong Elementary; throughout, Susana, grade two teacher, was never shy to voice her thoughts. While all other teachers at the school were from the urban center and its surrounding sitios, Susana was the most “local”; she grew up in Pagapag, thirty minutes’ walk away, and attended Mansarong Elementary School herself as a girl. In the community, she needed no introduction; her family members and neighbors were proud to tell me about the homegrown “mestiza teacher—Ilocana and Igorot”. In my conversations with elders and parents, many mentioned Susana, either to cite the importance and value of “homegrown” teachers, or to point to their aspirations for their own children. I frequently observed her walking home together with the Pagapag students at the end of the school day or attending community gatherings with her husband and young son.
In our early conversations, Susana told me she was in her third year teaching. But before being placed at Mansarong Elementary, she taught at a much more remote sitio farther down the road. This was her first assignment as a teacher and she described the challenges of being young, at the start of her career, and lacking the resources to carry out her work effectively; “we had no training, no experience” she recalled of her time at the small school, in which she taught a combined class of kindergarten, grades one, two, and three. She described the chaos that ensued each day in trying to teach a class of varied ages, developmental stages, and abilities. This was especially challenging as she was trained not as an early childhood teacher, but as a high school teacher. She explained to me that, like many other young teachers, she was assigned to this school based on rank, an elaborate system that prioritizes teaching placements based on years of experience, test scores, educational attainment, and many other standardized factors, which, “no one understands”. This system keeps the youngest and most inexperienced teachers in “far flung places”, as higher ranking teachers opt for better placements the first chance they get.

From these experiences, Susana has formulated outspoken opinions of the system; “if DepEd [Department of Education] really cared about students in the mountain schools, they would assign more resources” she announced the day I met her. In my time at the school, Susana was a spokeswoman for her peers, openly sharing their grievances about low salaries, lack of resources, unrealistic standards, and exhausting bureaucratic process. She explained that resolving these issues was simply “not a priority for the government and politicians”, leaving teachers “no choice and no way out” of bad placements, low wages, and difficult working conditions. Ultimately, “the children are the victims.” Throughout our discussions, Susana described the “overload” teachers experience in balancing teaching, lesson planning, preparation of materials, reporting, home life, and family/ personal responsibilities. “If I told you all the reports we have to do, I think your head would explode,” she continued, “it really takes away from our class time…they [the Department of Education] would rather us finish our reports than teach our students. What kind of system is that?”

Still, Susana’s efforts for her students were evident. She frequently showed me the handmade literacy books she prepared for her students, each tailored to a child’s individual reading level and language abilities. I often observed her tutoring students one-on-one, consistent with her report that much of her time and resources are dedicated to increasing student literacy. Throughout, Susana was actively involved in fundraising, community organizing, and improvement projects at the school. She described her disappointment to see that, from her perspective, the school had
not changed since she was a pupil; “it was the same when I was a student here, no improvement.” This was the motivation for her, together with other teachers, to develop projects for school improvement, including through the sale of raffle tickets to parents and community members. Last year’s funds purchased computers for the grade six classroom and this year’s funds will go toward fencing the schoolyard. “We need to secure our students,” she says, “so we develop one good project each year, otherwise nothing ever improves.”

**Toward Malisi**

![Figure 3: The defunct logging road, which connects sitios Mansarong and Malisi, photographed at the start of the dry season. Photograph by Mallory McGoff, 21 January 2019.](image)

From Mansarong, I traveled to Malisi by foot, continuing up the logging road (Figure 3) for five kilometers, an achievable pass in the dry season and considerable feat in the rain. This stretch of road was passable by vehicle neither in the wet season nor the dry season due to its rocky, winding nature and deep crevices carved by rain. My first trek to Malisi took place toward the end of the wet season. It had been raining for many days prior to my departure and continued throughout the walk. The mud was thick and deep; missteps frequently caused me to become lodged in the mud, knee-deep. At a quick pace, more than three and a half hours were required to complete the five kilometers in these conditions. In subsequent trips, the weather and road had dried up as the dry season approached. In this condition, the sun and heat were intense.
without the shade of trees, though as I increased in altitude, the air grew cooler and the land more forested. Throughout the trek, I passed small villages clustered around the road, many of which were named by their distance in kilometers from the start of the road (e.g. Kilometer Ten). I crossed multiple streams, bridged by massive, clean-cut wooden beams, bark still clinging to their edges. Upon crossing a final stream, the brush and tree line opened up to Malisi.

Malisi sat atop the foothills in a cleared area green with grasses and shrubbery. I observed Malisi to consist of about fifteen to twenty households, clustering around both sides of the road, which passed through its center. The homes were constructed of wood, together with palm branches, and were perched atop small, steep hillslopes. Many were roofed with galvanized iron sheets and surrounded by tidy gardens. Occasional dried, clean-cut tree stumps, some nearly meter in diameter, emerged from the earth, a reminder of the hearty forest this place once was. A spotty tree line surrounded the site on most sides, with vistas to cleared land and patches of tree cover as the mountain range continued toward the sea. In general, this place was quieter than Mansarong; save for the rain and wind. But then frequently, the shrill buzz of chainsaws rang through the site. The sound was omnipresent, echoing from every direction; each day from mid-morning to early evening, the proximity of (small-scale) logging and kaingin (shifting cultivation) activities could scarcely be forgotten.

At the center of the sitio, a bright pink wooden gate stretched across the road, over which arched a matching pink sign reading “Malisi Elementary School” in bright green letters. Passing through this fenced area, the wooden school building stood directly in the center of the road. As such, Malisi Elementary School saw many people pass by throughout the day: community members going to and from their homes, residents of other sitios, farm workers, and gatherers walked past, making treks along the road. The school was comprised of one wooden, earthen-floored building partitioned into three classrooms, a adjacent teachers’ cottage, and a third small wooden building used for storing books, water, and materials. The teachers’ cottage and storage room were the only buildings in the village equipped electricity, powered by solar panels installed by the Department of Education. Material culture of the classroom was minimal. Each classroom contained a number of student desks, one teacher’s desk, and a chalkboard. Books and supplies were kept in the locked storage room, rather than in the classroom. The lower grades classroom featured poster cards of most letters of the English alphabet, accompanied by an English word and its image, a “Welcome” poster above the chalkboard, and the word “silence” in Ilocano. The middle grades classroom again featured the English alphabet, the word
“silence”, and a printed imagine of President Rodrigo Duterte. In the higher grades room, only the image of the President was displayed.

I learned from speaking with the three young teachers who comprised the staff that the school served fifty-seven students from Malisi and surrounding sitios, including Kilometer Eleven and Kilometer Ten. While students from Malisi were Agta, students from surrounding sitios were non-Agta and Ilocano speaking. Due to the long trek required for teachers to reach their post, classes were held at Malisi Elementary School Tuesdays through Fridays. This school practiced formalized daily routines; students arrived throughout the morning, depending on the distance of their homes and weather conditions. Non-Agta students arrived carrying backpacks, which contained notebooks, pencils, and packed lunches, while Agta children arrived to school carrying no materials. While waiting for classes to begin, students from farther sitios changed out of rain boots and muddy clothes and into school uniforms, which few Agta students wore. Some female students completed chores, such as sweeping away leaves, planting orchids, or assisting the teachers. During this time, students from Malisi and those from surrounding sitios stayed mostly separate. Agta students climbed walls and fences and sat together under trees while non-Agta students gathered under the gazebo and played in the schoolyard.

Once the majority of the children had arrived, teachers called upon the students to arrange themselves by a flag pole in the schoolyard for the morning flag ceremony. Students formed lines by grade level and faced the flag. Agta students oriented themselves toward the back of the lines while non-Agta students oriented themselves toward the front. A teacher played the national anthem of the Philippines over a speaker and students placed their hands over their hearts. Next, students raised their right hands and recited a pledge of allegiance to the Philippines; students’ participation in singing and reciting varied. Finally, teachers shared announcements (such as reminding students to wear their uniforms) and led exercises of light physical activity before dismissing students to their assigned classrooms. Classes reliably began and ended in similarly ceremonious fashion, with students standing to recite a prayer in English. Students then took their seats by their own arrangement, with Agta students seated toward the back and non-Agta students seated toward the front.

After the school day had ended with another prayer and flag ceremony, students from surrounding sitios walked home together and students from Malisi dispersed to climb trees, practice with their slingshots, and collect wild berries. Teachers typically retired to their cottage
on the school grounds to rest and prepare dinner. Often groups of Malisi children returned to
the flat, cleared, and central space of the schoolyard to play games, with teachers watching from
their cottage, from which English Christian and pop music echoed out through the village four
days a week. On occasion, teachers and students visited the forest and gardens of community
members to gather purple yams and ginger.

**Georgia, Malisi Elementary School Teacher**

In my time at Malisi Elementary School, a key informant was Georgia, a first year teacher from
the urban center of the municipality, who was the tutor to grades four, five, and six. I first
stumbled upon the three Malisi teachers on a Monday afternoon, just as they completed their
weekly hike to the sitio in the morning heat. Weary from the sun and the mud, they were also
flustered to be locked out of their cottage; each took her turn fighting with the lock before their
students came to their aid. In that time, they had invited me to stay with them and join them for
dinner. I accompanied the teachers as they sifted rice and prepared the meal. Georgia told me
she and her colleagues were Ilocanas, in their early twenties, and from sitios closer to the
municipal center; she herself was twenty-two and recently graduated from the regional university.
In the next few days, I would ask her about her work and her experience teaching in Malisi and
she would laugh nervously and answer with pleasantries. I observed her classes, sitting in the
back and occasionally joining in with games and group activities. Georgia often had about ten
students in class, with the majority being Agta from Malisi. The students were attentive and calm,
but enthusiastic to solve problems on the chalkboard, play charades, and hold props for the
class. While some students were hesitant to participate, Georgia successfully encouraged them
with kind words and a jovial attitude.

Sharing meals with the teachers became my routine; one night Georgia found me alone and
announced she wished to tell me something about her work. Her tone was confessional. She
began by telling me that life here was very different from hers at home. It was harder, harsher,
simpler. She transitioned to describe her students; most were aged fourteen to fifteen, and placed
in the higher grades of the school, yet they were unable to read. She told me she spent the first
six months of her assignment in Malisi teaching reading alone: one-on-one sessions and classes
solely focused on increasing literacy. She broke into tears as she described that despite those
efforts, her students struggled to read even still. She explained that this has prevented the
instruction of required subject matter, course material, and standards and that her students were
overwhelmed by the academic requirements they faced. It was clear that this anxiety extended to Georgia too.

Georgia took me back to her first day on the job. She recalled that in the first months at her post her students “would not speak to me, would not look at me”. They spent their time in class silent and “staring at the ground”. Georgia identified the cause of this behavior as shyness and apprehension to interact with a new, unknown instructor each schoolyear due to high teacher turnover. Georgia described the particular suspicion of Jeremiah, the eldest Agta student in the class. He was distant, disinterested, untrusting in her early days her post. She cited that this behavior may lead some (unspecified) people to “think that Agta children are bad students”. She was quick to add that this attitude is a misunderstanding. Georgia was proud to tell me that now she has gained Jeremiah’s trust and that of the other students, but insisted it was not an easy task. She described her students now, including, and even especially, Jeremiah, as eager, enthusiastic, and dedicated pupils. “They are striving,” she noted.

Georgia mentioned that, unlike other teachers in the “mountain schools”, including her colleagues at Malisi Elementary, she was considering maintaining her placement, at least for a few more years. “I want to see my students graduate and be successful”, she noted, but the conditions of her placement have made that choice difficult. It is not just the condition of the road, the long hike, and the extreme weather, but also the distance from her family and home and the sacrifices required by her work. She thinks about starting a family of her own in the foreseeable future, but reflected that, due to the demands and isolation of her job in Malisi, she may not be able to have the life she imagines unless she finds an assignment closer to home.

Georgia described how many of her students take frequent hiatuses from their study to follow the livelihoods of their families, such as seasonal farm labor, hunting, and gathering. Other causes of these breaks are “poverty and no food”. This has resulted in her students attending school irregularly or leaving school altogether. As a result, her students have not advanced in the curriculum and have required multiple years to advance in grade level. Georgia told me that she has spoken to the parents of her grade six students, four of whom will graduate this year, about plans for their children’s education. She emphasized that though the families strongly desired for their children to continue school, she did not think they would. “It’s far,” she said, referring to the closest high school, located in the urban center, and board is expensive. Ultimately “it depends on the parents’ decision and money.”
This chapter has elaborated logistical and contextual aspects of the research, including the methodology, practice of ethical standards, positionality of the researcher, and framing of the communicative context. It had also introduced the sites of study, with special focus given to the schools as the epicenter of the research. Within these spaces, teachers are key informants and their perspectives provide a basic introduction to the schools, student populations, and occupational challenges. In the following chapter, I will further detail the communities of study, in terms of their historical and social landscapes, contextualizing these stories within the broader legacies of colonization and state-making in education and language in the Philippines.
Chapter Three

Enduring legacies: colonization, state-making, and origins

“English became the wedge that separated the Filipinos from their past [...] With American textbooks, Filipinos started learning not only a new language but also a new way of life, alien to their traditions and yet a caricature of their model. This was the beginning of their education. At the same time, it was the beginning of their mis-education”. –Renato Constantino, The Mis-education of the Filipino, 1970

Legacies in the classroom

Though recently developed, the education policies relevant to this study arise through legacies of the colonial past and processes of state-making. In this chapter, I will discuss the relationship between these histories and the circumstances of this study. To begin, I will review the theoretical framework from which we can interpret these histories and their relevance within a study of education policy. This framework will demonstrate how formal education and its policies function to indoctrinate students into a society, assign value to knowledge systems, and contribute to state-making and further, how they have been employed historically to reduce or erase non-dominant knowledge systems, especially in the case of colonial governments (Minter, Ke & Persoon 2012; Rafael 2015; Smoliez 1984). Finally, I will discuss how colonization and the nationalist movement in the Philippines led to the exploitation of natural resources through unchecked capitalism (Kummer 1992), resulting in the depletion of the forests and shifts in economy and ecology at the sites of study. In subsequent chapters, I will expand upon how these legacies result in a reimagining of the role and value of formal education in the contexts of these communities.

Minter, Ke, and Persoon (2012) discuss the international history of formal education as a political tool employed by colonial and postcolonial governments to indoctrinate indigenous and minority peoples into national identities, languages, and cultures. This is accomplished by establishing an educational culture of “cognitive imperialism” (Battiste 2005), in which a solitary system of language, knowledge, and values is approved by and promoted in the schools; all
minority systems are thereby illegitimated. Cognitive imperialism is a carefully crafted strategy for coerced assimilation of minority peoples into a homogenized national society and further, a system for the disenfranchisement of minority peoples, whose languages, cultures, and knowledge systems are effectively reduced and erased in the process (Battiste 2005). In other words, institutions of education and their guiding policies “have been and still are powerful institutions for molding a country’s cultural composition, for repressing cultural deviance and for determining the cultural norm” (Minter, Ke & Persoon 2012: 11).

Several anthropologists have described formal language in education as a process by which statehood and national identity are asserted, reproduced, and manufactured (Friedman 2016; George 2016; Minter, Ke & Persoon 2012; Wortham 2012). A national identity is accomplished here through language and culture socialization: an array of processes of social reproduction, through which language and culture come to represent “group identity, nationhood, [and] personhood” (Garrett 2002). For indigenous peoples, especially those residing in postcolonial states, this means their knowledge systems, skill sets, cultural values, and methods of teaching and learning have long been discarded in public education (Smoliez 1984; Rafael 2015). Ultimately, this relationship with the public school system results in decreased educational (and later, occupational and economic) outcomes for this global population, who are more likely to leave school at an early age (Minter, Ke & Persoon 2012; UNESCO 2009).

Colonial history of the Philippines, as it pertains to the study

In the Philippines, long histories of colonial occupation have resulted in the continued marginalization of indigenous and minority groups, many of whom have seen a steady decrease in the practices of their languages and ways of life as a direct result of these histories (Osborne 2015; Rafael 2015; Smoliez 1984). Colonial education and language policy here began with the arrival of the Spanish in the sixteenth century, who installed a system of formal education centered on Catholic religious indoctrination and Spanish language (Schwartz 1971). This system prevailed until the end of the nineteenth century, when the Philippine Revolution (1896-1898) and the Spanish-American War (1898) replaced Spanish colonial rule with American colonial rule (Rafael 2015). Herein, the Spanish public education system, along with the private education system, was dismantled and replaced by the American model as part of the colonizing country’s broader agenda of “benevolent assimilation,” of the people; the United States installed a public
school system across the Philippines as a “counterinsurgent” effort aimed at tranquilizing political turmoil and insurrection during the Philippine-American War (1899-1902) (Rafael 2015).

Under this system, pupils were instructed by American soldiers, and later, by the “Thomasites,” American teachers transported to the Philippines on the military ship USS Thomas (Rafael 2015). A “key feature” of this colonial system of education was “the adoption of English as the sole medium of instruction”, which accomplished the erasure of native languages and dialects from the public schools not just through their passive absence, but by their active prohibition (Rafael 2015: 284). Deliberate exclusionary methods included the charging of monetary fines to pupils “caught” speaking in their mother tongues (Rafael 2015: 287). As the implementation of English was intended to bring “natives closer to American interests and thereby putting an end to their resistance”, it was a key strategy in indoctrinating “‘savage’ Filipinos” into Western ideology (Rafael 2015: 284). Moreover, English served additional political purposes: identifying Filipinos as subjects of the American colonial regime and laying the foundations for the imposition of an Americanized “democratic society” to be accomplished through shared language (Osborne 2015; Rafael 2015: 285). But due to inaccessibility of schooling, inadequate resources, and high dropout rates in early grades, instruction in English language increased social disparities (Rafael 2015: 285). Much like the Spanish colonial era, this period was marked by elite Filipinos rising in society through mastery of the colonial language while already marginalized groups were further excluded (Osborne 2015).

Through this system of education, widespread proficiency in English was never accomplished and in the process, native languages were actively diminished. The eventual result of these policies and practices in the schools was a generation of students who were not fully fluent in any language, including their own (Rafael 2015). The American colonial occupation’s continued influence over education is evident today, both practically in language use and curriculum content and theoretically in a prevailing “colonial mentality,” which deems English language and Western knowledge systems superior to the languages and knowledges of indigenous peoples (Gaerlan 1998; Rafael 2015). This topic will be discussed at length in chapter five, where I investigate how current policies in Philippine education arise from and in reaction to this colonial past, as well as through framing of the future.
Statehood and nationalism, as they pertain to the study

In 1935, the constitution of the Commonwealth of the Philippines established that an official “national language” would soon be chosen; in 1937, Tagalog, later renamed “Filipino” was designated as the national language and required for instruction in schools across the country (Gaerlan 1998; Osborne 2015; Smoliez 1984). The prominence of this language in public education and the culture at large was promoted by the Japanese (Gaerlan 1998) during their brief occupation of the Philippines (1942-1945). In the years to come, the concept of a national language and its place in Philippine society and culture became highly debated (Gaerlan 1998). While Tagalog was widely spoken in the Philippines, it belonged to a distinct ethnolinguistic group mostly concentrated in Metro Manila (Young 2002) and remained inaccessible to the masses (Gaerlan 1998). But still, decades after independence (1946), the American model of colonial education prevailed. While students may no longer have been instructed by American soldiers or teachers, Filipino instructors continued with English language and American curricula in classrooms across the country (Gaerlan 1998; Rafael 2015). Rafael (2015: 286) describes the education system post-independence as continuing to “[foster] uncritical views of the benevolence of the United States, training Filipinos to blindly embrace American models.”

For nationalists, English language and its instruction in the schools marked a powerful structure of American colonial occupation, in regards to its effect of distancing students from their own languages and histories, instilling American ideologies, and stalemating pupils’ literacy and academic and social potential (Constantino 1970; Gaerlan 1998; Young 2002). The development and teaching of a distinct “national language” then marked independence and agency. This ideology is well-encapsulated in the widely influential text by nationalist Renato Constantino, *The Mis-Education of the Filipino* (1970). In this publication, Constantino (1970) described the use of English as colonial education’s central “instrument”. His essay detailed the rewriting of Philippine history and culture in the schools through American colonial (mis)education and the indoctrination of students into romanticism for Western culture and ideologies (Gaerlan 1998). To members of the movement, English language and the American public school system had ostracized Filipinos from their historical, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic identities; many students were no longer fluent in their mother tongues and were learning distorted histories of their peoples in the classroom (Gaerlan 1998; Rafael 2015).
Members of this movement understood a national language as the best means by which to reclaim their education, agency, identity, and ultimately, country. Constantino (1970) called for “a nationalist approach to education” in which the “national language would take its proper place” as the lingua franca of Philippine society. This feat would be accomplished through the use of Filipino as a language of instruction in early formal education; the author claimed that the “national language” was already a widely functional lingua franca at the time of his publication and identified resistance to the language as “colonial mentality”. In a final section of his text, titled “Filipinos: Needed”, Constantino (1970) makes a call to action: “[t]he education of the Filipino must be a Filipino education. It must be based on the needs of the nation and the goals of the nation […] Philippine educational policies should be geared to the making of Filipinos.”

As a result of this campaign, Filipino was formalized as the language of instruction in schools across the country in 1974 under the Bilingual Education Program of the Philippines (Gaerlan 1998; Osborne 2015). In the words of the Department of Education, this policy directly followed the nationalist movement by promoting “the development of Filipino as a linguistic symbol of national unity and identity” which prepares students “to perform their functions and duties as Filipino citizens” (Department of Education, Republic of the Philippines 1987). In a later publication of the Policy on Bilingual Education, the Department of Education provisioned for “the maintenance of English as an international language for the Philippines” as well as the employment of “regional languages” for “auxiliary media of instruction and as initial language for literacy where needed” suggesting the necessity and benefits of mother tongue instruction while underscoring the central place of Filipino in the classroom (Department of Education, Republic of the Philippines, 1987). More than a decade late, The Philippine Commission on Education Reform (2000: 61) echoed the perceived significance of this language policy and practice, stating “[i]n a country divided by geography of more than seven thousand islands and more than 171 languages, there is clearly a need for a national language that would foster national consciousness, facilitate communications across language boundaries and thus foster understanding, a sense of national community and identity.” Ultimately, this policy was replaced by MTB-MLE. Even so, the influence of the nationalist movement in education is evidenced in the practices of the schools today, which will be detailed in chapter four.

The postwar era of state-making was characterized not only by the push for the country’s cultural and linguistic independence, but for its economic independence as well (Gaerlan 1998; Rafael 2015). Following the establishment of statehood, the Philippines relied economically on
the United States. The country’s “development strategy” proved unsuccessful; it “failed to provide” employment to a growing population, the manufacturing industry stalled, and economic development was not on par with fellow Southeast Asian nations (Kummer 1992: 91). It was these circumstances, along with great socioeconomic inequality that set the stage for the exploitation of forest resources in the postwar period, resulting in rapid and widespread deforestation (Kummer 1991: 65).

While there existed a variety of contributing and interconnected factors in the process of mass deforestation, including small-scale logging, agricultural expansion, and population pressure, perhaps the most primal was unchecked commercial logging by multinational corporations (Kummer 1991; Ross 1996), particularly in the sites of this study. These corporations often operated illegally, unregulated, and under the protection of government bribes (Kummer 1991; Ross 1996). But the consequences of their often illegal activities were not limited to the mass extraction of timber, rather the detrimental effects “can be extended to include improper logging techniques, poor construction of logging roads, failure to reforest after logging, and perhaps most important, failure to prevent agriculturalists from occupying concession land which has been logged” (Kummer 1991: 70).

Figure 4: Previously forest, corn fields, owned by residents of Mansarong and tended by residents of Malisi, dominant the foothills of the Sierra Madre at the sites of study. Photograph by Mallory McGoff, 21 January 2019.
Decades after corporate logging has ended in the Sierra Madre, these effects can be plainly witnessed at sitios Mansarong and Malisi. The establishment of logging roads facilitated access to previously isolated forest areas and the practice of logging created broad swaths of cleared, arable, and unoccupied land attractive to farmers from surrounding regions, especially as population growth had not been matched by economic growth (Kummer 1991). The migrant farmers who cultivated these cleared forests often practice(d) shifting agriculture and small-scale logging, which further deplete(d) the remaining natural resources. For residents of Mansarong and Malisi, the massive depletion of the forest and subsequent agricultural encroachment (Figure 4) is experienced through lasting environmental consequences: erosion of topsoil, local climate shifts, sedimentation of rivers, and drastic decrease in biodiversity. Ultimately, these consequences have threatened the livelihoods of peoples in both communities and impacted their imagination of the future, including the imagined role of education in preparing children for the future. In the following section, I will outline the histories of sitios Mansarong and Malisi as they were described to me by prominent elders. As founding members of the villages which sprang up around a commercial logging road, their stories align strongly with the broader narrative described above, demonstrating enduring legacies at the sites.

**Origins and place-making of sitios Mansarong and Malisi**

As communities of indigenous and multiethnic groups in a space of drastic environmental and economic shifts, the sites of this study are part of the enduring legacies described above. As such, their origins and processes of place-making are foundational to the interrelationships investigated in this study. It is not surprising that the most informative and thorough accounts of these origins were relayed to me by elders and village leaders, whose personal histories were well connected with the histories of the sites. In the following section, I will retell the personal histories relayed to me by selected informants.

I will begin the story of Mansarong where my own experience began in at the site: with Paul, the councilman to this barangay district. I was first introduced by to Paul by a Mabuwaya Foundation staff member, Arnold, who shares a long history with the sitio and its people. “My brother,” Arnold called him, now that they have known each other for twenty years and have worked together toward shared goals of environmental conservation and economic stimulation. I frequently observed from Paul’s concrete porch, shared by his family’s sari-sari shop: a typical
gathering place for Mansarong residents as well as travelers who stop for a rest on their trek along the road. Here, I asked him about this place and his own history in it. Paul told me he was Ibaloi from Cordillera and member to one of the original families to settle in the area. He was born in Benguet, but moved to the Mansarong area as an adolescent in 1977, during Marcos’ dictatorship. His family came here to “meet our needs,” which were not sufficiently met in Benguet where fertile land was scarce and political unrest disrupted the lives of the people. The land in the Sierra Madre was unclaimed and unoccupied. There was “no road and no logging” in those days, only “virgin forest.” Paul’s family occupied themselves with subsistence farming and hunting, cultivating a wide variety of vegetables to sustain themselves. “We Ibaloi are gardeners… we grow for family use, we sell only the surplus” he instructed, explaining that historically his family had not been involved in large-scale agriculture. Paul made clear though: “Agta were here before us, they were the original inhabitants.”

In the 1980s, Paul’s family began to have company. After the logging road was made, farmers flocked to the area from across northern Luzon to claim the recently cleared land: “Kalinga, Ilocanos, Ibanag, and Itawes,” to name a few, he recalled. “They only plant one crop,” he scoffed in a way that was both amused and disdained. Between logging and the new occupation by farmers, the forest was quickly cleared. Since then, sitios have sprung up along the road “all the way to the coast” and Ilocano has become the lingua franca of the area. Though both he and his wife are Ibaloi, Paul told me that he and his family speak Ilocano around the house and that Ilocano is the language his children know best, as they grew up speaking it in the school and community.

In the time since the forest became farmland, Paul had adapted and done well for himself, acquiring a significant amount of land, on which he farmed corn, upland rice, and vegetables. He supplemented his family’s diet by hunting wild pig native chicken in the forest. He employed Agtas, including several from Malisi, who worked as tenants and laborers on his farms. He and his wife also operated a sari-sari shop from the front room of their house, which was frequented by many travelers along the road, as well as locals. He was able to send his eldest sons to a Catholic high school in urban center and owned a motorcycle and a logging truck, which he used to transport his crops and bring residents of Mansarong, Pagapag, and Malisi, as well as their products to the market each week.
In later conversations, Paul reflected on the changes in the natural environment over his lifetime and recalled an old friend, a British environmentalist who conducted research in the area many years ago. “Daniel taught me many things,” he told me, “about the disappearing forests, about animals and birds… I am a sharp shooter and he comes with me hunting and I shot a bird I see him like this” he portrayed a sad expression and mimed a tear running down his face: “he told me that if I hunt and shoot a bird, I must spare the bird beside it because birds plant the forest through the dissemination of seeds, you know? So they can restore the forest…I didn’t think so much about it in those days, now I realize that Daniel was right.” Paul reported that he now shares this message and teaches his community about environmental conservation, “now I tell that to the others.”

Beyond environmental projects, I observed that Paul led many community improvement initiatives. One Sunday, while conducting daily rounds and interviews, I observed him at Kilometer Nine leading a group of men in work on the road. His sister-in-law told me he organized regular task forces of volunteers on the weekends to repair and improve the road conditions so that farmers might be able to move their products to market more easily and efficiently and so children, teachers, and others who frequently travel it might be less inconvenienced. At the Elementary School, I read in a newsletter that Paul recently led a community cleanup and sanitation effort to reduce the risk of dengue and malaria transmission. The teachers told me that Paul enlisted the help of the school in this project and that he is often organizing the community to these ends.

A second key informant in Mansarong was Antonio, who, like Paul was one of the founding residents of this sitio. I met Antonio during my first stay at the site when he was invited to Paul’s house for dinner. One Saturday, I passed his home, located directly along the road, on my way from the farming co-op shop to Paul’s house. From his open door, the soundtrack of old American cinema radiated out onto the street. Antonio invited me in to share lunch before he headed back out to tend his farm again in the afternoon. Over the next two hours, he told me his story of Mansarong.

Antonio told me he too was from Benguet, identified as Igorot, and moved to this area when he was twenty-four years old. He tells me martial law was imposed on his home at this time, driving many people away from the region, including himself; because of this, he went to join a brother who was raising crops here in the Sierra Madre. At the time, he and his family comprised one of
Antonio declared proudly “and so Mansarong was founded by Cordillera! Especially us from Benguet, Igorots from Benguet, Ibaloi and Kankanaey…Most people here come from Igorots.”

When he first moved here “there were lots of Agta”, with whom he described an amicable relationship, even calling them “our friends since always…we treated them well so that they will like us.” He explained that he and other, non-Agta residents in the area established a mutualistic relationship with their neighbors; “Agta are friendly,” he said, “we know they prefer to hunt and fish, not to farm, they follow the river” he shrugged, “that’s the way they like.” He added that the “Agta learned from us, the Ilocano way of living” by which he meant settling, farm work, and perhaps some other qualities he did not name.

Yes, Antonio is Igorot, and yet here he referred to Ilocano as his own communal “way”. While Antonio strongly identified with the Cordillera, Ilocano is the dominant regional identity in Baggao and has become part of his own ways of being and doing. “Ilocanos came to Cagayan and it became the common language” he told me. “I was already hearing Ilocano when I came here…language was always mixed here”. While Antonio’s children speak Ibaloi with their father, they, like others in Mansarong, speak Ilocano in the community context. And as they have married non-Igorots, Antonio’s grandchildren are Ilocano-speaking and do not know their ancestral language. “I was not able to teach Ibaloi to my grandson due to mixed family” he said, explaining that his daughter married an Ilocano. This was the case for many people I interviewed in Mansarong. While older generations spoke Ibaloi, Ibanag, Kanakanaey, or other tongues, their children spoke this language in a limited capacity and only in the home, and their grandchildren did not speak it at all. Ilocano dominated as the shared and preferred language in the community context, and frequently in the home as well.

Antonio continued his story, repeating Paul’s account of mass migration after the construction of the logging road. This change in demographics and economy resulted in changes to the natural world as well; “there were rapid changes to the environment. Before it was cold and fresh, the land was forested. Climate change is global, but we feel climate change here. Now that the trees are cleared, the climate is hotter and rains are heavy.” Antonio recalled that around the
year 2000, government regulation became part of the space. “The government came to say no kaingin, no cutting trees…now we are aware of rampant changes to the environment.”

The conversations above encapsulate well some personal histories of Mansarong as they were described to me by informants throughout the village. It should be noted that both informants cited spoke English very competently; the shared language between informant and researcher facilitated fluid and spontaneous conversation. Further, for both conversations, no interpreter was required, allowing a more balanced power dynamic between researcher and informant, as well as a more natural communicative context. These circumstances could not be replicated with community informants in Malisi as there were no shared languages between researcher and informants at this site. In these cases, an interpreter was always present, translating the conversation between English and Ilocano. While this method allowed access to a communicative context, it also created an atmosphere that was inherently more restrictive. This effect resulted in more abbreviated responses.

I will begin in Malisi (Figure 5) with Mario, the mayor and founding member of the village. I was introduced to Mario by Mabuwaya Foundation staff members on my first visit to the site. He quickly arranged my stay, research, and accommodation with his community and coordinated a village meeting at the school to discuss the study. On a few occasions, I visited him at his home, located next to the school, where he could be found outside in the sun, shaping long stalks of rattan, in preparation to weave baskets. Here, Mario told me about the “times past” before the logging road came to be. He was a young man in those days, hunting, fishing, and gathering in the forest with a band of other Agta. He recalled the cooler air, calmer weather, dense forest, and abundant fish, wild hogs, fowl, and flora. There were no farmers in those days, though Mario noted that there were two non-Agta families settled in the vicinity. “We were here first” he told me, “we were here before the road.” And his livelihood was sustainable and sufficient.

Then, the “veterans” came, plowing a wide path for their logging trucks to access to the depths of the forest. Around this time, Mario invited his kin to join him in his place. Together, they established shelters along the road at the sitio Malisi. Over the next few decades, he remembered, trees were depleted by loggers. Forest cover became scare and the land was exposed to increased sunlight and heat. The rivers dried up. The land surrounding Malisi was cleared. There’s just “no more fish, no more animals” he stated plainly. What was once a fruitful livelihood became scarce and precarious. As a result, the people of his village experienced hardship in securing food and
turned to day labor to combat this precarity (Tsing 2015). Mario observed that about ten years ago, the people of Malisi began participating in agricultural labor, typically working for Ilocano and Igorot farm owners in neighboring sitios, most prominently Mansarong. Even so, they continued hunting and gathering whenever possible and practical. I asked Mario if he and his people would continue their practice of hunting, gathering, and fishing as their primary livelihoods, if there were sufficient forest resources. “Of course,” he replied solemnly, “always.”

Figure 5: Children play near their homes in sitio Malisi, which cluster along the road. Photograph by Mallory McGoff, 21 January 2019.

Robert was a second key respondent in Malisi. He was Mario’s son and the vice governor of Malisi. On my first day at the site, I attended a meeting at his home with Mabuwaya staff. Robert brought us to a spare building at the far end of the village where we could stay and ensured the house was well provisioned with firewood and plates and cups borrowed from the neighboring house. Robert too was always busy and often I encountered him along road in my travels or at the offices of the local government unit, where he accompanied his community members to meetings, to collect resources for the schoolchildren, or to request government
assistance. On occasion, I visited him and his wife at their home in the evening when he had returned from the field or the forest or the market or the city center. He often rocked his young children as we squatted by the fire to talk. While many people in Malisi told me their livelihood was farming or farm labor, Robert named his as “hunting but also farming”. He told me that while most people in Malisi hunted whenever possible, they hunted substantially more in the past. He and his constituents worked in farm labor more often now that forest cover had decreased and animals and fish had been depleted, but still his identity remained strongly with hunting; “hunting is our livelihood since birth. No land, no rice field,” he declared, “this is our way.”

Robert often referred to non-Agtas as “Filipinos.” He told me that these “outsiders”, including non-Agtas from surrounding sitios in the area, contributed to the depletion of forest resources by logging, hunting, fishing, and practicing kaingin, despite that these activities were prohibited by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. “They come from the outside to log and sell… the Filipinos go to the river and catch fish,” he described. But such activities are part of a longer tradition of environmental degradation Robert has witnessed throughout his life. He told me frankly “life was better before than now.” He elaborated: the cutting of trees caused Agta livelihoods to vanish in his lifetime, made worse by non-Agtas who exploited resources on “Agta land”. Hunting has become insufficient as a livelihood practice now that the forest animals have disappeared.

Finally, I met David by chance. As I was conducting observations in a class at Malisi Elementary School, he passed along the road, through the schoolyard and stopped for a rest at the shelter in front of the teacher’s cottage, as many travelers do. The teachers notified me that the “leader of the Agta” was at the school and had made himself available to be interviewed. I left the classroom and joined him with an interpreter. I asked him about his post and duties and he told me he is the “captain of the Agta people from the river until the coast”. In this role, he was “the leader of the people to maintain the community”, which consisted of five distinct sitios, and was “responsible to address problems of the Agta”, which included internal or external issues. David spoke both Labine and Dupaninan, the two languages of Agta in this area.

I asked David about the Agta settlements in the area and how they came to be. He told me “before the road, there was only Agta”; in the past, his people made their livelihood through hunting and fishing, but also through the production of rattan-woven handicrafts, such as
baskets and brooms, which were sold to “Ilocanos” in surrounding areas. According to David, this practice has decreased over time due to decreased supply of raw materials in the forests as well as decreased demand for the products. In general, he told me, this area and his communities have changed substantially over time, with the introduction of schools being a significant and notable change. But perhaps the most drastic and encompassing change has been in the natural environment, including “landslides and erosion” on their ancestral domain. These changes have necessitated a shift in livelihoods. Now, his people make their living through farm work. He reported that while some Agta had their own land (often through marriages to non-Agta), most were tenants or laborers on famers belonging to “Ilocanos”.

As described above, Mansarong and Malisi feature some key differences in terms of livelihood, ethnic/ cultural/ linguistic composition, and economic strategy and opportunity. Importantly they also share some commonalities, symbolized by the feature that unites them physically: the old logging road. While the logging industry left decades ago, the road remains. Now in disarray, the road presents a paradox at the heart of legacies of the past, contexts of the present, and framing of the future; the road gave rise to these sitios as settled communities which sprang up along its edges, but it also led increasingly precarious livelihoods in both places. In chapter six, I will discuss framing of the future and how formal education is seen as a pathway to combating this precarity for children. In the following chapter, I will describe translation of language and culture in these communities into practice within the schools. Throughout, I will demonstrate how the legacies introduced in this chapter shape the place and space of language and culture within these sites, as well as their perceived value through their assignment to distinct scales.
Chapter Four

Practicing policy: language, culture and ideologies of scale

“The language problem of the Philippines […] is the problem of reconciling the competing demands of ethnicity (embodied in an individual’s mother tongue or vernacular), nationalism (manifested in having and propagating a national language) and modernization (seen to be synonymous with using an international language)” – Ma. Lourdes S. Bautista, 2000

Language and scale

Chapter three introduced the roles of languages and their associated cultural practices in the public school system of the Philippines across distinct eras, as well as the setting of the sites of study. The current education and language policies and practices investigated in this study respond to and arise from the particular history discussed in chapter three. In this chapter, I will review the practiced, observed and reported role and value of languages and cultural knowledge systems in the schools, drawing upon colonial legacies discussed in chapter three, which lay the foundation for the assignment of languages and cultural practices to scales—local, national, and international/global—within the schools and broader sociocultural context. Further, this chapter will emphasize the significance, not only of these scales themselves, but of their associated ideologies, roles, and values, which participate in a narrative of progress characteristically ascribed to indigenous and minority peoples in colonial and postcolonial settings.

First I will describe the concept of ideologies of scale as applied to language and culture. Through colonization, “culture” is envisioned as a measurement of civilization; while colonizers envision themselves as evolved and modern, they cast colonized peoples as primitive; elements of this evolutionist narrative of progress prevail in popular conceptualizations of “globalization” (Tsing 2000). Tsing (2000) describes the “charismatic” magnetism of globalist ideology, in which the world and all of its composite “cultures” are imagined to be improving and advancing toward a shared global future. In that sense, “global” can replace “modern” as a descriptor of advanced, evolved, or superior societies and cultural practices. This creates a false
hierarchical association between scales and eras in a progress narrative across time, in which societies and cultural practices associated with the local scale become relegated to an outdated, primitive past (Elyachar 2002; Tsing 2000). Herein, local is positioned as the dichotomous opposite of “global”, wherein peoples, cultural practices, and societies are imagined to “progress” from local to global across time, through “world-wrapping evolutionary stages” (Tsing 2000: 347). This school of thought allows for the imagining of the present and future as “a global era, a time in which no units or scales count for much except the globe” (Tsing 2000: 327-328).

This demarcation of time-space and assigned relative value is shared by Elyachar (2002: 494) who describes “global” as “a metaphor for development” wherein localized cultural practices are “condemned as backward and an obstacle to development” (500) by national and international actors. As discussed in chapter three, American colonizers of the Philippines designated the practice of “local” language and culture as a hindrance to the development of a subordinate and “democratic” colonial state (Rafael 2015). For this reason, they implemented English, to “scale up” to the international/global level. Though imagined to break from colonization, the nationalist movement in education also understood “localized” practices as a barrier to development, valuing instead a national scale linguistic and cultural identity (Constantino 1970; Philippine Commission on Educational Reform, 2000; Young 2002). As a result of both of these processes, indigenous and minority linguistic and cultural heritages were largely removed from practice and relative value in the schools, which emphasized the greater weight of nationally and globally scaled languages and cultural practices (Rafael 2015; Young 2002).

Bautista (2000) describes the “language problem of the Philippines” as a negotiation of scales; it is “the problem of reconciling the competing demands of ethnicity (embodied in an individual’s mother tongue or vernacular), nationalism (manifested in having and propagating a national language) and modernization (seen to be synonymous with using an international language)”. As languages are scaled, so too are their associated meanings; in instituting an “international” or “national” language in place of students’ “local” or native language, the associated cultural practices and heritages of these languages are valued over those of the students (Bautista 2000). Moreover, these hierarchical ideologies of scale result in ranked, “hierarchical spaces” for language and culture practice in a society (Friedman 2003). These spaces are reflected strongly in the schools, in which distinct languages and cultural registers are invoked in distinct moments and for distinct purposes.
In the following sections, I will create an assemblage of selected observations and conversations which inform the practices and perceptions surrounding the roles and values of languages and knowledge systems. Distinct scenarios will be described for each school with respect to each setting’s distinct and illuminating contexts. Anecdotes are chosen by their relevance and ability to concisely represent widely observed or reported phenomena. Taken together, these snapshots can inform the practice of mother tongue-based education and the assignment of language and cultural knowledge systems to distinct scales.

**A note on “mother tongue”**

Before I discuss the policy of “mother tongue” in the school context, I must make a note of the nuanced situation of mother tongue among within the community context. Here, the layered and intricate complexity of language and linguistic identities lies in stark contrast to the prescribed simplicity of “mother tongue” in policy, in which a single language is declared the “mother tongue” (Department of Education 2012: 3) for all schools within a region, without provision for a community’s unique linguistic makeup. Both schools in this study practiced Ilocano as their designated mother tongue, yet the practice of language in both communities is distinct.

Malisi as a cultural, ethnic, and linguistic community is fairly homogenous. Its people are almost exclusively Agta and speakers of the Agta dialects Labine and Dupaninan, though many reported that they speak Ilocano outside of the community. Yet Labine and Dupaninan are not the “mother tongue” of the school, which is also attended by Ilocano-speaking students from surrounding sitios and staffed by Ilocana teachers. The case of Mansarong is more varied. Mansarong’s people practice a multitude of languages and dialects, not limited to Ilocano, Ibaloi, Kankanaey, Ibanag, and Itawes, and the interrelationships between these dialects is complex. While Ilocano is the dominant *lingua franca* of the village, the case of this language itself is complex, including the phenomenon of “deep Ilocano”.

From the beginning, the teachers at both schools told me that a significant challenge they faced with implementing MTB-MLE was confronting the vast lack of fluency in “deep Ilocano”. While “deep Ilocano” is the “pure” version of the language, most speakers in the area practice code-switching to English or Filipino to replace vocabulary within the Ilocano language that is uncommonly used, non-household, impractical, nonexistent, or simply phonetically/phonologically arduous. For these reasons, such words are no longer used or even known by
many speakers of the language in the area, who instead substitute with English or Filipino. “Even I don’t know the word in Ilocano,” teachers told me frequently, explaining that for their students, “deep Ilocano” was even more obscure. In other terms, the practice of the Ilocano language is distinct from the formalized orthography invoked in the school setting. As such, the school context makes “inflexible demands” of the language that are incompatible with its practice in the community context (Hinton 2001: 9).

Ilocano language, culture, and peoples are not indigenous to Cagayan, though they now form the dominant linguistic and cultural group in the region (Osborne 2015). Mansarong itself was founded by diverse peoples from across northern Luzon. Yet there strongly prevailed the idea that the language and culture of this place was Ilocano, and that speakers of other languages, even those among the first to settle in the area, should adapt themselves to the regional language. Ilocano’s status as the most practical and valuable regional language was demonstrated by a conversation I had with a Kilometer Nine family, whose children attend(ed) Mansarong Elementary School. While the family’s adult son identified strongly as Ilocano, his parents told me they were Igorots and spoke Igorot dialects. “We are Ilocano and we must learn Ilocano so that the next generation can speak it and understand,” the son asserted. “The people here don’t understand full Ilocano due to mixing. We don’t speak straight. We should learn the language from here, Ilocano.”

Mansarong Elementary School

Following this brief introduction to language practice and identity within the community context, I will discuss the practice and interpretation of mother tongue-based education at Mansarong Elementary School. As cited in chapter two, students at Mansarong Elementary School are of mixed ethnic and linguistic heritage. Parents of these students reported that their children speak and understand Ilocano, with some reporting their children speak a limited amount of a heritage language as well. Teachers at Mansarong Elementary School shared in language with their students; all seven were also native speakers of Ilocano, though some of their ethnic identities were mixed. In the following sections, I will assemble a selection of observations and conversations which demonstrate the practice of language and culture in the school through mother tongue-based education.
Visual language and registers

One of the first things I noted upon entering classrooms at Mansarong Elementary School was the focal point of each room: a large image of President Rodrigo Duterte hanging above the chalkboard. In most cases, it was flanked by the mission and vision statements of the Department of Education, written in English. The vision statement, read (in part):

“We dream of Filipinos who passionately love their country and whose values and competencies enable them to realize their full potential and contribute meaningfully to building the nation.”

Typically this statement was accompanied by the Department of Education’s four “core values” listed in Filipino:

Maka-Diyoś [pious / for god]  
Maka-tao [humanitarian / for people]  
Makakalikasan [environmentalist / for nature]  
Makabansa [nationalistic / for country]

These core values are identical to the national motto and are lifted directly from the Oath of Allegiance to the Philippine Flag. Together with the vision statement and the image of the president, they clearly invoke the national scale, identifying the student as a citizen of the State, who maintains a responsibility to “building the nation”. Further, they present a scale of their own, ranking the values and naming the moral code of the student/Philippine citizen, in which Filipino and English languages are given a central role. The use of English and Filipino in these more “official” capacities, especially in a space where many children, parents, and community members do not speak these languages, reflects the elevation of English and Filipino to a position of power and authority.

These two languages—English and Filipino—were repeated on walls around the classrooms, with dozens of posters displaying educational information (the alphabet, numbers, parts of
speech), motivational quotes, and curricular information (the school calendar, parent-teacher association details, biographical information about the teacher) with the majority being in English. While Ilocano could be found in some standardized textbooks and a large variety of handmade materials prepared by the teachers, it was notably absent in the language visible on the walls of the school. If the material culture of the classroom is to model and reflect the objectives and priorities of the education which takes place within this space, then its values clearly lie with English first, Filipino second, and Ilocano a weak third, if at all.

Anthropologists and sociologists have long identified formal language in education as a process by which statehood is asserted and national identity is reproduced through language and culture socialization (Friedman 2016; Garrett 2002; George 2016; Minter, Ke & Persoon 2012; Wortham 2012). The Indigenous Peoples Education Policy Framework and MTB-MLE both invoke appeals to national identity and statehood, while, at the same time, presenting the opportunity for those concepts to be critically reimagined. Together with the MTB-MLE model, the Indigenous People Education Policy Framework recognizes and promotes the long-expressed “desire of IP [indigenous peoples] communities for an education that is responsive to their context, respects their identities, and promotes the value of their traditional knowledge, and other aspects of their cultural heritage” (Department of Education 2011). In the same note, the order calls for a system of formal education which “empowers IPs [indigenous peoples] to exercise their rights and duties as Filipino citizens” (Department of Education 2011). Herein, the policy invokes ideas of both self-determination and citizenship.

**MTB-MLE policy in practice**

In my early conversations with the teachers, I joined them as they gathered daily for lunch in the grade five classroom. I asked them about teaching in the mother tongue and their experience with the policy practice. They explained the basic “theory” of the policy from their perspective; MTB-MLE is implemented in four hierarchical stages as students progress through their primary education. The first stage or “level one” is represented by the use of the designated mother tongue for all class instruction. The second stage or “level two” involves continued instruction in the mother tongue with “Tagalog” (Filipino) introduced as an academic subject. “Level three” sees the introduction of English as an additional academic subject. Finally in grade four, students should have attained sufficient competency in English and Filipino to “transition” to the exclusive use of these two languages as the languages of instruction for all coursework. At this
time, formal use of the mother tongue is discontinued. For the rest of their academic careers, students are expected use these two languages exclusively.

It is important to note that, by this model, as students “advance” in their formal education, they leave behind the “local” language for the “national” and “global” scales. Teachers do not imagine literacy in the “mother tongue” as an academic end goal, but rather as a “bridge” to facilitate students’ “progress” to higher scales—the national and international/“global” languages—ultimately retiring mother tongue altogether during the later years of primary school. This model is representative of the narrative of progress inherent in “globalist” ideology (Tsing 2000), applied at the level of the individual; through evolutionary stages, the student is imagined to “advance” from local to national to global.

While this “bridge” method is the ideal, the teachers made clear that the policy cannot be practiced as such. In the case of their students, as well as students in similarly “far flung places”, the policy model had not effectively prepared students to make the transition; they remained “hard up” to gain sufficient competence and confidence in Filipino and English to transition to the use of these languages for instruction. Instead, the teachers reported that they used mother tongue for all instruction through grade six, the end of elementary school, and into high school. They reflected that low literacy levels among their students were a barrier to mastery of curriculum in general, regardless of language of instruction. With up to eight subjects to cover each day, time, resources, and interest among students dwindles. Because of this barrier, the teachers at Mansarong decided they must focus primarily on the development of literacy which grade two teacher Susana described as “the building blocks to other subjects”.

Susana reported that she spends some time each school day in one-on-one tutoring sessions with her students. I observed this practice in her classroom: each child had an individualized reading booklet, handmade by Susana and tailored to their reading level and language competencies in Ilocano and/ or English. Each book consisted of dozens of pages of individualized reading exercises bound together with staples and tape and marked with the name of the student to whom it belonged. I recognized not only the time, effort, and resources required to develop these materials, but the personalized knowledge and understanding of each student’s abilities and needs. This effort was also observed with April, the grade one teacher, who showed me meter-high stacks of handmade storybooks and reading materials she had prepared in Ilocano, Filipino, and English. She estimated she had made “several hundreds” of such materials. April explained
that MTB-MLE necessitated a heavier workload on the teachers, who must prepare materials in three languages, spend years working toward basic literacy in the classroom, and tailor to the needs of individual students. In her classes too, I observed that she too frequently practiced reading with students one-on-one while the others recited Filipino phonics from videos or repeated as an “advanced” pupil read aloud in English to the class.

Over the course of my time at the school, the teachers reiterated the necessity and value of *linguas franca* as tools for communication between and unity within the region and country. “Our students are Ilocanos, Ibanag, Igorot, and Itawes. How will we communicate with each other?” Louisa, grade three teacher, remarked. They asked how many languages students learn in my country; I told them typically only their native English. “You’re very lucky!” Susana remarked, “It’s better off like that, at least you can all understand each other. Easier to learn and communicate.” I asked them what they saw as the motive for mother tongue-based education. Invoking the global scale, Susana replied “DepEd [Department of Education] wants to model itself on other countries, like [United States], to compete with other countries and be like that. That’s why they changed to K to 12, because that’s a successful model in other countries around the world and they see that and want to be like that. And MTB [mother tongue-based education] is part of K to 12.”

“*The destructive mother tongue*”

Toward the end of the schoolyear, I joined the teachers as they scrambled to finish their reports for the national standardized exam in Filipino and English competency (Figure 6) before the end of the day. The teachers informed me that the reports were intended to demonstrate improvement in the students’ skillset in the two respective languages over the course of the schoolyear. I asked Lucy, grade six instructor, how her students fared in the exam. “I cannot say that there is any progress,” she confessed plainly; most of Lucy’s students did not significantly increase in their scores, and some decreased. Lucy was perplexed and exhausted by this phenomenon for which she did not have an explanation. She guessed: “maybe the students haven’t practiced enough….maybe they aren’t prepared. I don’t know why….How come when we were in school we learned English and Tagalog and they can’t?” she asked earnestly.
Figure 6: Teachers at Mansarong Elementary School prepare reports on their students’ Filipino and English language competency. Photograph by Mallory McGoff, 22 February 2019.

I asked April and Lucy about the changes in language policies they have seen in their careers, as well as their experience with teaching in the mother tongue. “I don’t know what’s going on with DepEd. I don’t know what they’re thinking…” Lucy began, exasperated, “I don’t know why they would make this policy. I can’t explain.” Not only did she not understand the motivation for mother tongue-based education, Lucy identified that it has failed her students in practice. She explained that, by grade six, her students have yet to develop proficiency in Filipino or English, so she must continue to use Ilocano to instruct all subject matter. As a result, her students had not made the linguistic “transition” (intended by grade four) to prepare them to enter high school. She expressed her frustration: “my [grade six] students can’t speak English or Tagalog, so everything becomes mother tongue. Even English [subject] becomes mother tongue. Filipino [subject] becomes mother tongue. Everything is mother tongue!” April added: “the destructive mother tongue!” They both laughed.

April explained that before MTB-MLE, she taught literacy in “Tagalog” quickly and efficiently: “we used to teach reading [in Filipino] with an eight week program. Eight weeks, that’s all, it worked, and they [grade one students] could read. Now even in the higher grades the students
can’t read because of the mother tongue and seven to eight subjects which take away time from literacy.” April identified that this previous policy, in which students learned to read in Filipino and mother tongue was used only as an auxiliary language of instruction, was more effective in developing literacy. Like many teachers I spoke with across schools, April had witnessed her students struggle to develop literacy and identified mother tongue policy as a significant contributing factor, combined with unrealistically heavy and complex course load and lack of resources.

Lucy reiterated April’s perspective: “there are too many subjects and it’s too difficult for students to understand when foundation in language is not strong.” Lucy’s solution to navigating instruction in three languages, two of which her students do not fully comprehend, has been to allow the students to use “Taglish”, which she described as an amalgamation between English, Tagalog, and Ilocano. This adaptation may allow students to codeswitch to make use of their knowledge in three languages. But course load is not the only factor in inhibiting literacy in multiple languages. Lucy explained, “it’s also harder here in far flung places”, where the students are not often exposed to English or Filipino, except occasionally through television or radio. “They [the students] are isolated,” she elaborated, “many people here only speak the mother tongue [Ilocano] and there’s no technology.” I asked if her students would continue to high school after they graduated from elementary school in the coming weeks. “They will go to high school,” she said, “but it will be difficult for them to transition to Tagalog and English and they will be far behind their peers from urban places. I’ve done everything I can.”

Without prompt, she added: “if I were to make a suggestion to DepEd it would be to use mother tongue as a bridge. There should be less focus on mother tongue. It prevents the students from learning English and Tagalog. In the past the students were not so hard up to learn English and Tagalog. It was not like this.” I asked her why the situation seems to have changed: “the destructive mother tongue,” she repeated, this time no laughter: “that’s the cause of the trouble. It confuses the students. And then they don’t learn English and Tagalog.”
Scales in opposition

“Stand straight!
Go forth!
Spread our values
And be proud of our culture!”

This passage if lifted from page two of the grade five, Department of Education issued textbook *Joy in Learning English* (Castillo & Angeles), used at sitios Mansarong and Malisi. From the first pages, a theme that emerges prominently throughout this text is the establishment of the national scale, which encompasses all Filipinos, and the erasure of sub-identities and cultures. At the top of this page, the textbook shows a photograph of hands raised in the direction of multiple flags of the Philippines. In large font, the title reads “Celebrating Our Culture, Living Our Values”. At the bottom of the page, the text continues:
“We all take pride in our Filipino culture. Our culture provides us with beliefs and values that guide us in our everyday actions, interactions, and decisions. Our culture gives us identities that make us unique from the rest but still make us feel that we belong to a group, to a family, to a nation. Let us celebrate our culture and live our values.” (Castillo & Angeles 2)

Finally, the question is asked “[w]hat values and culture are you proud of as a Filipino?” (Castillo & Angeles 2). This passage sets the tone for the rest of the textbook, in which readers are addressed and identified as Filipinos first, and perhaps exclusively. Throughout, the textbook features a variety of passages that clearly develop a narrative of progress in which “localized” cultural practices and identities, such as hunter-gatherer livelihoods, are relegated to the past. Multiple passages assert farming’s evolutionary superiority to the cultural livelihood of the Agta, which is regarded as an ancient and unenlightened practice that leaves its practitioners “no better off than animals” (Castillo & Angeles 284). This idea is encapsulated in a passage titled “Life Getting Better”:

“There was a time when it took man days and weeks on end to get things done and with great difficulty. He traveled on foot for hours to get to a place. He relied on his own labor to paddle his banca across the rivers. He used his strength and cunning to trap animals and kill them for food. He had to wait patiently to send or receive word from others. […] During all his waking and sleeping hours, he was at the mercy of nature and the environment. Man was no better off than animals.” (Castillo & Angeles 284)

The story continues to describe how modern technology, agriculture, and urban settlement, associated with the national scale, have drastically improved the life of “man” and allowed him to live out his destiny as “the master of creation, [a]s God intended him to be” (Castillo & Angeles 284). It is clear that while the lifestyle described above as primitive and uncivilized is meant to refer an ancient, long-gone way of life, it largely resembles the practices of the Agta. In disregarding this, the passage simultaneously erases the existence of the Agta and their way of life from the national scale and relegates them to the past, by playing heavily into ideas of development (Elyachar 2002) and narratives of progress (Tsing 2000).

Participation in the national scale was performed twice daily at Malisi Elementary School through the flag ceremony (Figure 7), in which students stood in lines by grade level, facing the flag in the middle of the schoolyard to sing the Philippine national anthem with hand over heart and recite
the pledge of allegiance in Filipino. Students participated verbally to varying degrees, with Agta students less participant and young Agtas least of all. I asked Michelle, grades two and three teacher, why the flag ceremony was performed twice daily here when, at every other school I visited, I had not seen it performed at all. Michelle was scandalized by my report, assuring me this was proper Department of Education protocol. She told me that performing the flag ceremony twice daily served to “show respect for our flag and patronize them [the students]”.

Language and literacy

Teachers at Malisi Elementary School frequently echoed the literacy issues expressed by teachers at Mansarong, also citing that policy implementation impossible. Georgia, instructor for grades four, five, and six, told me most of her students were aged fourteen to fifteen, and nearing graduation form elementary school, yet they were unable to read. She recalled that she spent the first six months of her assignment in Malisi teaching reading alone: one-on-one tutor sessions tailored to each student and lessons that focused exclusively on literacy. She described that despite those efforts, her students still struggled to read. Like Mansarong Elementary School, low literacy levels here have inhibited students’ mastery required subject matter, course materials, and standards, as well as their “advancement” to English and Filipino.

Georgia told me she preferred teaching in (designated) mother tongue, Ilocano, in order to connect and communicate effectively with her students; “it’s easier for them to understand” she reported. She added that her students also learned “Tagalog” in her classes and that she occasionally used words and phrases in this language for classroom instruction, also splicing in English to broaden the vocabulary of her pupils. I frequently observed this practice in her classes, in which she occasionally incorporated words and phrases of the two languages, though her students responded exclusively in Ilocano. The two other Malisi Elementary School teachers, Michelle and Nikki, were also observed in this practice and reported the same goal: increasing student language ability by utilizing Filipino and English when possible. Like Georgia and the teachers of Mansarong Elementary, they shared their belief that the purpose of “mother tongue” as a language of instruction is to increase student understanding and learning outcomes, with the ultimate goal of “scaling up” to English and Filipino more effectively.

Michelle was quoted “Ilocano is the language the students know best and they use in their home and community.” Importantly, this statement was only true for non-Agta students who
commuted to Malisi Elementary School from surrounding sitios. Agta students of Malisi spoke Labine and Dupaninan. Michelle and Nikki, however, spoke about their students as if they all spoke and understood Ilocano competently and equally. From my conversations with parents, it was evident this was not the case. Parents at this sitio reported that their children only began learning Ilocano when they entered school. At home, they spoke Labine or Dupaninan. On the other hand, parents of Malisi Elementary students from surrounding sitios, such as Kilometers Ten and Eleven, reported that their children spoke Ilocano as their native language, citing Ilocano and other non-Agta heritages.

These reports were supported by observations. In the kindergarten and grade one class, I observed Agta students frequently disengaged, fidgeting in chairs and climbing on desks before they left the classroom altogether in the middle of the lesson. This behavior was not observed in their non-Agta peers, who remained in the classroom during lessons and participated actively. Non-Agta students participated by eagerly calling out answers in Ilocano or providing written answers on the chalkboard more than five times as frequently as Agta students, who rarely participated verbally. The same phenomenon was observed in non-verbal participation, such as raising hands to be called upon, maintaining passive engagement with the teacher and classmates, and remaining in the classroom throughout the lesson. It should be noted that in the grade two and three class, Agta students participated almost as frequently as their non-Agta peers. In grades four, five, and six, Agta children made up the majority of class and were seen to participate more frequently than non-Agta peers. These observations support interview data to suggest that participation was linked with competency in the language of instruction (Ilocano), which was grossly unequal between Agta and non-Agta students in early grades, but became less significant as student developed fluency through the middle and upper grades of elementary school.

“There are no others”

As for the true mother tongues of Agta students, it was clear that to the teachers, these dialects had no place in the classroom. The teachers themselves did not speak the dialects and reported that no teachers do. Further, they noted these languages had no role outside of the “local” context. This was demonstrated by a conversation I had with Nikki, lower grades teacher; she described the hierarchy of languages as they are associated with scales of interaction and opportunity. She remarked “some parents [in Malisi] don’t even understand if you speak to them in our national language. In cities, all the people use the national language [Filipino] and
international language of English to communicate with other people, others who pass through, but here…” she looked at Michelle and they both laughed, “here there are no others.”

This statement clearly referenced the perceived value of the Agta languages as associated with the “local” scale: limited, remote, and lacking in associated opportunity. In this sense, they are deemed less valuable than and inherently opposed to the “national language” and “international language”, which are associated with urban, “developed”, and interconnected modern spaces and provide opportunity for interaction with broader scales and national/glocal populations. Herein, value is clearly invested in the education, development, and promotion of these “higher” scales. This value system was also reflected by the teachers’ employer: the local government unit (LGU); Nikki shared this perspective with me during a week when Georgia had been called out of her teaching post by the LGU, assigned instead to guide tourists at the widely publicized anticipated “international cave congress” hosted in the urban center. This situation left the teachers at Malisi so understaffed and desperate that they asked me to fill in as the instructor to her class for the week.

Culture and the classroom

Figure 8: After school hours, Alex, Malisi student [right], demonstrates to his teachers and the researcher [left] how to harvest ginger from the forest. Photograph by Mallory McGoff, 13 February 2019.
The policy framework investigated in this study calls not only for classroom instruction in the local mother tongue, but also for culturally-relevant education (Department of Education 2009, 2011, 2012). This is meant to include curriculum responsive to the students’ environment and cultural context. The meaningful implementation of such policy presents a variety of barriers discussed above. First, teachers themselves are often from outside of the communities and not members of the cultural heritages of their pupils; the teachers may not speak the mother tongues or possess the culturally-specific knowledge they are intended to teach (Metila et al. 2016). This is the case for both Mansarong and Malisi, though it is particularly relevant for the latter.

Additionally, as observed at these schools, rigid standards set forth by the Department of Education actively prevented teachers from engaging in culturally-relevant practices during the school day.

Despite their challenges, teachers at Mansarong Elementary School were proud of their pupils’ “multiple intelligences” and actively sought avenues to engage them. They lamented that diverse interests and skill sets were not valued in the curriculum, and that they as teachers were required to implement irrelevant and uncompelling subject matter. The teachers discussed this with me over lunch in Rosario’s classroom as her students helped her prepared the meal. “Why can’t we let them [the students] do what they are good at and what interests them?” asked the grade five teacher, indignant. She reminded me that her students were intelligent gardeners, wood workers, craftspeople, and creatives. She showed me the heaps of vegetables in her classroom: beans, cauliflower, eggplant, peppers, bok choi, and onions, which she told me were grown by her students both in the school garden and in their family gardens at home. She showed me the bookshelves on every wall of her classroom, constructed by the students themselves with scrap materials found about the schoolyard and community. She described the creative arrangements of potted plants outside her classroom, again designed by the children.

In her classes, I often observed many activities took place simultaneously: song, dance, carpentry, cooking, drawing. Children grouped themselves into activities organically and by interest. When doing more “academic” work, Rosario maintained this flexible atmosphere, allowing her students to find workspaces that comforted and inspired them, including rearranging furniture, lounging on the floor, or moving outdoors. At least once weekly, accompanied by Lucy and Louisa who also resided at the school during the week, Rosario organized students in “nature walks” after school hours to “observe animals in nature”, identify plant species, and evaluate the natural environment. I observed that this activity was popular among the local students, who
enthusiastically attended and participated, tracking birds and monkeys, spotting fish in neighbors’ ponds, trekking into the forest, and fashioning handicrafts from plants. It was clear that this was not only a relevant and engaging educational experience for the students, but a snapshot of what culturally-relevant education could look like. The students were enthusiastic, collaborative, investigatory. I asked the teachers if they had considered incorporating such activities more formally in their curriculum. Louisa explained they only found the time for this type of activity after school hours; the Department of Education’s tight daily schedule, curricular requirements, standardized evaluation procedures, and restrictions on leaving the school grounds prevented her from providing the style of education that might be valuable and productive for her students.

Extracurricular practices of culturally-relevant education happened too in Malisi. While young Agta children were frequently seen disengage in class, they actively engaged with their teachers in activities outside of the school building. In the evenings after class, I occasionally joined teachers and Malisi students as they wandered together through the forest, harvested ginger and purple yams in the forest and neighbors’ gardens (Figure 8), collected wild berries, planted orchids, tended to carabao, spotted butterflies, practiced with their sling shots, or played games invented by the students themselves. The Malisi students, who not only joined, but led these activities were their least reserved in these moments, laughing and joking with their teachers in Ilocano, digging eager hands into the earth, demonstrating their skills, inviting me to try my hand at their games, and sometimes venturing a word or two in English. It was plain to observe their comfort and ease engaging in these informal, familiar experiences and spaces.

While the teachers and students may not have recognized these activities as formal education, it was among the most engaging and productive education practices I witnessed between the groups in my time in Malisi, in terms of participation by Agta students, student-teacher rapport, and collaborative learning. In showing their instructors how to spot the best yam crops, ride a carabao, or play “kick the slipper”, the children flipped the script and became the teachers, forging a more egalitarian relationship between the two. They participated in learning experiences they enjoyed and clearly excelled at, rendering the educational environment more familiar and inviting. They engaged their imaginations, cultural intelligences, and academic knowledge simultaneously.

This chapter has elaborated the practices and interpretations of culturally-relevant, mother tongue-based education in the contexts of Mansarong Elementary School and Malisi Elementary School. It has also relayed the practical constraints of the policy, as well as the ideological
implications. Following the foundations of colonization and state-making, these implications include the reiteration of languages and their associated cultural knowledges systems to hierarchical scales, in which “local” systems bear less weight and value than “national” and “global” systems. In the following chapter, I will discuss how this “third wave” education policy is propagated by actors across scales in the agenda of “conserving” culture.
Chapter Five

Conserving culture: education as “preservation”

“If you lost your culture—no more—you lost everything.” –Carmen, MTB-MLE coordinator

In the previous chapter, I have discussed how language and culture policies play out in the practices of the school, including a variety of challenges to their implementation. I have also described how languages and their associated cultural practices are differentially valued, ranked in hierarchical relationships, and assigned to scales through their ability to provide opportunity, access, and interaction. These hierarchical spaces and scales reflect the continued legacy of colonial education and nationalist movements in the education system discussed in chapter three, which laid a foundation of unequal power dynamics between languages and cultures in the schools.

In this chapter, I will elaborate how the education policies investigated in this study emerge from these contexts to form a third and current “wave” in education policy, promoted by stakeholders across scales. In responding to the legacies of the colonial and nationalist influences in education, these actors hope to benefit students in indigenous and minority communities through the “localization” or “indigenization” of formal education. These practices and policies invoke ideas of “cultural conservation” and “language revitalization” as models of formal education. Here I will review what stakeholders hope to achieve through these models and offer a critical analysis of this perspective.

Cultural conservation and language revitalization

Nolan (2005) defines the ideology of cultural conservation and its primary goals; “[c]ultural conservation refers to systematic efforts to safeguard traditional cultural knowledge, customs, and materials and the natural resources on which they are based. The primary goals of cultural conservation projects are to sustain cultural and ecological diversity within modernizing communities and landscapes” (Nolan 2005: 625). This definition invokes cultural conservation as a reaction to, and perhaps defense against “modernization”, which is posed as the dichotomous
opposite of “tradition”. It also invokes calls to conserve the natural environment as an effort to conserve culture; the relationship between cultural conservation in education and efforts for “global” nature will be explored in chapter six.

Cultural conservation is closely associated with language revitalization. Hinton (2001: 5) describes the ideology language revitalization and the motivation of its proponents; “the loss of language is part of the loss of whole cultures and knowledge systems, including […] environmental knowledge systems”. As such, “[t]he world stands to lose an important part of the sum of human knowledge whenever a language stops being used” (Hinton 2001: 5). In this sense, language is “revitalized” in order to safeguard cultural knowledge systems, which are scaled up the level of the globe. This ideology is echoed in The Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act of 1997, which forms the framework for MTB-MLE and culturally-relevant education by ensuring the right of indigenous peoples to “preserve and protect their culture, traditions and institutions” (Republic of the Philippines 1997). This includes the “right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions by providing education in their own language, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.” (Republic of the Philippines 1997). The policy framework investigated in this study goes beyond the practical call for increased educational access to invoke calls for cultural conservation and language revitalization, which will be explored in the rest of this chapter. In the following sections, I have selected a number of interactions in which these registers clearly emerge to demonstrate how this policy is interpreted across scales.

**Conserving “our language and culture”**

From the perspectives of teachers in Mansarong and Malisi, inclusion of the “mother tongue” in the schools was intended to increase understanding and learning outcomes for students, ultimately benefiting their “advancement” to higher scales. In the municipal center, the perspective was distinct; teachers and coordinators in urban areas were certain of the policy’s purpose of cultural conservation. I met with teachers at Baggao South Central Elementary School in San Jose, the municipal center of Baggao, at first by default. The local government unit directed my inquiries away from their offices and toward a district school administrator who maintained an office at this elementary school. Like all other administrators I approached in this study, he was never able to be reached. Across several weeks, I made appointments to speak with him and ended up waiting in a staff room for a few hours. In his absence, I struck up
conversations with the teachers who passed through. They shared their distinct perspective of the policy, shaped by the distinct circumstances of their student population.

**Baggao South Central teachers**

Teachers and coordinators at urban schools expressed a resounding belief that mother tongue-based education was a model for language revitalization and cultural conservation, invoking ideologies of scale in their explanations. Carmen, a grade five teacher, explained “DepEd wants us to be globally competent and internationally skilled…so it’s hard to decipher why they would [implement mother tongue].” She suggested three possible reasons. The first: “to preserve our language and culture”. Two: “to make sure students are competent in their own language”. Three: “to establish rapport between students and teachers.”

Another teacher at this school, Karina, elaborated: “DepEd is afraid that when the students grow up, they will not understand their own language.” In Susana’s opinion, this fear stemmed from observed reality. In the past few generations, “deep Ilocano” had faded from memory as schools (and some parents) prioritized Tagalog and English. She explained: “When we were growing up, people still knew words like ‘skirt’ [in Ilocano] by hearing it from their grandmothers. But now even the grandmother doesn’t know because when she was in school, she only learned Filipino and English”. Susana identified this as the reason mother tongue-based education was introduced: as a “complete reversal” of previous Department of Education policies that may have contributed to the “decline” of “mother tongue” languages.

Karina expressed that she appreciated the concept of cultural conversation, and believed that it had been effective in her school. Even so, she reported, like the teachers in Mansarong and Malisi, that the use of the mother tongue had presented practical issues for literacy development. “I am happy to see that the children now know ‘aunt’ and ‘grandfather’ and other deep Ilocano words because the past generation did not know…” then she changed tune: “I don’t want you to think I hate mother tongue, because I don’t…” Karina explained that she believed mother tongue should function as a single subject rather than as the language of instruction for all subject matter. This way “we can show that we love our language, but the students won’t be so hard up to learn English and Filipino.” Developing literacy and fluency in these languages was critical to Karina as she believed it allows students access to and identity with national and international scales; “we are Filipinos, we are proud to be Filipinos, so we must also know the
national language: Tagalog”. She added “English is our international language in our modern world, so we must learn.”

It is critical to note that these teachers reported their student population to be strikingly different from the populations of Mansarong and Malisi Elementary School. They told me their students identified ethnically and linguistically as Ilocanos, and uniformly so. Further, they had significant exposure to English and Filipino through media and the application of these languages in their family and community contexts. This meant that many of the students understood English and/or Filipino better than their “mother tongue”, Ilocano. These contexts shaped the way teachers interpreted and imagined the role of mother tongue in education and framing of the future.

While use of the mother tongue was a more practical measure to teachers in Mansarong and Malisi—intended to increase access for students—to teachers in the urban center it was an effort to “conserve” a fading tradition. Even so, they overwhelming valued literacy in Filipino and English over Ilocano, due to their associated scales of opportunity, modernity, and access.

**MTB-MLE coordinators**

This concept was repeated to me by MTB-MLE coordinators, whom I met with by the same occasion: Department of Education administrators were absent for meetings and the coordinators were present. These coordinators worked to develop materials in the mother tongue for classroom instruction. I asked them the purpose of the policies for which they develop curriculum; they told me the initiative existed “so they [the students] know to speak their own dialect, not the dialect of others. Nowadays most students are speaking English at home or Tagalog, not their own language”. This is due in part to parents’ desire for their children to learn these languages over the “mother tongue” as they are perceived to provide substantially better social mobility and opportunity; they explained “maybe the parents want them to learn those languages so they [the children] can go to other places, do other things”.

One coordinator informed me that some of her students struggled to understand the mother tongue, so she urged parents to restructure their linguistic practices at home. “Now I met their [the students’] parents and I told them to speak [the mother tongue] at home. Now they are doing that they [the students] understand more”. The coordinators professed the importance of mother tongue-based education and I asked them elaborate some of its benefits for students. They reported that mother tongue-based education serves to instill cultural and linguistic
identity, heritage, and tradition in pupils: “to know where they were born, to talk to playmates and neighbors, to know your identity”. Ultimately, this identity is perceived to be in decline, a situation the coordinators perceived as dangerous: “if you lost your culture—no more—you lost everything”, one stated.

I described to the coordinators that Mansarong and Malisi are small villages, away from the urban center and asked how the perception of the “mother tongue” might vary between urban and remote settings and populations. They conceded that the application of MTB-MLE differs by population, invoking ideologies of scale. “Most pupils in barangay [village] are child of farmers so they use pure [mother tongue], it’s what they understand. In big schools, they learn mother tongue when they didn’t know it before, so that is the benefit.” In other words, as a “local” practice, the mother tongue represents “tradition” or the past to urban populations, which is not the case in remote settings. To conclude the conversation, one coordinator summed up: “I’ve learned that returning to the mother tongue means a lot to Filipinos. One: to preserve the dialect and culture. Two: to learn well and facilitate learning. Three: to apply with peers in different parts of the country and world.” In this sense, it was clear that MTB-MLE represents negotiation across scales. It can be imagined both to make “national” and “global” education models more “local” by adapting them to places and peoples whose languages and cultures are perceived to be in “decline”, but also to make “local” pupils more “national” and “global” through scaling up across languages and knowledge systems.

**Training teachers, organizing communities**

As demonstrated in previous chapters, most educators at the schools of study were from outside of the communities. This is particularly relevant in Malisi, where the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic difference between Agta students and Ilocana teachers was most pronounced. Because of these differences between pupils and educators, shifts in education away from the colonial and toward the culturally-relevant are present a challenge for implementation of policy. This challenge was confronted by two teacher trainers I met in Manila who, funded by grants from national and international organizations, such as Australian Aid and the Philippines’ own National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, trained teachers across the country to implement mother tongue-based education, with a special focus of cultural relevance and sensitivity. Their particular focus was with the target groups of these policies: small, often remote, indigenous communities. Here, they prepared teachers, who, like the teachers in Mansarong and Malisi
typically came from more dominant languages and cultural heritages, to implement these policies in their classrooms and work with their communities to develop curriculum.

On two occasions, I visited the trainers in their university office where they showed me an array of teaching materials they had developed throughout their years—storybooks, posters, songs, games, flashcards—all in a variety of mother tongues and featuring locally-relevant imagery and characters. They described the multi-step process of their trainings with teachers, which involved the development of “cultural sensitivity” among teachers, their participation in “ethnographic participatory research on indigenous knowledge systems”, the development of instructional materials specific to the community contexts, and the “localization of the curriculum”. In speaking with the trainers, it was evident that for both, but most evidently for the senior trainer, Linda an indigenous person herself, this work was a passion project. Across many hours of conversation, they shared the insights they had gained through years of experience training teachers and organizing communities, among them the challenges they faced in promoting culturally-relevant education.

For Linda, these issues can be traced back to education’s colonial roots: “you have to think how the impact of colonization has been impressed in the school system,” she explained, “when we were colonized, anything that is English is better, anything that is Western is superior”: an idea which she reported prevails unchecked in a “colonial mentality” held by educators and community members alike, who hesitate to engage with mother tongue in the classroom due to “feelings of inferiority of their culture or language”. Linda described this mentality as the underlying explanation for parents’ and teachers’ concerns that the practice of mother tongue in the classroom may hinder children’s achievement in school and beyond; “they don’t want the children to learn mother tongue because they don’t want them to be ostracized”. Linda continued to describe how mother tongues are often considered impractical and outdated: “how can they [the communities] support their mother tongue if they don’t see the practical use of it? Even in the market they use English… Even at the community level we have to convince them ‘this is your identity!’” Linda made clear that teaching in the mother tongue is, at least in part, about safeguarding the identity of a people as it is perceived to slip away.

In describing their efforts, the trainers spoke of “localizing” and “indigenizing” education, two concepts spelled out by the Department of Education itself (Department of Education, Republic of the Philippines 2016). They told me that localization is the process of adapting a standardized
education to the community contexts, while indigenization is the process of integrating indigenous practices and knowledge systems into school curriculum and structure. In other words, localization and indigenization are efforts to reverse legacies of exclusion in colonial education and “scale down” education to the “local” level. The ultimate goal described by the trainers is to fully adapt state education to the social context of a community: Linda proclaimed “real indigenization should be the whole system”: it should reformat the school calendar to fit the livelihoods of the people, formalize orthographies of their languages for use in the classroom, utilize resources from the ancestral domain, and involve elders in the development of curriculum and the teaching of language and culture in the classroom. Altogether, this format would approach their objective of “culturally adaptive basic education, integrating indigenous knowledge, skills, and practices”.

While this may be the imagined trajectory of culturally-relevant education, trainers noted that it had yet to be achieved. The current standards and procedures mandated by the Department of Education do not allow for the adaptations necessary to realize the department’s own stated goals. Linda even specified “DepEd is the problem” in regard to barriers to implementation for “indigenized” education. While she suggested “teachers should think of strategies to promote mother tongue in the classroom,” she added that the bureaucracy of the Department of Education prevents their engagement in activities that might facilitate this process; “they can’t go outside, they can’t change the curriculum. This makes it difficult for the teachers,” to engage culturally-relevant, “indigenized”, or “localized” education in meaningful practice, as described in chapter four.

Further, the trainers noted that their educational model is hindered when teachers are not equipped with tools to be successful at their post; most often is it young, inexperienced teachers who are placed in the remote, under-funded “mountain schools” and they remain there only long enough to earn a more preferable post. These new teachers, eager for a placement closer to their homes and families, “use it [the remote school] as a stepping stone to a better placement”, Linda explained. And as outsiders within their students’ space, the teachers are not familiar with the local dialects, cultures, beliefs, and customs; ultimately “it is a handicap if you don’t know what is your community” Linda shook her head. Finally, as teachers themselves were educated into legacies of colonialization in the schools, they are not adequately prepared to abandon their training and embrace localized/ indigenized models. Linda explained the effect: “she [the average teacher] was educated in the American system…they [the teachers] were not trained this way, to
teach this way.” This is much less a personal failing than a systemic miseducation; Linda told me that teachers who received her trainings internalized them, expressing regret for participating in culturally insensitive practices in the classroom. “Sometimes they [the teachers] are crying,” after receiving the training, “they say ‘we did not know we were part of the reiteration of this’”.

The trainers described the multiple national and international actors championing the movement for mother tongue-based and culturally-relevant education. They recalled that these policies arose as a result of advocacy by these actors for increased access to formal education for indigenous and minority communities. From their perspective, the movement started in the 1980s and 1990s, when “conversations began” among international stakeholders. At this time and ever since, “NGOs pressure[d] the government to address marginalization” of indigenous peoples in the school system. This started at the international level with the involvement of UNESCO in mother tongue education across Southeast Asia, and later at the national level, with the support of key congressmen. These actors championed mother tongue as policy for increased educational access for indigenous peoples, but also as a method to “perpetuate culture and self-identity” and to “restore cultural heritage” among these communities, which were perceived to have been in decline. In other words, both the cultural conservation model and the increased access model discussed by teachers in varying sites were relevant goals from the perspective of the trainers.

Linda added the continued role national and international stakeholders played in her fight for culturally-responsive education: “NGOs are concerned MTB[-MLE] will not be enhanced with this administration, but the UN and UNESCO are there to help.”

I described to the trainers the situation of Malisi, where Ilocano was used in the school (Figure 9), yet most of the Agta students did not speak the language when they entered the institution, speaking their Agta dialect, instead. Linda sighed; she had witnessed this situation often and concluded that languages like Labine and Dupaninan “might die” in the foreseeable future because “nobody is interested to keep [them]”. She shared the story of another community in Northern Luzon, whose dialect, Arta, was limited to eleven known speakers. These numbers have continued to shrink as the children learn Ilocano in the schools. I asked her what role formal education plays in the process of language usage, maintenance, or erasure over time. She responded that it can be a critical factor in determining the “future” of a language; “I don’t want to blame education,” she said, “but it is a matter of prioritizing the language in the classroom” and after a thoughtful pause “it [formal education] is one of the reasons [language knowledge declines]…sometimes.”
Figure 9: Students at Malisi Elementary School learn about professions in the formal economy, including “doctor”, “teacher”, and “farmer”. Lesson given in Ilocano. Photograph by Mallory McGoff, 13 February 2019.

Linda also hinted that mother tongue education and its goal of cultural conservation are connected with agendas for conservation of the natural environment. Her work involved community organizing and she mentioned the frequent disparities between the goals of local and regional governments and indigenous peoples. She talked about infrastructure development as a potential threat to minority ethnolinguistic groups whose livelihoods and ways of being depend on the natural environment; “who will benefit more [from the development of infrastructure]?” she asked. “Once you have road there, all your resources are already gone. Other people will come in and destroy the land”. In this sense, preservation of language and culture is often imagined to be connected to preservation of the natural environment, which I will discuss at length in chapter six.

Finally, I discussed with the trainers that many parents and elders in Malisi and Mansarong expressed a desire for local teachers, raised in their communities. Linda shared that there was a system in place for teachers to be hired in their communities, but, of course, the challenge was access to the high school and university education required to become an educator. She elaborated: “if the LGU [local government unit], DepEd, and IPEd [The Indigenous People’s
Education Program] work together, we can achieve local teachers,” adding that this could be possible in as little as ten years with active collaboration among stakeholders. But collaboration between these actors is not easy and would require shared responsibility on all sides, including by the Department of Education, which she expressed was crucial in this matter. Describing the role of formal education in shaping how communities perceive and value their languages and cultures, she added “DepEd has a big role if it wants to help in the preservation of culture because people believe so much in education, whatever they give the community, they will believe it.”

**International stakes**

In the push for culturally-relevant, mother tongue-based education, international organizations have formed a compelling force. Ultimately, these stakeholders hope to benefit indigenous and minority communities through the promotion of a model of formal education that responds to and is compatible with children’s linguistic experiences and cultural landscapes. For many indigenous and other cultural, ethnic, or linguistic minority groups worldwide, “mainstream education” is inaccessible and impractical; standardized curricula and external models of instruction are incompatible with their realities (UNESCO 2009: 25). In response, models of culturally-relevant education, including instruction in the mother tongue, have gained prominence internationally as they have shown promise in the development of early literacy and other academic competencies (Burton 2013; Minter , Ke & Persoon 2012; Victor & Yano 2016).

The goals of international stakeholders in such policy shifts are to improve access to and value of education, thereby boosting academic outcomes, which result in increased social and economic outcomes for communities as wholes (Minter, Ke & Persoon 2012; Victor & Yano 2016). This is accomplished through the valorization of “local” cultural practices in the school context; the formalization of mother tongue-based education at the national and international levels then may be interpreted as “procommunity” or “antidevelopment development” social model, as described by Elyachar (2002). Legalizing the sovereignty of indigenous peoples in the Philippines and their rights to language, culturally-relevant education, and self-determination (Victor & Yano 2016) invokes social micro-informality; the roots of this policy are intertwined with the sponsorship of local level community “empowerment” (Li 2011).
In the case of mother tongue-based education, the United Nations and UNESCO have been strong proponents. The United Nations designated 2019 “The International Year of Indigenous Languages”. The organization describes its motivation in this effort: “[l]anguages play a crucial role in the daily lives of people, not only as a toll for communication, education, social integration and development, but also as a repository of each person’s unique identity, cultural history, traditions and memory. But despite their immense value, languages around the world continue to disappear at an alarming rate” (UNESCO 2018). Further, UNESCO elaborates its own stakes in this matter: “[w]ithout appropriate measure to address this issue, the further loss of languages and their associated history, traditions and memory would considerably reduce the rich tapestry of linguistic diversity worldwide” (UNESCO 2018 c). More than a threat to “the rich tapestry of linguistic diversity”, (UNESCO 2018 c) UNESCO frames the decline of languages as a marker for the decline of “culture” and cultural knowledge systems; as a language “disappears”, so too does its “entire cultural and intellectual heritage” (UNESCO 2019 b). Herein, the organization makes a call for the conservation of language and culture across a variety of fronts, prominently including formal education, citing the institution’s role in framing the future (UNESCO 2018).

SIL Philippines, an organization that partners with the Department of Education to develop orthographies of indigenous languages for their translation into education materials, reiterates this idea. The organization states that the mother tongue-based model of education valorizes cultural knowledge systems in the classroom; “‘mother-tongue-first’ or ‘first-language-first’ education affirms the personal worth of the children as well as their language and cultural heritage” (SIL International 2019 b). It continues to elaborate the relevance of culture in the revitalization of language (SIL International 2019). The organization shares its vision for minority communities to “[preserve] their heritage” (SIL International 2019 c) and model linguistic and cultural continuity across time. Their statement reads in part: “[o]ur vision is that language communities have the information and skills to ensure that their language continues to serve their changing social, cultural, political and spiritual needs” (SIL International 2019 c).

This vision for linguistic and cultural preservation, modeled by mother tongue-based education, is shared by the Asian Development Bank. A working paper endorsed by the organization states “mother tongue literacy can foster cultural identity and support the strengthening of ethnic communities as well as the pursuit of ethnic continuity” (ACDP INDONESIA 2014: 2). This publication describes the historical relationship between colonization and linguistic and cultural...
loss; “[h]istorical incursions associated with colonialism as well as a host of contemporary
political, economic and social processes have endangered many of the world’s languages and
cultures” (5). Further, it details how mother tongue-based education plays a role in reversing
colonial legacies in the schools in order to “preserve” language and culture for posterity: “formal
education systems in the children’s mother tongue can ensure the transmission of a community’s
linguistic heritage and prevent this cultural and linguistic loss.” (5).

Altogether, the goals of many international stakeholders in culturally-relevant, mother tongue-
based education policy align with the promotion of “cultural conservation” and “language
revitalization” models, through which actors hope to preserve languages and cultures which are
perceived to be “dying” in a “global” world. These actors intend to promote preservation
through a shift in policy in formal education: notably, the same social institution by which
minority and indigenous languages and cultures were reduced. While there is no doubt that many
indigenous and minority languages have witnessed a drastic decrease in their number of speakers,
the associated “culture” or “decline” of culture cannot be measured in the same way.

A critical note on cultural conservation

It is critical to recognize indigeneity has been and continues to be invented and defined
externally; the word itself—“indigenous”—coined by colonizers, represents a “historical
relationship as a colonized people” within a nation (Wright & Martí i Puig 2012). Across cultures
and societies, indigenous identity is typically classified externally using the following composite
descriptors: “the existence of distinct language; the retention of social, cultural and political
institutions; attachment to and/or continuing occupation of ancestral lands; and the experience
of marginalisation at the hands of the state or within the context of colonialism” (Padwe 2013:
288). One must bear in mind that such external definitions do not address processes of
identification by indigenous peoples themselves or the inevitable cultural shifts that take place
within all societies (Wright & Martí i Puig 2012: 251); in other words, external definitions
continue to imagine indigenous peoples as homogenized and static relics of a “traditional” past,
immune to, or incapable of change.

Speaking of “conservation” or “revitalization” of culture assumes “decline”. All societies change
across time, but while cultural shifts in dominant societies are often celebrated as “progress” and
“development”, changes in postcolonial indigenous or “traditional” societies, who are not
granted the same capacity to change, are framed as “loss” (Wright & Martí i Puig 2012). Colonial violence and oppression directly and intentionally suppressed and erased languages and cultural practices among indigenous and minority peoples in the Philippines, resulting in loss, and that legacy continues today through colonial mentalities, miseducation, and systemic marginalization (Rafael 2015). It is, however, also necessary to recognize that other external, albeit often related, factors, such as shifting economies and ecologies, shape the adaptations, identities, and goals of distinct peoples, resulting in change (Minter 2010).

This chapter has reviewed the stakes of actors across scales in “conserving” language and culture through education policy. In doing so, it has critically reflected on the theoretical implications of these ideologies for indigenous and minority peoples upon whom policy is projected. In the following chapter, I will discuss how informants in Mansarong and Malisi interpret and imagine change and adaptation within their communities and how their adaptations cannot and should not be framed inherently as “progress” or “loss”. These frames will be juxtaposed with those imagined futures framed by international stakeholders, which invoke broad agendas of environmental conservation and “sustainability”. Further, I will reflect on the role of formal education in framing these distinct futures.
Chapter Six

Imagining futures: “global” and “local”

“[G]lobal Nature made the knowledge of varied localities compatible. It offered a universal system to bring together local knowledges. Global nature can inspire moral views and actions. In nature appreciation [...] localities are charged with global insight; they are microorganisms of universal knowledge.” –Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Friction, 2005

Imagined futures

The previous chapter discussed how models of cultural conservation and language revitalization, promoted by stakeholders across scales, are engrained in the ideology of the policies investigated in this study. Further, it reviewed how these models imagine indigenous peoples and frame what it means for a society to change and adapt. As an educational model, “cultural conservation” is intended to “valorize” minority heritages and identities in order to overturn their erasure in formal education and other social institutions as a result of colonization, ultimately allowing increased access for the target communities. Moreover, these models represent the preservation and legitimization of cultural heritages, practices, and ways of being deemed “sustainable” by advocates for the environment and “social development”. In this sense, mother tongue-based education and its formalization in state schools participates in the broader and “global” discussions of environmental conservation and “sustainable development” for the imagined future.

Culturally-relevant, mother tongue-based models respond to and arise from legacies of the colonial past and contexts of the present, but also through framing of the future. Persoon and van Est (2000) note how ideologies of the future play a significant role in formulating concepts of cultural “conservation”, as well as environmental planning and sustainability, much like those promoted by proponents of these policies. In this chapter, I will discuss how a culturally “conservative” model of education participates in framing of the future for both proponents of the policy and informants in the study, reflecting on scales of language and culture as well as legacies of the past and contexts of the present.
As an inherently future-framing institution, formal education intends to prepare pupils for their imagined future (Finnan et al. 2017). As such, it is a fitting space for future-oriented interventions. Historically, the imagined future framed by formal education has assumed pupils’ participation in and reproduction of the national language, culture, identity, and economy (Minter, Ke & Persoon 2012; Wortham 2012). In this way, it has excluded pupils of minority identities as well as communities who imagine the future for their children differentially from this model, devalorizing their ways of being and doing through cognitive imperialism (Battiste 2005). The shift toward culturally-responsive education then, marks an effort not only to preserve “local” cultural knowledge systems, but to valorize their role in promoting issues “global” issues.

In the following sections, I will describe how “globalism” imagines a shared “world-wrapping” (Tsing 2000) future in which all societies are interconnected through world-over issues such as climate change and “sustainability”. I will detail how stakeholders, such as environmental and “development” actors, frame the future through the “globe” and interpret “sustainability” in terms of environmental preservation in which indigenous peoples play a significant role. This imagined future and conceptualization of “sustainability” will be compared with the futures envisioned by parents and elders in Mansarong and Malisi, who hope to minimize precarity for the children by providing them increased opportunity for educational, occupational, and economic stability.

“Global” futures

According to the teacher trainers introduced in the previous chapter, the movement for culturally-relevant, mother tongue-based education begins at the international level with the interest of organizations such as the United Nations. On its web page for “International Mother Language Day 2018” UNESCO Bangkok explains “why mother tongues matter”; it states “Asia-Pacific's remarkable cultural and linguistic diversity is one of this region's greatest strengths, with tremendous promise to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – however, that potential can only be realized if all learners have access to education in a language they can understand.” (UNESCO 2018 b). The United Nations describes this “Sustainable Development Agenda” as a set of “new Goals that universally apply to all,” under which “countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change”; the primary ambition is “to promote prosperity while protecting the planet” (United Nations 2019).
UNESCO (2018 b) declares mother tongue-based education a formative aspect of “sustainability” in the imagined future. The term itself—“sustainable”—has long been claimed by environmentalist and social development agendas. Both of these actors frame their goals in terms of the world at large; they imagine the natural environment and the “developing world” at the global scale, in what Tsing (2005) calls an act of “globe-making”. Tsing (2005: 111-112) notes the role of the natural environment and its proponents in creating the “globe”, facilitating international collaboration, and valorizing “local” knowledges systems; “Nature offers various kinds of commitment to a global scale. Global Nature can collate facts from around the world […] global Nature made the knowledge of varied localities compatible. It offered a universal system to bring together local knowledges. Global nature can inspire moral views and actions”. The result of this ideology is that “localities are charged with global insight; they are microorganisms of universal knowledge.” (Tsing 2005: 112). In imagining this “global” future, “local” knowledge is scaled up to the universal and indigenous peoples are framed as stewards of the natural world. On a webpage titled “Indigenous Knowledge and Biodiversity” UNESCO publishes “[t]he recognition that local and indigenous people have their own ecological understandings, conservation practices and resource management goals has important implications. It transforms the relationship between biodiversity managers and local communities. While previously they were perceived simply as resource users, indigenous people are now recognised as essential partners in environmental management” (UNESCO 2019). In other terms, while once viewed as “primitive,” the knowledge systems of indigenous peoples are increasingly valued in international efforts for environmental conservation, including in the Sierra Madre (Persoon et al. 2009).

These frames for the futures are echoed by smaller, locally operative organizations as well, such as Mabuwaya Foundation, which maintains active involvement at the sites of study. Mabuwaya’s goals are oriented with environmental conservation, protection of biodiversity, and the preservation of endangered species. This work involves a recollection of times past, but also a functional recognition of change over time. In the days before corporate logging and agricultural encroachment, the Agta were the forest’s primary inhabitants, hunting, fishing, and gathering in small bands. The few Igorot migrants in the area sustained themselves through the cultivation of modest gardens. These practices were minimally disruptive to the ecosystem.

But as the ecosystem and demography of the area changed, so too did the livelihoods of the people. Mabuwaya acknowledges these shifts and seeks to support the development of
alternative economies in alignment with the preservation of the natural environment. In this way, Mabuwaya’s involvement in sustaining the forest extends beyond biological conservation and into social development. In speaking with their staff, I learned their work involves community organizing, education, and capacity building which stem from and promote an environmental agenda. Throughout my time at the sites, members of Mabuwaya Foundation frequently passed through to facilitate trainings and meetings with community members. In Malisi, they told me they “organize” the Agta, register the community for “IP” resources and benefits, and strengthen their livelihood through the support and development of economies considered harmonious with the natural environment. These livelihoods include the gathering and marketing of non-timber forest products and the production of handicrafts, such as rattan woven baskets. In Mansarong, I frequently met community members who had been involved and employed their reforestation initiatives.

Figure 10: Mabuwaya-sealed Barangay ordinance sign in Mansarong, declaring the sitio and surrounding area a “Wildlife Sanctuary”. Photograph by Mallory McGoff, 14 February 2019.

Mabuwaya works to restore the forest in part by developing sustainable livelihood practices with the people who inhabit it, herein safeguarding the “future”; this future orientation was clearly expressed in a sign (Figure 10) which greets travelers along the road as they enter Mansarong. Showing a variety of images of local wildlife, including the endangered species, it declared
“WILDLIFE SANCTUARY Sta. Margarita, Baggao, Cagayan”, “PROTECT OUR FORESTS, CONSERVE BIODIVERSITY, SECURE OUR FUTURE.” In the finer print, the sign established Mansarong, Malisi, and their surrounding area a “Wildlife Sanctuary”, in which the hunting of animals, “cutting of trees”, “opening of new lands for slash-and-burn farming, expansion of existing farms, and other destructive activities” are prohibited and punishable by fines and community service. The sign was marked with the logo of Mabuwaya Foundation as well as that of the municipality of Baggao, the Barangay Santa Margarita, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) of the Philippines, and the sustainable development organization German Corporation for International Cooperation GmbH (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH).

This sign stood directly in for the farming cooperative, a Mabuwaya affiliated project, where members of the Community Based Forest Management (CBFM) program, yet another initiative of Mabuwaya involvement, frequently gathered. Here, I met Fernando, the chairman of the organization in Mansarong, who told me CBFM has been ongoing for twenty-five years. He described its four objectives: “protection, development, rehabilitation, and conservation”. His work with the organization has included “monitoring for illegal activity like logging, limiting hunting of birds, teach people to not hunt endangered, indigenous species, both flora and fauna…flood management, assist in restoration, prohibit kaingin.” Other members of the organization described their involvement with the project; Matthew, a “forest protection officer” of Mansarong under the DENR, reported “I monitor the forest, document endemic species, observe for landslides…plant trees, prohibit slash and burn”. He told me he believed the efforts have been successful, noting that since his involvement, he has witnessed “more wild pigs, which indicates the forest is growing and healthy”. Another member, Joseph, told me he sees the “environment changing positively through reforestation”. Mabuwaya, the DENR, and other stakeholders promote their visions or the future and by investing in these local actors who can advocate their causes at the community level.

Across scales, organizations involved in environmental conservation and protection have a vested interested not only in preserving and promoting ecologically “sustainable” livelihoods on the local level, but in strengthening and supporting cultural practices and identities associated with these livelihoods. Herein, culturally-relevant education represents more than the “conservation” of language and culture for the sake of maintaining and appreciating “diversity”; it is key in promoting “global” futures. “Mother tongue”, its promotion by stakeholders across
scales, and its formalization by the state represent an ideological return to practices remembered as ecologically “sustainable”. The role of indigenous peoples here is clear; cultural conservation plays into the framing of indigenous peoples as innate protectors and stewards of the natural environment, whose livelihoods are, or at least can be, harmonious and synonymous with environmental protection and conservation. At least in part, these organizations hope to conserve the natural environment by “conserving” culture. Herein, education plays a significant role.

It is without a doubt that the Agta of Malisi’s hunting and gathering practices and the Igorot of Mansarong’s original small-scale varied gardening practices were more environmentally beneficial than the larger-scale, single-crop (often kaingin) agricultural practice that has taken over the region in the decades since corporate logging. People in both Mansarong and Malisi also made clear their desire to maintain environmentally stable practices, which benefit their communities by facilitating the sustainability of their livelihood practices. In Mansarong, elders Paul and Fernando reported that they desire for their children to become formally educated in land use, forest protection, and sustainable agricultural practices. They have witnessed firsthand the degradation of the land, the erosion of soils, the silting or rivers, the diminishment of flora and fauna, and the increasing severity of the climate, which now threaten their farms. In Malisi, Mayor Mario and Vice Governor Robert emphasized that the forest is not only their historical livelihood, but a formative aspect of their cultural identity; their people would still practice hunting, fishing, and gathering as their exclusive livelihood if possible. But due to the depletion of the forest and its resources, it is not possible. Both elders desired increased efforts to safeguard the forest for the imagined future.

In this sense, elders in both sites discussed and promoted an alternative but highly related definition of “sustainable” imagined futures. That is: futures which are economically viable over an extended period of time. Environmental instability in both sitios has threatened economic stability. Consequently, peoples of both sitios have sought pathways for reducing precarity in their children’s imagined futures, through a variety of adaptations. This included shifting livelihood strategies and cultural and linguistic practices and leaning on formal education to proportion economic, academic, and occupational opportunity for their children. In other words, elders at both sitios adopted a model of practicality for the imagined future, in which the role of education is significant.
Practical futures

And as a progress-oriented institution, education participates in framing imagined futures for pupils and their communities (Finnan et al. 2017). While state education historically prepares students for their imagined future participation in the national language, culture, identity, and economy (Minter, Ke & Persoon 2012; Wortham 2012), models of cultural conservation or language revitalization intend to preserve the “past” in order to promote agendas of conservation (Hinton 2001; Nolan 2005) for the future. These goals are distinct from those of the people of Mansarong and Malisi, who envision the future for their children and community in terms of reducing precarity while maximizing opportunity. To approach the imagined future, I asked parents and elders to envision the future for their children, schools, and communities and to describe their ambitions, hopes, or predictions for the years to come. In the following section, I have selected a handful of illuminating responses from parents and elders which were generally representative of this population of informants. In interpreting these responses, one should take into account the inequality inherent in the “capacity to aspire” (Appadurai 2013), required to envision the future. This inequality can be cited in the distinct imagined futures framed by respondents of distinct economic and social opportunity.

Mansarong

Antonio, an elder in Mansarong introduced in chapter three, articulated the role of culturally-relevant education, first describing his home place in Cordillera; “our beliefs in Cordillera are different from here, for us Ibaloi, Igorot, we always smile, show kindness, respect…they [the children] should learn the customs of our place. In occasions here there is a dance that came from another place but we have our own dances, gongs, costumes, clothing. Children should learn this, even in school. We do not know where we came from because we mix, but the children should learn.” Antonio recalled how his community established the school decades ago: “we built the school, not the government”, hosting classes in their own homes, raising funds, and finally constructing an independent building on land donated by his brother. The practices of the school changed when it came “under the control of DepEd…the orders are coming from the head now”.

Antonio noted frequent changes in school staff, which has impacted the quality of education; “the term of the teachers here…there is always reshuffling.” Even so, Antonio was proud to say
that Mansarong Elementary School did boast a teacher “from here”: his own niece, Susana. He elaborated on the benefits of “home-base teachers” and his pride in his niece’s work; “home-base is good, especially like [Susana] is a mestiza—Igorot and Ilocana—she knows the habits of Igorot, Ilocano, and some others. She will understand the children. That’s why I’m always in favor of this.” He added, “I hope they [the other teachers] will also make home-base too. I hope this school will go on [to continue improving] with the level of learning.”

Paul, the councilman in Mansarong, also introduced in chapter three, expanded on the locally-relevant competencies children should and should not learn in the classroom (Figure 11). While Paul did not name “teacher” specifically to be a future profession for his sons, he told me he hoped they will “finish school and get a good job because farming and this lifestyle is a hardship.” He explained that these hardships are exacerbated by unsustainable practices; “you have a small plot of land and you farm that and eventually it is depleted. Maybe with education you know how to use the land properly so it is always fruitful.” For this reason, he hoped land use, forestry, and agricultural technology might be taught in the schools.

I asked him what he thought about teaching in the mother tongue, Ilocano. He reflected that it is useful in that it is easily understood by the children, but that it “shouldn’t be the focus for too
long. Then, the children will not speak English and Tagalog properly”. Paul identified strong skills in these languages as essential for accessing academic, economic, and professional opportunities in the imagined future. “It’s better to use [mother tongue] only when the children don’t understand. If they are able, use English and Tagalog.” He added that he would hold the same opinion for teaching of his own mother tongue, Ibaloi, in the schools: “don’t focus too much,” he repeated. Paul reflected on his own language skills repeating that he perceived himself to not “speak straight” English or Tagalog. He expressed hope that his children would not face this barrier themselves. I asked Paul how he envisions the future of Mansarong. He told me sincerely, “the future of Mansarong is in education. The future is children getting education and giving back to the community, making changes.” He described logistical benefits of teachers “from here […] like Susana”; too often, teachers from the center “can’t come due to the road and river conditions, then what happens to the children?”

Paul’s hope for practical education was shared by Fernando. In addition to serving as the chairman of CBFM, Fernando was also the president of the Parent –Teacher Association at Mansarong Elementary School. Perhaps for this reason, he described education and environment as particularly interconnected. He told me “children should have a general subject in school about environment” this would include “managing waste, pollution, floods, forests, trees”. He explained “the government should get DepEd to mandate environment education in the schools. It should be taught just as ‘vales’ or ‘morals’ subject.” He continued, “children should learn about this at a young age so that they can educate the community, raise awareness, improve the environment in the future”. In imagining this future he told me “I want my kids to finish school, graduate, be teachers here because the teachers now are from outside.” I ask him what the difference would be between teachers from “outside” and those from “here”. He described that local teachers could prevent the “constant change of teachers. They could have a better connection between teacher and children, be more involved in the community, more knowledgeable about the community, take part in conservation projects”.

Malisi

The desire for local teachers prepared to execute effective culturally-relevant education was also shared by parents and elders in Malisi. Robert, the vice governor of Malisi (introduced in chapter three) and a parent to young children at Malisi Elementary School told me he is glad to see Ilocano in the school; while the true mother of Malisi is Labine, Ilocano is still much more
accessible than English or Tagalog, “so Ilocano is better” than these languages for instruction. I asked Robert about his plans for the future of his community. He described that he hoped “for all Agtas to learn and graduate, I hope for the students to progress to high school because normally they don’t” due to the distance and financial burden. Robert told me about a plan he developed to build a high school in Malisi with the help of the NCIP, so that Malisi students would not have to travel to Santa Margarita to attend high school, twelve kilometers away by foot in harsh weather and road conditions. The distance and difficulty have prevented many students from continuing their education. Ultimately, his plan did not come to fruition as it was deemed there were “too few students here to build a school”.

Still, Robert explained that he would like to see children from the community stay together when they must leave for school, to establish a support system for each other. He added that he would like to see an Agta teacher in Malisi in the future because “blood is thicker than water. They [Agta teachers] can help raise the children to be kind and have a good attitude in life. Ilocanos are different than Agtas… Agta can help parents, can do what we want in the school, could teach traditions like dance, how to get food, live, worship, community with elders, use Labine and Dupaninan in the school”. As he imagined the future, Robert described to me the degradation of the forest in the past and reflected that these issues—decrease of natural resources, deforestation, agricultural encroachment, and population boom—could worsen in the future, further endangering the Agta livelihood. He planned to combat this issue through communal efforts to “preserve the forest”. To accomplish this, “children should learn about preservation of forest, animals, and plants to contribute to a better future.”

This desire was repeated by Malisi Mayor Mario (introduced in chapter three) who responded “in the future, I hope the children finish studies and come back here to work, especially as teachers….they could teach Labine, traditions, know the culture.” I ask him why using Labine would be preferable. He told me “I want Labine in the school so it is easier for the children to understand.” David, “leader of the Agtas” (introduced in chapter three) repeated this sentiment, telling me “even though the children go to school, we want them to continue Agta culture, like the hymn of the Agta and our dance…they must learn this at home because the teachers don’t know it.” I asked his thoughts about incorporating Labine and/or Dupaninan in the schools. After explaining that this was currently impossible because “the teachers don’t know it”, he added “I would like Agta teachers because then they [students and teachers] can understand each other due to same culture.”
Finally, Belinda, mother of grade six Malisi student Jeremiah (introduced in chapter two), offered a particularly representative perspective. Reflecting on her own education, she told me she went to school through grade two in Mansarong, as there was no school in Malisi during her youth. She explained that when she was a child, her parents were “not aware of the benefits” of formal education, which she values for her children. Belinda told me she now participated in varied livelihoods, including seasonal labor, planting, and porting to support her family while her children attend school; “I work hard for my children so they finish school”. I asked her how she imagined the future for her children. She reported her ambitions: “I want them to be teachers, here in Malisi. I want the children to learn the culture….I teach them at home about the traditions because the teachers don’t know it.” I ask her how this might differ if the teachers were Agtas themselves. “I would like Agta/ Labine teachers so they [the students and teachers] can understand each other. The [current] teachers don’t speak the language so I would like it [language/ culture] in the schools if the teachers were Agta because we are not Ilocanos, we are not Tagalogs.”

Overwhelmingly, parents in both communities hoped for their children to finish their education, return home, and contribute to the betterment of their communities, most notably as teachers. This ambition reflects a widely expressed desire for local teachers who share in the identities, cultures, languages, and ways of being and doing of the students, and who are imagined to be better equipped to educate children and bring culturally-relevant education to life. Notably, informants in both communities also cited the relevance of the natural environment in imagining the future and reflected upon the importance of formal education in this matter. In doing so, they recalled legacies of the past to envision what is to come.

In a variety of interviews in Malisi, parents and elders reported a desire for their children to learn and practice some aspects of their cultural heritage, but not others. In Mansarong, parents of non-Ilocano heritage largely reported that they preferred their children assimilate to Ilocano language and tradition rather than continue with their own. In both cases, this perspective may be seen to reflect a “colonial mentality” projected upon indigenous peoples through education, in which they are taught to devalue their own ways of being and doing in favor in the ways of the dominant group (Constantino 1970; David & Okazaki 2006). This rang particularly true when parents attached negative connotations (e.g. “old” or “bad”) to their heritage practices. But to blame a colonial mentality as the sole cause of this phenomenon would be reductionist. These
expressed desires represent practicality; parents valued their children’s engagement with languages and practices that serve their best interests and facilitate opportunity as their natural environments, economies, and ecologies change around them.

For many parents in Malisi, this practical adaptation has meant shifting away from a nomadic lifestyle that is no longer sustainable in the aftermath of deforestation: a lifestyle which resulted in hardship, poverty, and precarity in their own youth. It meant continuing hunting, fishing, and gathering when possible, but also participating in agricultural practices and seasonal labor activities when necessary to reduce precarity for their children. The environment has drastically changed, and in exercising their ability to adapt to these changes, the Agta demonstrate their resilience, rather than cultural “decline” (Minter 2010). For non-Ilocano transplants in Mansarong, practicality meant adapting to Ilocano language and “ways” as these practices are perceived to better prepare their children to interact, communicate, engage, and identify with their community, receive an education, and expand their economic and social opportunities in the imagined future.

In other words, while colonial legacies are highly relevant, the situation of language and culture in preparing children for the future is both simpler and more complex; changes in linguistic and cultural practices do not inherently represent progress or loss, but rather adaptation to shifting contexts. Importantly, parents and elders in both places were interested in the possibility that their languages and cultural practices could be incorporated in the schools, if there existed teachers to represent them. This underscores that these informants valued their languages and cultural practices as well as practical measures to reduce precarity and access opportunity.

This chapter has described the imagined role of culturally-relevant, mother tongue-based education in framing the future by environmentalists and social development organizations, who promote their agendas through scaling “local” knowledge systems up to the level of the globe. Herein, the “sustainable” livelihoods of indigenous peoples become valorized in their ability to synergize with a “global” future, and therefore are “conserved” in the classroom. This imagined future is juxtaposed with the future framed by parents and elders in Mansarong and Malisi, who imagine education as a pathway to reduced precarity and increased opportunity. They value culturally-relevant education for its potential to increase access for their children and facilitate rapport between teachers and students.
Chapter Seven

Conclusions

This study has intended to document and analyze the implementation and interpretation of culturally-relevant, mother tongue-based education at sitios Mansarong and Malisi in Baggao, Cagayan, Philippines, as well the broader social and cultural contexts that drive them. To do so, the researcher has conducted observations at the local elementary school at each site and held semi-structured and unstructured interviews with teachers, parents, elders, teacher trainers, and MTB-MLE coordinators. The study has also sought to contextualize the practices observed and the perspectives shared within the historical and social legacies which give them rise and futures they frame, including through the interventions by actors across scales who promote these policies as keystones in “global” agendas.

In the Philippines and around the world, legacies of colonization shape formal education and its policies pertaining to the place and space of language and culture in the classroom (Minter, Ke, & Persoon 2012). In the case of the Philippines, American colonial education established a classroom culture of cognitive imperialism (Battiste 2005) in which English language and Western knowledge systems were cemented superior and indigenous languages and knowledge systems were diminished and erased (Rafael 2015). This tradition continued with the nationalist movement in education, in which the newly minted “Filipino” language was implemented to unify disparate peoples under a shared national identity (Tupas & Lorente 2014; Young 2002). Concomitantly, this period of state-making saw the country’s forests destroyed through unregulated corporate logging practices (Kummer 1992), destabilizing livelihoods for many indigenous and minority peoples, including at the sites of study.

These legacies of the past gave rise to a “third wave” policy for anti-colonial, culturally-relevant, mother tongue-based education. Further, they established the ideological foundation for languages and their associated cultural practices to continue to be assigned to scales of value in the school context. In this policy practice at the sites of study, “hierarchical spaces” for language and cultural practice (Friedman 2003) prevail; languages and their associated cultural knowledge sets are assigned to distinct scales, invoking a narrative a progress (Tsing 2000) as students “advance” away from the “local” and toward the “national” and “global” scales. In these hierarchical spaces, English and Filipino represent the future and facilitate education,
opportunity, and “success”. “Mother tongue”, or the regional language in this case, represents the past. Positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy, it is considered limited in terms of associated opportunity in the imagined future. While the designated “mother tongue” employed at both Mansarong Elementary School and Malisi Elementary School is Ilocano, the true native languages of the community members are distinct, varied, and multiplex. But of all the linguistic heritages and practices present in the communities, only Ilocano has a place or practice within the classroom, effectively rendering the relative value of other mother tongues negligible in the school context.

The practice of mother tongue-based education policy faces a variety of barriers to implementation at both schools, both practical and ideological. While teachers reported that Ilocano is more effective in facilitating student compression than English or Filipino, they, together with parents, expressed concern that it may hinder students from successfully “scaling” up in the school system and society at large. These informants imagined “mother tongue” is best suited as an academic stepping stone to these higher scales, which are perceived to offer greater academic, economic, and professional potential in the imagined future. At both sites, compelling practices of culturally-relevant education (Minter, Ke & Persoon 2012) take place between pupils and their teachers, but rigid standards prevent their meaningful translation into the formal school space.

While the mother tongue-based model of education reproduces scales in the classroom and curriculum, it also arises through negotiation across scales. Through these policies, international stakeholders promote models of cultural conservation (Nolan 2005) and language revitalization (Hinton 2001). Though imagined to overturn colonial legacies and mentalities in formal education (Republic of the Philippines 1997; UNESCO 2001), these models have the potential to propagate the tradition of externally defining and homogenizing indigenous peoples (Padwe 2013; Wright & Martí i Puig 2012), generalizing their adaptations and change over time as “cultural loss” to be combated through “conservation”. This interpretation of cultural change and the role of policy as “intervention” was expressed by teachers, coordinators, and teacher trainers in urban settings of this study who attested that languages, cultures, and identities in their communities were in “decline”. This belief was in contrast to that of teachers, parents, and elders in sitios Mansarong and Malisi, who did not describe decline and who did not believe their cultures and languages inherently required “preservation” efforts.
Mother tongue-based education as a model of “cultural conservation” is representative of the broader agendas of the international stakeholders who promote it, including imagining the future through environmental conservation and social “development” (Elyachar 2002; Persoon & van Est 2000; UNESCO 2019): topics which are inherently framed in terms of the “the globe” (Tsing 2000; Tsing 2005). In environmentalist agendas, indigenous cultural knowledge systems and practices become valued as ecologically “sustainable” and scalable to the level of the “globe” (UNESCO 2019). In this way, the global future is imagined in part through the preservation of minority knowledges systems and ways of being and doing, as well as through environmentally viable “social development” within these communities.

As parents and elders in Mansarong and Malisi bore witness to the destruction of the natural environment, which directly threatens their livelihoods, they too promoted and propagated agendas for environmental preservation and imagine this topic is critical in children’s education and preparation for the future. However, these informants also imagined the “sustainable” future in more practical and economic terms. They valued their languages and cultural practices and desired to see them applied in the classroom, but only so much as these practices remain beneficial to their children academically, economically, and occupationally; their primary concern is reducing precarity (Tsing 2015) in their children’s imagined future, which is accomplished through economic, linguistic, and cultural adaptations. These adaptations do not reflect cultural decline, but rather resilience to shifting environmental and social contexts (Minter 2010). In parents’ and elders’ imagined ideal, their children’s education would be led by their own teachers, incorporate relevant aspects of cultural and localized knowledge, but primarily prepare children to access educational and economic opportunities and give back to their communities. From their view, this requires “scaling up” across languages and cultural knowledge systems.

“There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ method for integrating multiple languages into an education system” publishes the Asian Development Bank (ACDP Indonesia 2018: 3). Teachers, parents, and elders in Mansarong and Malisi reflected that MTB-MLE policy, at least as currently implemented, is top-down, fails to increase learning outcomes for children, may hinder their academic, economic, and professional access, and does not meaningfully contribute to the continuity of cultural knowledge and practices. Teachers and elders at these sitios desired greater flexibility in curriculum and standards that might allow instructors, together with community members, to adapt state education to meet the needs of the students, the goals of the peoples, and the social and environmental contexts of their sitios.
Altogether, this study has demonstrated that interpretations of and motivations for culturally-relevant, mother tongue-based education in Baggao, Cagayan, Philippines are strongly anchored to legacies of the past and imaginations of the future across scales. As such, the policy practice at the schools of study reproduced ideologies of scale associated with language and culture, in which “global” and “national” languages and knowledge systems are framed as bearing greater weight, opportunity, and access than “local” languages and knowledge systems, which are externally declared to be in decline and in need of restoration. The “third wave” education model investigated in this study is adopted and propagated by actors across scales who hope to promote their “global” causes through conserving and valorizing “local” cultural practices. These external goals can be both aligned with and distinct from the goals of the people upon whom they are imposed. Ultimately, the case of mother tongue-based education at sitios Mansarong and Malisi represents an ongoing negotiation of scales and across scales, which extends both from the past and into the imagined future.
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