THE CATANDUNGANONS— MAKING AND SEEING SELVES THROUGH THE EYE OF THE TYPHOON

Ramon Felipe A. Sarmiento

The Catandunganons' sense of identity largely builds on two geographical features of their home-province, namely its insularity and the prevalence of strong typhoons. But geography is not an unchanging given reality in its impact on people. It proves to be a plastic ingredient for the enterprise of making selves. While insularity and typhoons are eternal aspects of Catanduanes, these are variously construed through time by the Catanduanganons as they factor them into constructing their identity. Moreover, a sense of place defines one's sense of self, but these two in turn are shaped by the vagaries of history. This article by examines how four successive generations of Catandunganons make sense of their Catandunganon-ness as they define and deal with the reality of insularity and typhoons, and are influenced by circumstances of history, specifically the globalizing forces of science, technology, media and the world economic order.

Geographically speaking, my province Catanduanes appears to be permanently defined by two features, namely its insularity and the regular battering by typhoons. To the extent that geography makes a people, it would seem that we Catandunganons have been determined for all times by these two natural facets of our place. But geography may not prove to be an immutable and neutral reality out there that bears on people. A sense of place is socially and culturally constituted (Feld 1996:11). Place-making and the concomitant making of selves are contingent on the vagaries of history. Both insularity and typhoons would variously take significance in the process of place-making by subjects creating, recreating and transforming themselves. In this paper, I propose to explore place and identity as being both confluent and historically embedded in the specific case of us Catandunganons, giving particular attention to our related experience of insularity and typhoons.

Methodologically, I am doing "anthropology at home" (Peirano 1998:105-128; Jacobs-Huey 2002:791-804; Davies 1999:34-36). I was born and raised in Virac, the capital town of Catanduanes and so I have embodied in my lived experience the salience of being an islander and the recurrent destruction of typhoons. For this paper I draw from my accumulation of

AghamTao, 2011, Volume 20:68-86

insights. But while I am my own informant, I also draw information from others. Specifically, I make use of things I heard and observed from three generations of people I have shared life with in my hometown, namely: 1) my own generation, 2) those immediately before me, that is, the contemporaries of my parents and grandparents, and 3) those that came after me, my nieces and nephews and their cohorts. I shall then reconstruct the sets of practices for each of these groups regarding the making sense of typhoons and insularity as prominent aspects of place-making, and the making sense of selves. Analytically, I propose to work out a connection between both, and compare them in terms of changing trends according to the larger historical context.

Place-making and the Making of Selves: A Being-in-the-World

The framework of this paper can be laid out in three related statements. First, both senses of place and of self are social and cultural constructions. Second, their production and reproduction are inextricably implicated with each other in dynamic ways. Third, these processes are attended by historical factors, principally the various aspects of globalization. Underlying these three assertions is the contingent character of place and self, something that serves to challenge their appearances as taken-for-granted stable givens.

The first statement calls attention to the fact that the making sense of something is an active enterprise of construction by subjects that draws from social and cultural sources. This becomes problematic when it comes to the sense of place and self because in order for place and self to make sense, they must precisely take the quality of immutable external reality. Place and self therefore must be so constructed in ways that must hide their constructedness. Place for example, appears as found entity courtesy of the scientific imagination of the material world. Here, a place is conceived as the totality of geological features - surface, subterranean and atmospheric - that becomes the ponderous setting for people's activities, the solid ground for the fickle flow of human enterprise. In this way of seeing, Catanduanes as place becomes essentialized as an island of such and such dimension and coordinates nestled in a specific corner of the Philippine archipelago and exposed to recurring tropical climatic patterns that bring in a good amount of destructive howlers in specific periods of the year. But this scientific framework is merely one cultural resource, among others, that people use in the construction of a sense of place. As for one's sense of self, it works much the same way. The self appears to one's self as a presence of overwhelming compulsion and weight. Furthermore, its immediacy and

ubiquity as experience gloss over the fact that it is also contrived through social and cultural inputs.

The inseparability of place-making and the making of selves is contained in the phenomenological definition of lived experience as a "being-in-the-world." In this reckoning, subjects are confronted at the outset with both a self-project to pursue and a world to inhabit. In fulfilling the former, they must outpour themselves into the latter but altering it in the process. In creating themselves, they, too, must create the world that in turn shapes them (Berger 1969:3-28; Casey 1996:15-46). In this scheme of things, being-in-the-world becomes a set of practices regarding how agents engage with their contexts. Place-making and the making of selves become a set of ways of knowing and acting in the world. A sense of place then is the totality of feelings, knowledge and competencies of comprehending a world that is both producer and product of one's self. A sense of self on the other hand, is the totality of personal dispositions of appropriating such a world, so informed by such comprehension. Because of this intimate connection, a person or a group's identity is usually referenced according to one's place of dwelling. So the label of one's self as "Filipino" or "Bikolano" conjures the inhabiting of a particular place. Being Catandunganon means being competent in knowing and acting in Catanduanes.

The third statement implies that as various historical forces act on the process of construction of both place and identity, these two become susceptible to changes over time. Therefore, the Catandunganons not only produce and reproduce themselves and their Catanduanes but in the process also transform themselves and their place. In this paper it is specifically argued that developments brought about by globalization significantly influence the changing contours of the Catandunganons' sense of place and identity. Insularity and recurring typhoons, while appearing as eternal features of Catanduanes, have been variously understood and dealt with, courtesy of globalizing forces such as media technology, scientism, and increasing integration into a world economic order.

Typhoons, Insularity and Being Catandunganon

Notwithstanding historical changes on what may be construed as the 'Catandunganon Experience', typhoons and insularity can be considered as underlying common defining features of Catanduanes (Sarmiento 2009:54-62). What is more, these two are seen as intimately related; one cannot be imagined without the other. This relatedness is apprehended through an awareness of continuity and separation between three forms of matter, namely solid, liquid and air, as represented in the land mass of the island, the

surrounding sea, and the atmosphere beyond the horizon and about the sky. But a duality is created: the joint presence of the sea and atmosphere is an engulfing but less stable matrix to one's own solid ground. This duality is the stuff of insularity. And insularity of the Catandunganon is made more acute by the recurring typhoons because a typhoon is a tumultuous confluence of atmosphere and water, destructive sea waves and battering rains agitated by strong winds that pound furiously upon the land, violently undermining humans' immediate dwelling place.

So while insularity creates a sense of isolation, the expectation of typhoons creates a sense of anxiety, resulting to a feeling of vulnerability. Being Catandunganon then is one of vulnerable isolation. But the Catandunganons do not wallow in this fix, for such situation also becomes the proverbial anvil on which their character is founded. In town fiesta souvenir programs or similar documents, it is typical to describe Catandunganons as a resilient, tenacious and religious people. The isolation and constant exposure to climatic scourges make them acutely aware of powers beyond their control so they resort to religious piety. But it is not to be construed as debilitating fatalism because the Catandunganons also do their active part in confronting their situation. They have developed a set of strategies that allow them to spring back to vitality after every ordeal from nature; they know how deal with natural calamities, especially typhoons.

A sense of place and of self must necessarily be also a sense of relationship with other places and other peoples. Insularity implies an orientation to things beyond one's territorial reaches, things that represent the promise of presence of and interaction with others on one hand, and of access to external resources on the other. For the Catandunganons, it means relating with other Bicolanos settled just across the horizon or the *ibong*, literally referring to "the other side." Of course, the immediate other side continues on to other peoples and places and all these mean new relationships and added recourses for material needs at home, and even possibilities of alternative places to live in.

The following presentation of findings is of two parts. In the first, I describe the Catandunganon folk knowledge of typhoons: how they predict and then prepare for their coming, how they deal with their actual onslaught, and how they try to go back to normal in the aftermath. Then I discuss how this folk knowledge has been reproduced and transformed through the generations as Catandunganons get more and more engaged with globalizing forces such as science, media, and the international economic order. In the second part, I elaborate on the Catandunganon sense of insularity and the related aspect of sense of self. Likewise, these are both matters that

reproduce and transform as people are exposed to globalizing forces that serve to change their orientation to things and people beyond what they embrace as their own.

Knowing Typhoons, and Beating Them

The ways of my sky-gazing forebears. During my childhood, it was quite commonplace to overhear the old ones talking about the weather with great folk savvy, using a rich vocabulary to denote various conditions and scenarios about the behavior of the atmosphere and the seas. Every now and then, I would see my grandmother momentarily drop the broom while sweeping the yard, straighten up and squint her eyes to survey the skies and even appear to sniff the air. If her face shifted to a frown of anxiety, I knew something was wrong and true enough, she would announce over lunch that there was going to be a bad turn in the weather, perhaps a typhoon. She had seen the signs this morning. The *pangnudon* or clouds looked like *mga kabayong gapaburukod*, or horses chasing each other, *"Ay bakong marinas, kadindata, namiligro kita!"* ("Oh not at all a good sign, it's ominous, we are facing a calamity!"). My mother might reinforce this by saying that it explained the unusual behavior of the fowls just the other day where she saw a hen flying high some three meters above the ground for some distance. In some cases it can be a duck. My father might contribute his piece by pointing out that the *kalachuchi* had borne two fruits, has anyone not noticed it? And everybody would know that a typhoon was inevitably coming in a matter of days, perhaps a week or more. My elder siblings would pitch in their contribution to this exercise in prediction: one may talk of the strange ring around the moon or sun seen the other day, or the discomforting redness of the sunset yesterday.

The above-mentioned signs are the various ways in the folk knowledge of the Catandunganons for predicting the coming of typhoons. All these can be observed within some ten days before the actual onslaught of a howler, with the exception of the fruition of the *kalachuchi* which can come perhaps a month before the event foretold. It is a very rare occurrence such that when it happens it means an exceptionally destructive storm forthcoming. After the initial set of signs, there comes another set of indicators which means that the typhoon is imminent within a few days. First, the sea would be *guduk* or continuously rippled with small waves, sometimes crested with white foam, even if there is hardly a breeze blowing about. The sea would also emit a fishy smell. Then, ponds of stagnant water or *tamaw* release bubbles unexplainably to the surface, with foul smell. And of course, there is the disconcerting *anangaang* or humid temperature that keeps everyone fanning

themselves. At about this point, one hears over the radio (no TV then yet) a typhoon forecast, and my mother would say *"Iyo daw, dai nagsala su sabi ko! Maraot ang panahon, mag andam kita!"* ("Indeed, just like what I said, we're in for bad weather, we should prepare!").

Preparation for a coming typhoon entails addressing several concerns. First is provisioning for material necessities. In my household, we need to buy at least a liter of kerosene and have the "petromax" or gas lamp filled up. Then, there must be an extra box of matches and several candles. We also buy extra kilos of rice, some cans of sardines, and a lot of bread. Second is securing the house. For this, my father and elder brother would buttress windows and doors by fastening them with wire, twine or wooden braces. The sound of furious hammering around the neighborhood truly adds to the sense of anxiety and urgency of the incoming calamity. In rural areas where houses are not as densely huddled as they are in the urbanized places, the practice is to tie the four corners of the house down with huge ropes to pegs driven into the ground, as a countering pull against strong winds. This is called *banting*. For this purpose, every house in our town, particularly those made of light materials, maintains a set of robust ropes and a bamboo ladder. Meanwhile, *malunggay* branches are cut down so that the leaves can still be eaten as wind-battered *malunggay* becomes unfit for consumption. Papaya and banana fruits are also hastily gathered to save them from damage. As a final preparation, my mother would save a change of clothes for everybody as the entire house can get drenched inside out. Small children are bundled up with sweaters and bonnets. Also, my mother would have cooked enough food before the hearth becomes too wet for starting a fire. We would also have an early meal of hot rice and *malunggay* or papaya cooked in thick coconut milk because it lends heat to the body and help ward off hypothermia. After the meal, everybody huddles under our dining table as a last layer of sheltering and we stay there while the typhoon rages on. Then my mother lights the perdon candle that has been blessed during the feast of Our Lady of Candelaria and is believed to ward off harm during calamities. We pray the rosary, led by my father. It is necessary that this be done before the strong roar of the winds at the height of a typhoon will make it difficult for us to hear each other.

A typhoon can last for as short as three hours to as long as the entire day. To pass the time, we tell stories or play games such as cards or *sungka*. But when the typhoon proves to be exceptionally vicious, we keep quiet, or else my mother might start a new round of the rosary. My father is always on guard throughout the duration of a typhoon. He would be properly geared for the occasion by strapping on his bolo in a scabbard around his waist (a psychological gearing up, but also a practical one, just in case anything

needed to be cut), and having his hat and raincoat ready to hand. He constantly makes a round of the house to check things, and would come back and appraise us about the progress of the typhoon. He discusses with my mother possible scenarios using their familiarity with how a typhoon behaves. On these accounts, they make decisions as to the necessity of certain courses of action.

The behavior of an ongoing typhoon is described according to the system of wind directions. Here, there is no one-on-one correspondence between the standard north-south-east-west quadrant and the local system. Instead, the Catandunganons distinguish between six directionalities that vary, either as definite points or as ranges of degrees of location, depending upon their salience in reckoning weather in general and typhoons in particular. Figure 1 below is an illustration of the wind directions as identified by Catandunganons, reckoned relative to the established east-west-north-south schemata (represented by broken lines). *Timog* goes from east to southeast; it is not an important directionality because wind from *Timog* is not stable nor cause significant effects that figure during typhoons. *Dumagsa* or *Kwartang Amihan* is northeast and *Amihan* is north, and both are significant because typhoons usually start from these points. *Kanaway* is northwest and is within the usually vicious typhoon route that starts from *Amihan,* going counterclockwise all the way to *Habagat,* which goes from west to south-west-south. *Salatan* comes from the south.

A typhoon is experienced as destructively strong winds that shift directions from one to the other of these points, a circling of the place. As mentioned, it starts from *Dumagsa* and proceeds in two ways, clockwise to *Timog*, or counterclockwise to *Amihan.* But all typhoons end up in *Salatan.* A clockwise direction means that the typhoon will be short and less gusty but the seas will be turbulent, a *bagyong dagat* (sea typhoon) as they say in Virac. In this case, people think that the viciousness of the winds was *binawi ning dagat* or have been absorbed by the seas, but then they will have to deal with storm surge or *su-oy.* If it goes counterclockwise, it will be protracted and furious. *Amihan, Kanaway,* and *Habagat* are known to be bad-tempered howlers but the last of the three is the most hated one. This perhaps is on account of the fact that the *Habagat* monsoon, even if out of the context of typhoons (it prevails from June to September), is identified with bad times: it means bad crops, the arrival of epidemics especially flu, rough seas that make travel difficult, and lean catch by fishermen. In Catanduanes, a person who is particularly ill-humored is called *Habagat.*

But there is one more thing about the attention given to *Habagat*—people distinguish four kinds of it: the *Habagat sa Lagonoy*, the *Habagat sa*

May-ong, the *Verdaderong Habagat*, and the *Habagat sa Bacong*. The third is the 'genuine' one and the three others are variants so named in reference to three places in the Bicol mainland (Lagonoy in Camarines Sur, May-ong or Mayon volcano in Albay, and Bacong in Sorsogon). Why this fine differentiation? The reason is that when a typhoon batters from *Habagat*, this means that it is about to end. For that reason, the movement to each *habagat* is a suspenseful countdown to the end of a typhoon which happens as the wind moves to *Salatan* (south). Each *Habagat* variation represents a progress towards the most desirable wind of them all, the *Salatan* that signals the end of the ordeal, and for this the people afford this wind direction with a singular regard. *"Arin ang pinaka maisog na hangin?"* ("Which is the fiercest wind of them all?") *Habagat?* No. It's *Salatan,* because *"Siya sana ang ga suhay ning bagyo"* ("It's only *Salatan* that can command the typhoon to stop").

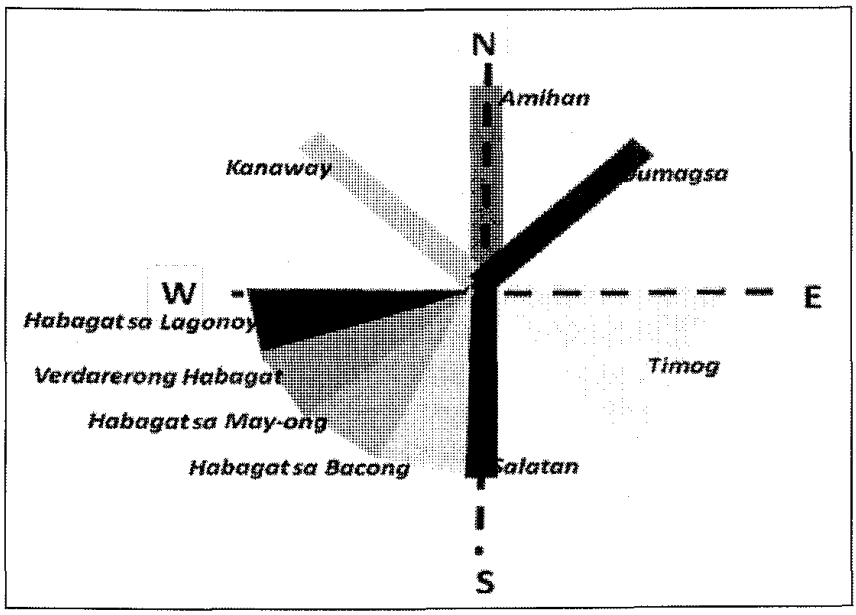

Figure 1: Wind Directions Recognized by Catandunganons

As *Salatan* takes over, people would already start with the task of rehabilitation. Even as the mild gusts of *Salatan* still blow, people would already venture out of their homes to run after a window shutter, or a door, or perhaps a piece of wooden plank that was ripped off the wall. Sometimes, one hears arguing voices piercing through the remaining howls of wind as people dispute the ownership of a wayward piece of house part. Then follow other tasks towards a full coming back to normal, not only of the material make-up of the house but more so of the everyday routines of its dwellers.

The rehabilitation of one's house depends upon the extent of damage, which in turn depends upon the structure of the house. The anticipation of regular occurrence of typhoons had therefore translated into specific time-tested building techniques. In putting together the traditional dwelling made of locally available materials, the basic approach is to attend to the structural aspects. First, the posts must be large and anchored into the earth for up to a third of the entire length. A post must consist of an entire tree trunk of some fifteen inches in diameter. I always get surprised when I see houses in many parts of mainland Luzon made with such comparatively weak posts, almost like stakes. Bamboo, for one is never used for structural purposes in house-building in Catanduanes. Even horizontal beams are always made from heavy-duty logs. Secondly, attaching beams and posts to create the basic shell is done with the *ipit* technique that does not use any nail. Instead, house joints are bound by rattan strips elaborately worked to produce strength, flexibility, as well as design motifs. The whole point of this method is to avoid the loosening up of joints by constant rocking through a typhoon, such as what happens when nails are used.

To prevent the roof from being blown off, awnings are not rendered wide, but windows are of the *tukod* type made of a one-piece shutter that is raised and extended horizontally out by the use of a pole when opened, to ward off rain. As for the roof, *nipa* shingles are used, which can stay for three years before needing replacement. They are sewn in place with such care that only a super typhoon can blow them off. Applying these shingles is one of the first skills a father passes on to his son. I remember my own turn to learn this skill when I was about thirteen years old. Up the scaffolding, my father initiated me to the labors of replacing the shingles. He told me that he must teach me as his own elder brother taught him (his father died when he was just four), but that he would be happier if I build my own house with galvanized iron, because I must improve on what we have now. To add security to the roof, a layer of bamboo trellis that acts like netting may be superimposed on it, which also adds some decorative effect. After a typhoon, a Catandunganon is happy when the basic structure is intact. Some damages here and there on the roof or wall are quite normal and easy to deal with. When perhaps the house had started leaning off from center courtesy of a particularly strong *habagat*, it can be corrected by the *budyong* which is to pull it back to center by the use of ropes. But reconstruction might become necessary when damage is extensive. In both *budyong* and reconstruction work, one can always avail of communal labor through the *duksoy* which is a one-day free labor provided by neighbors and friends, or else one may mobilize assistance from one's circle of kin or neighbors, or from the *sosyudad* which is an indigenous voluntary association devoted to

mutual aid (Sarmiento 2009). Minor repair work on roof or other parts are expected to be done by the man of the house and his brood of grown-up sons, if he has any.

From sky-gazing to map-reading, to TV watching. My parents' generation acquired their forebears' intimate knowledge of the varying tempers of the natural environment. After World War II however, they had gained access to a new way of knowing if a typhoon is imminent, and that is through technology-driven equipment. During the war, the Americans built a radar station in Bato, Catanduanes that could detect not only enemy movements at sea but also the coming typhoons. This facility remained intact by Liberation time and continues to be useful up to the present. Information from the facility was easily relayed to the Catandunganons especially when a commercial radio station was established in Virac in the 1960s. But utilization of this new resource was enhanced by something else that my parents' generation had but not their own elders, and that is knowledge of scientific geography (see Figure 2 below for the comparison of methods of forecasting typhoons among the three generations). They were after all the first beneficiaries of popular education introduced by the Americans. I remember how my father would take note of the details of the radio forecast of typhoons, especially the longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates. Then he would ask me to pull from the shelf the gargantuan and dusty Geography book, the same book he was burdened to carry to school as an elementary pupil in the 1930s. He would spread it on our dining table and with all of us siblings huddled about him, he would plot the location of the typhoon on the map. He would do this regularly so much so that the page had markings of typhoon tracts. Sometimes, he asked one of our elder siblings to do the honor of locating a typhoon on paper. My father was, anyway, a teacher by profession.

But this map-reading approach to the anticipation of typhoons was not unique to my family. It was typical to see the Philippine map with the grid for purposes of tracking typhoon routes pasted on walls or on the backs of house doors. However, those of my parents' generation continued to use the old knowledge to complement the new; they gazed up the skies and sniffed the breeze even as they benefited from the knowledge of maps and the miracle of some American-fabricated hardware lodged up the mountaintop in Bato town. My father would intersperse his scientific explanations with the vocabulary of the old way. But during an actual typhoon, my parents would revert back to home-grown wisdom in making sense of it. Apparently this intimacy is not something that books can provide, but is acquired only by accumulation of experience.

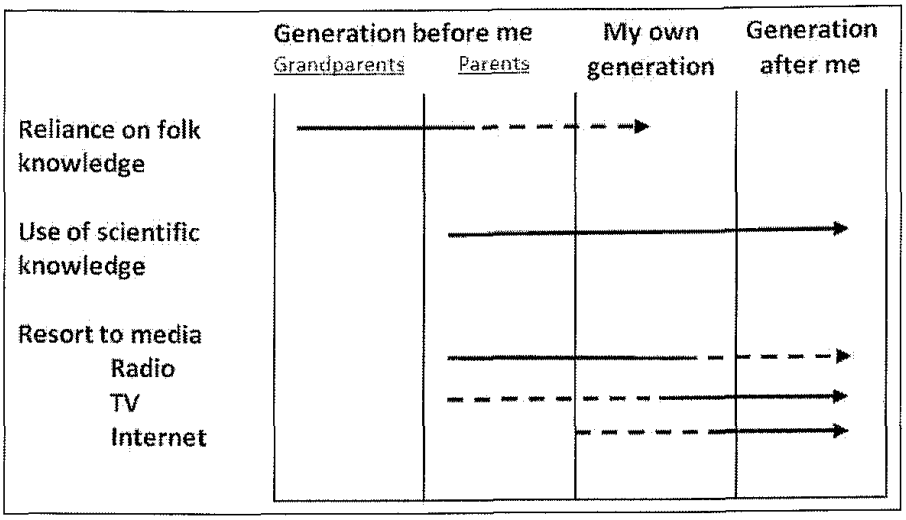

Figure 2: Sources of Knowledge of Typhoons Among Three Generations of Catandunganons. (The heavy lines represent dominant use while broken lines mean minor dependence.)

This mix of knowledge between the local and the scientific standard was what I and my generation received from our parents. When it was our own turn at dealing with typhoons, we largely made use of both orientations. In anticipating the coming of typhoons, we therefore did what our parents did, triangulating physical signs with scientific forecasts conveyed through media. However, our methods of dealing with the actual onslaught and the aftermath has come to differ depending upon our lives' circumstances. Those among us who got good-paying jobs abandoned the traditional house of wood and nipa shingles. The great aspiration of my generation was to live under a roof that is made of *sim* or galvanized iron, as indeed my father encouraged me to achieve, and thus the nipa roof fell into disrepute. This notion was even captured in a popular joke: "Use sympathy in a sentence!" Answer: *"Gayon ning harong mi, sim pati!"* (How nice is our house, it's roofed with galvanized iron!) Later, the taste got upgraded to become *sim buda semento* (galvanized iron and cement). Improvement in economic capability was key to this changing approach to dealing with destructive typhoons. And because the Catanduanes local economy cannot offer much, we ventured out to look for good jobs across the seas, to Bicol mainland or Manila. To enhance our chances, we took college degrees. And then came the grand exodus to foreign land, *mag-abroad*, for even greater possibilities. My generation was the first to really benefit from the massive overseas deployment for work.

With an even greater influx of resources, the Catandunganons increasingly resorted to a new house-building approach but their basic

concern remained to be how to address the reality of prevalent typhoons. They even started to abandon the *sim buda semento* type after realizing some of its weaknesses. Presently, the latest batch of houses looks like concessions to the current craze for the Mediterranean style seen elsewhere, but on closer inspection, it has characteristics that may not be found in any other place but Catanduanes, features that are incorporated in consideration of typhoons. First is structural robustness. Posts and beams are of more than standard dimensions. Walls can be of hollow blocks but better if these are of pure concrete. The byword is to go *buhos* (poured concrete) in all aspects, even the roof must be made of cement slab. Awnings are done in cement molded to appear like roof tiles because the real thing can be dislodged by a howler. Windows are fitted with steel grills (in flowery designs), not so much to protect from intruders but from flying objects during stormy weather. Or else, they may be provided with permanent metal girdles into which wooden planks are inserted as barriers in preparation for the regular climatic scourge. This new batch of typhoon-resistant houses indeed look like virtual fortresses that may as well be bomb-proof.

In the early nineties, television came to Catanduanes. By the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, use of the Internet had become prevalent. The effect of these new sources of information plus the changing approach to building residences marginalized practically all vestiges of traditional knowledge on typhoons for the generations that came after my own. With the television, people have ceased searching the skies for signs of things to come and instead directed their gazes to the TV screen for weather forecasts. They have lost not only sensitivity to the messages of the elements of their immediate natural environment but also the skills of map-reading as they rely upon the images mediated by some distant satellite. With the new houses, they do not have to worry about how typhoons behave as they ravage the land because they can just let it pass while being comfortably protected inside thick formidable walls. The young Catandunganons have lost the intimacy with climate in general and typhoons in particular that those before them had.

Typhoons and the Framing of Insular Identity

The changing orientation to typhoons is accompanied by evolving ways of framing insular identity among Catandunganons. The more intimate and localized knowledge of typhoons has meant a more compelling and acute sense of insularity, while the more generic knowledge supplied by a universal and objectified framework, one that is comprehended in scientific terms and conveyed through various forms of modern media, involves a

rather diffused sense of insularity. Thus, Catandunganon identity now varies along a continuum as exemplified by the four successive generations represented here.

My parents and grandparents shared the same traditional knowledge of typhoons on one hand, and a strong islander mentality on the other. However, there are some important differences between them, brought about by the different historical circumstances that have attended their lives. In the case of the latter, their island sense consisted of a solid intimacy with their immediate physical and social world but a vague notion of what lies beyond the horizon. Theirs indeed was a world made real by its reaches being so easily established: the dome of the skies above and the landscape and surrounding seas on the ground. It was an enclosed world of definite possibilities and limitations, harsh yes, but very knowable and not impossible to master. Its insular character was singular and simple, something comprehended according to its own terms and not by what is outside its boundaries. And why not? In those times, hardly anyone ventured outside of the island. Significant exchange with the outside world was minimal. Any intrusion became engulfed and naturalized by the local context so much so that there was no radical comparison between lived worlds of the in and the out as the latter did not present any clear and imminent alternative. My grandparents were born within the last quarter of the 19th century, but even then the earth-shaking events at the turn of the century hardly breached the physical and social barriers to ripple into Catanduanes.

With my parents' generation however it was quite different. Their insularity was also intense and compelling, but for another reason. Unlike their own parents who constructed their insular sense inwardly, theirs was the product of a growing awareness of the outside world. For one thing, they were the first recipients of popular education introduced by the Americans. For another, they got exposed to new media such as the movies and print that afforded them a good notion of other lifestyles, values and ways of seeing. All of this created in them an urge to try the outside world, and in fact, many of my parents' contemporaries ventured out of the island to partake of new possibilities.

But instead of dissipating the insular attitude, the increased encounter with "the other" by my parents' generation created in them an acute view of one's own. The resulting self-regard was a contradictory but mutually reinforcing mix of depreciation and aggrandizement. Confronted by "the other" the Catandunganon was reminded of one's deficits. But the Catandunganons' "other" must be differentiated into two types. In Manila, they were ridiculed as *probinsiyanos*. But the Manilan was the far-other.

More painful was derision from the near-other, the mainland Bicolano or the *ibong-non* (the one from 'the other side'). Indeed, familiarity breeds contempt. For the Manilans, the Catandunganons were just one of many *probinsiyano* types, but with the mainland Bicolano they were the main object of discrimination upon whom they threw their despise. While anecdotes about the Catandunganons' misadventures in the big city were told with amusement, tales of encounter with the *ibong-non* were sources of resentment. Nothing could provoke the Catandunganons' insular rage more than the *ibong-non*'s derogatory description of the island-province as *sarong bagol-bagol na orarhot*, a coconut shell full of *orarhot*, a kind of salted fish of low quality, food for the poor.

This mean handling from the *ibong-non*, real or imagined, became a motivation to prove one's mettle. Stories of how Catandunganons could outdo the *ibong-non* in various aspects were exchanged often as proof of the islander's better capabilities. To illustrate, those of my parents' generation who crossed the seas to Albay to take up high school education (high school became available in Catanduanes only after the war), would come home with narratives of triumph in academics, athletics, even in street brawls or in winning the fairest lass, and such would be circulated almost as folklore. This disposition to prove one's worth also took political form. Throughout the Spanish regime, the island was variously a sub-province either of Albay or Camarines Sur. While the revolutionary spirit of the late 19th century hardly moved the Catandunganons, it would seem that the Philippine campaign for independence from the Americans inspired them to pursue "independence" from mainland Bicol. So therefore, a campaign for the province-hood of Catanduanes was launched during the Commonwealth period. Catandunganon political luminaries proposed to Congress the separation of Catanduanes as a province. But it was only in the aftermath of the Liberation that it was granted. In October 24, 1945, the law creating the province was signed. It was a cause for great jubilation, coming as it did at the height of the euphoria brought by the victorious end of the war (Vargas 1991:25). This was followed by a period of flowering of consciousness of Catandunganon identity by rediscovering aspects of Catanduanes cultural heritage (Sarmiento 2008).

The tendency among my parent's generation to shore up strong self-regard in the face of a hegemonic other was, I believe, built on their forebears' original insular pride which can be said to be "native" to any island people. That is because an island's definite boundaries create in one a compelling sense of self-containment. This in turn brings an attitude of self-sufficiency. In the case of the Catandunganons, this is significantly enhanced by the harsh conditions they contend with, courtesy of climatic adversities,

especially the recurring typhoons. These climatic ordeals serve as a way to strengthen their character: the Catandunganons see themselves as a resilient people. Insularity then is basically an internal source of self-definition, but juxtaposed with a bigger context, the contrast can serve to reinforce and reframe it.

Surely, my generation imbibed our parents' way of seeing. We grew up to the ambivalent but acute attitude of attraction-repulsion towards the *ibong-non*, anticipating they would batter our Catandunganon ego, but buttressing ourselves with an assumed high ground. We loved our unique Viracnon diction, knowing that the *ibong-non* is ridiculously helpless trying to imitate it, but when we do our more serious speech such as in formal praying or in oratory, we resort to *ibong-non* tongue. Nothing could capture this contradiction better than how we rendered in our grade school classes the Catandunganon anthem titled *Isle of the Eastern Seas*— we sang of the singular beauty of our home island, of its virtues, and its being the jewel of the seas, but in mainland Bikol language.

But we did not simply duplicate our parents' lenses. In our own lifetime, we experienced Catandunganon animosity to mainland Bikol with the same full force of its virulence as our parents had, but we also witnessed its progressive weakening later in our lives. This was brought about by the new historical circumstances that came our way. If our parents were first to benefit from popular education from primary to secondary levels which afforded them an awareness of the outside world much more pronounced than their own parents, we their children were the first to fulfill the great aspiration to earn college degrees. Therefore, we gained access not only to an even more expansive view of the Big Picture of the world, but more importantly to possibilities of actual participation in the broad national and international social landscapes. We did not only seek college education outside of the province but also employment and residency. As we did so, the resentment towards mainland Bikol in our old insular attitude disappeared. We became more cosmopolitan, although we retained the regard for roots. For those of us who found new places to settle in outside the province, the connection to the hometown took proxy form: as monetary remittances to families back home, as regular homecoming for reunions and holidays, as hometown organizations through which we held our fiestas in exile, sang the Catandunganon anthem out of geographic context, and got lumps in our throats.

Meanwhile, typhoons continued to be a regular feature of the island. In my fifty years of age, I know of countless disturbances but among them were four specifically vicious ones that breached the 250 km/hour mark and hit a

bull's-eye of Catanduanes. How did they make an impact on my generation's sense of insularity and identity? They reinforced that same notion of vulnerable isolation that had been possessed by those before us, but we had it quite differently nuanced. While my ancestors largely had it by sheer weight of their lived experience, my own generation's Catandunganon identity took much boost from the outside, specifically the media. Throughout the sixties and into the nineties, before the advent of the global climate change scare, the media had come to package Catanduanes, together with Batanes and Samar, as the most typhoon-prone areas of the Philippines. Therefore, when people we would encounter from elsewhere in the country learned that we were Catandunganons, they would invariably ask about typhoons. Our old reputation as *sarong bagol-bagol na orarhot* courtesy of our near-other the mainland Bicolanos may have dissipated, but only for us to acquire a new label as people of the typhoon belt, thanks to national media. And we seemed to have taken this to heart, so much so that some arbiters of local identity, perhaps thinking of its tourism implications, have started to call Catanduanes the "Land of the Howling Winds."

What of the new generations? It is already a matter of conventional wisdom to hold that the present generations' way of seeing and doing is shaped by the forces of globalization, and that surely holds true of the new breed of Catandunganons, even in the aspect of framing their insular identity. With their extensive sources of influences, the old sense of vulnerable isolation coupled with a strong sense of self-containment among their forebears would be quite difficult to rub onto their skins, much less internalize. They know of violent weather disturbances but such had become less formidable because of sturdier dwellings courtesy of improved economic capabilities. They experience having to cross the seas to reach other places, but it has become a much less taxing ordeal due to developments in transport technology. Furthermore, digital communications technology has overcome the physical isolation of the island. Any animosity toward the "other," mainland Bicolanos or otherwise, would have long banished in their outlook because the terms of engagement with these others has leveled off. Even Catanduanes' distinction as a typhoon-prone province increasingly became meaningless within the last decade with the advent of the supposed era of global climate change. Catanduanes may indeed be prone to natural disasters, but so is the entire archipelago. If Catanduanes is the "Land of the Howling Winds," that is hardly remarkable in a world that supposedly has come to reap the wrath of nature because of global warming.

So what does insularity-in-the-time-of-globalization among the young set of Catanduanganons consist of? At this point, this generation to whom the future belongs, remains to be a work in progress. There is no way to describe

with certainty their condition. It can be said that anyone born and raised in Catanduanes will always have to build a sense of self from an insular identity. In a globalizing world however, one is not given much opportunity to stabilize such insularity because soon one's ground is caught in an interweaving net of streams of influences surging from all directions. Very likely, the world of the new generation of Catandunganons will not anymore be a solid ground of definite boundaries from within which to regard the rest of the world that flows about. Their being Catandunganon may still provide a sense of one's own, a notion of difference, but it is one among a vast multitude of differences all bristling about in continuous flux, differences in kind that need not try to impose on each one. This scheme of things is best exemplified by the World Wide Web, or the Internet, where the great network of interconnections from a great many nodes can carry on without any centralizing order, but also without having to collapse into a mush of sameness. And back to this matter of typhoons in Catanduanes: their island-province being typhoon battered does not necessarily escape the consciousness of the young set of Catandunganons. But with global warming being itself a globalizing force, Catanduanes has ceased to be a lonely, nature-tortured island removed from the rest, but had gone into intimate solidarity with a world that has now become pervaded with calamities. As if that is any consolation.

To Conclude

In this paper, I attempted to demonstrate the social and cultural constructedness and connections between place-making and identity through my own lived experience. To do such, I reflected on my being Catandunganon, a place-based identity that builds on two salient features, namely insularity and the prevalence of typhoons. While these two appear to be *a priori* givens, they are comprehended by people and affect them only in socially and culturally constructed ways. This is clearly illustrated in the historical trajectory of identity construction, so I invoked here the experiences of three generations that I have come to engage with in the course of my life: my grandparents, parents and those who came after me.

My grandparents have created for themselves an insular identity that may be described as intimate and inwardly, shaped as it was by 1) keen familiarity and mastery of the immediate physical world, including its harsh tempers, and of which they have formed a body of traditional knowledge of their environment; and 2) the lack of a strong and clear notion of the world beyond their boundaries.

From my parents onwards, the highly localized and self-contained character of this insularity was progressively eroded through greater engagement with the outside world courtesy of the forces of globalization. It also spelled the marginalization of the traditional knowledge of climate and typhoons as successive generations embraced new ways of knowing and dealing with such conditions.

While it might appear that globalization is the antithesis of insularity so that one expects the latter's disappearance as the former dominates, a closer look at Catandunganon identity construction by successive generations reveals that insularity need not dissolve in the face of the onslaught of globalizing forces. Insular sense, given particular nuance by the prevalence of typhoons, continue to inform Catandunganon identity, but in various ways. In my parents' case, they took the initial surge of globalizing intrusion, and insularity took form through the blunt contrast of two worlds, theirs and the outside. In my generation this sharpness smoothened as the two worlds interpenetrated. For those that followed us, their insularity becomes their entry ticket to a world that is a tapestry of multitudinous differences: globalization, after all, seems not to be a process of homogenization that many had feared it will be.

References

Berger, Peter. (1969). *The Sacred Canopy.* New York: Doubleday.

Casey, Edward S. (1996). 'How to get from space to place in a fairly short Stretch of time: Phenomenological prolegomena.' In Steven Feld and Keith Basso (Eds.), *Senses of place.* New Mexico: School of American Research Press.

Davies, Charlotte A. (1999). *Reflexive ethnography.* London: Routledge.

Feld, Steven and Keith H. Basso. (1996). 'Introduction.' In Steven Feld and Keith Basso (eds.), *Senses of place.* New Mexico: School of American Research Press.

Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson. (1992). Beyond "culture": space, identity, and the politics of difference. *Cultural Anthropology,* 7(1):6-23.

Jacobs-Huey, L. (2002). The natives are gazing and talking back: Reviewing the problematics of positionality, voice, and accountability among "native" anthropologists. *American Anthropologist,* 104(3):791-804.

Peirano, M. (1998). When anthropology is at home: The Different contexts of a single discipline. *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 27:105-128.

Ritchie, James E. (1977). Cognition of place: The island mind. *Ethos,* 5(2):187-194.

Sarmiento, Ramon Felipe. (2009). The sosyudad of Virac, Catanduanes: Reproducing and transforming a traditional practice of cooperation in insular Bikol. Unpublished PhD. Anthropology dissertation, University of the Philippines, Diliman.

Sarmiento, Ramon Felipe. (2008). "Pantomina Catandunganon version: Choreographing identity and the politics of dance in insular Bikol." Paper read at the 30th Annual Conference of the Ugnayang Pang-AghamTao, Inc., October 23-25, 2008, San Fernando City, Pampanga

Vargas, Bernardo. (1991). *History of Catanduanes.* Manila: Catanduanes Ecoprogress Corporation

Ramon Felipe A. Sarmiento *has a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of the Philippines, Diliman. He teaches full-time at the Department of Behavioral Sciences of De La Salle University, Manila*
E-mail: monxar@yahoo.com.