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Photo by Jessie Varquez Jr.



(R-L: the late Dr. Erlinda Burton, Dr. Edvilla Talaroc (Xavier University), Dr. Augusto B. Gatmaytan attend the early morning ritual to open the 39th UGAT Annual Conference, officiated by Baylan Nahilaran Armando Hagunaw.)

Photo by Jessie Varquez Jr.



The offerings of betel-chew and money are for the Higaunon and Bisaya spirits of the earth and sky, and to those who dwell in the immediate vicinity. These offerings are for 'opening' the ritual, in the course of which the spirits would additionally be offered the sacrificial chickens. At least one chicken each was symbolically offered by conference participants from Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao. The sacrificed chickens help to confer recognition of the participants by the spirits, protecting them from any adverse reaction to the presence of strangers on the part of these spirits, and more, placing the participants under the spirits' protection.

Photo by Fred Precillas



[The second half to the ritual was conducted after the chickens had been cooked. Participants shared the ritual meal with the spirits that included the cooked sacrificial chickens for lunch.]

EDITOR'S NOTES

Reflections on the way to press:

THE UNBEARABLE RELEVANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS. Weeks before the 39th UGAT conference in November 2017 (in which most of the articles featured in this issue of *Aghamtao* were originally presented), Martial Law was declared – from far away Russia! – by the Philippine president over all of Mindanao, Marawi was being besieged and bombed, and UGAT conference planners (I was then UGAT President) were seriously considering if we should not move the venue from Cagayan de Oro City to Cebu or Palawan. Today, two years later, Mindanao is still under Martial law. An editor should be gratified by the currency of a journal issue's theme but never so unfortunately so: the Drug War continues (with the death toll of thousands anticipated to notch up further in the wake of a certain 'deadly police chief' reassignment), islands in the 'West Philippine Sea' have been unambiguously taken over and transformed into military installations by China, and indigenous people's struggles for land and life and self-determination are vital as ever. The articles in this issue touch on all of the above topics. In 2018 UGAT issued a position statement on the terror-tagging of IP leaders by the Philippine government which is also included in this issue.

INTENSE EXCHANGES. A distinct aspect of the 2017 UGAT conference was the significant presence of invited representatives of indigenous communities, who made up fully a fourth of the conference participants. All of them actively and articulately participated in sessions in the conference program, they did not come just to watch and listen but had key roles as speakers, panelists, moderators, facilitators, or reactors and discussants. For making their presence at the conference possible, UGAT deeply thanks the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). And we hope that community participation will continue to invigorate future conference sessions, as well as have a continuing impact by publication in *Aghamtao*. The IP [indigenous people] participants' voices and face to face engagement with the anthropology practitioners brought a certain intensity to the proceedings of the conference. This can be felt somewhat in the transcript of the *Pagtulang* which is among the articles in this issue.

SOLIDARITY AND UNION. The 'Pagtulang Session' was conceptualized as another version of the 'Dap-ay Forum' that had been initiated in the previous year's conference at the Ateneo de Manila University (by conveners

Fernando Zialcita and Jose Jowel Canuday) wherein elder and younger generations of practitioners could share and discuss their engagement with the public sphere or their modes of 'applied' practice of anthropology. Appropriating the atmosphere of a gathering of minds around the community fire, this physical set up diverges from the implicit social hierarchy in the usual lecture type sessions. Even though it took place at the very end of an exhausting conference day, the 'Pagtulang' session recharged the audience. I was particularly encouraged as to its success by a remark I received afterwards from a Panglima from Palawan (one of the IP participants), who said that it was like being in their own 'big house'. This interaction or 'dialogue' between the 'IP' and the 'tribe of anthropologists' can only continue, and judging too by the very competent synthesis of the session by a young participant of Ayta heritage and freshly earned academic credentials, as well as by other developments over the past year that UGAT boardmembers have engaged in (such as 'capacity-building' or facilitating learning ethnographic methods and anthropological perspectives) it seems that the nature of the 'divide' and potential 'oneness' between practitioner of the discipline and the research subject is rapidly evolving.

CHICKENS. Carefully prepared offerings and the sacrifice of life took place on the grounds of Capitol University to launch the conference according to Higaonon ritual protocol. How to properly perform the formal procedure to secure the blessing of the local environmental spirit folk for our event involved considerable negotiation in advance—informed by ethnographic fieldwork and also motivated by the limits of the conference budget(!). (See photos of the rite on the page before these notes.) The process that was thus commenced reaches a kind of finish point with the publication and launch of this particular themed journal, as this issue brings a sense of completion for all the energies involved in an academic conference endeavor (note: *Aghamtao* Vol.27 No.2 is forthcoming featuring articles on Moro rights and gender rights). I speak for myself, but hopefully also for all the valiant others involved in organizing UGAT's annual conference, which, as well as *Aghamtao* journal, is mostly a product of volunteer labor. With the approval of our ancestor anthropologists—such as Dr. Erlinda M. Burton, an indomitable spirit who contributed so much to organizing the conference, we presume she smiles upon this journal offering—we affirm being alive and here, for Others, as human beings, warm bodies taking part in 'the struggle for rights'.

- *MARIA F. MANGAHAS, OCT. 22, 2019*