

EDITORS' NOTES

Trajectories of the 'anthropological' in the Philippines

Gleanings from the UGAT conference

It was the sense of “anthropological” presence in various research endeavors that triggered the convening of the UGAT conference in 2014. Against an exclusivist view of anthropology, the conference was a way of acknowledging anthropology’s multiple locations in the field of social and cultural inquiry. The conference was able to convene scholars from different fields, varying from media, to education, to social work and community development, to business and even religious studies. In terms of the record number of paper presenters, the conference [held at Saint Louis University, Baguio City] was quite successful in drawing in diverse researchers and practitioners who embrace the “anthropological” in their work.

The keynote speakers together alerted us to the location of the “anthropological” at the intersection of the humanistic and scientific domains of the human sciences. Filipino-Chinese culture advocate Teresita Ang-See employed history as an intrinsic property of the “anthropological” in analyzing the Chinese presence in the Philippines. Patrick Flores demonstrated the conversation between the curatorial and the anthropological through certain exhibition projects. Howie Severino took a visual turn in documenting for public consumption a community tradition called “*lukayo*” that unsettled the moral tenets of Christianity due to its sexual innuendo. Hiromu Shimizu foregrounded the practice of engaged anthropology through his active involvement in heritage conservation in Ifugao. As a physician, Isidro Sia shared his fascination with indigenous medicine as part of Filipino cultural heritage. All the keynote speakers drew on their own experiences, rendering their presentations a great deal of reflexivity.

And so from the conference we discern tendencies to associate the “anthropological” with—

- *Conducting fieldwork (“being there”)*
- *Documenting the ‘native’s point of view’ (read: ‘indigenous knowledge and practice)*
- *Calling attention to issues of power and domination.*
- *Interpreting the “resilience” of “communities” in the midst of “dehumanizing ecological and social forces” as human adaptability*

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- *Revitalizing/Recapturing local traditions/heritage*
- *Attending to identity politics in the context of “globalization.”*

This issue of AghamTao

The scholarly articles assembled in this issue of AghamTao are particularly substantial, they pertain to distinct landscapes of meaning and experience in the Philippines, and to issues relating to these local knowledges, their knowledge-bearers, their interpretation, the survival of their communities, as well as their value for anthropological practice and knowledge production.

Maria Lourdes Ingel and Eufrazio Abaya have documented the *salsalita*, or sung stories, of the late ‘Ilocano living treasure’ Tata Lucio Dalgo, a uniquely knowledgeable and creative individual raised in the chanting tradition of this region, to highlight cultural scenarios ranging from social reciprocity to justice, in these mythic worlds and magical tales about heroic and distinguished men and women, that in effect instruct the listener about life and how one should live. Jessie Varquez, Jr. approaches place-names using maps and narratives and learns about how to find one’s way through ‘sago forest’ in Bunawan, Agusan del Sur. This is a knowledge of environment anchored in the temporality of the landscape— which will change accordingly as other humans, non-humans, and water, move through it. Making one’s home in another kind of watery forest—mangrove areas in Leyte—similarly entails constant adaptive response to a changeable landscape. Dove Villardo’s article moreover focuses on the divergence in perspectives between residents and the state in contestations over the mangrove area. Still in Leyte, Pamela Cajilig, Oliver Salva and Pia Maranan applied “design-thinking” to post-Yolanda reconstruction. Initially seeking sensitivity to gendered perspectives in their article, they went on to reflect on the actual process of design-thinking in light of various conflicting subjectivities, toward designing a house or shelter that ‘fits’. Water scarcity by contrast is the issue faced by small island communities, such as in the small island of Gilutungan off Cebu, where coping strategies and changing perceptions are also contextualized in larger political and economic transformations by Zona Amper. A movement analysis of the *putong* or *tubong* in Marinduque as a ‘ritual-dance’ is offered by Brian Viray, who also speaks as on possessing embodied knowledge of the performance. He critiques previous dance scholarship as well as contemporary ‘folkdance’ appropriations of *putong/tubong*. A similar ‘insider’ perspective is also offered by Kamaruddin Bin Alawi Mohammad in his reflections on the *salaah* or ritual prayer and the contemplative life of Muslim mystics.

Readers are also invited to reflect on the critical essay on “kalibugan” (‘confusion’ or cultural hybridity) by Ponciano Bennagen, for whom ‘all knowledge is local’, and has its distinct place of creation (*pook-likhaan*), although knowledge may also escape to other sites and be appropriated by others. This essay offers a broad overview of the rise of anthropology in the Philippines, and especially the past discussion on indigenization of science, which is an important reminder for what serious *Aghamtao* entails.

The issue also features commentary by Enrique Oracion on the politics of language that mediated the officialization of the one-Negros region; and reviews of two new books.

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