

The Making of the University of the Philippines Anthropology Field School 2022

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Introduction

The concept of *making*—one where a preconceived form is imposed on the raw material substance—highlights the agency of the maker to work with the possibilities and material conditions in our world. In the words of Tim Ingold, it involves “bringing them together or splitting them apart, synthesizing and distilling, in anticipation of what might emerge.”¹ In the process of *making*, what emerges then, is a product generated from the continuous joining (or “correspondence”) of existing materials, conditions, and possibilities. The product is never final because it is continually (re)made through the intervention of human actors exercising agency in effecting and responding to changing trajectories. This view of human action is in contrast to a static idea of the predisposition of an individual to act to based on patterns of learned behavior.

Guided by the framework elucidated by Ingold, this paper traces and narrates the experience of making the UP Anthropology Field School (UP AFS) 2022, espousing an idea of making that is not linear and predetermined, but dynamic and always in *correspondence* with the world.² In the following, we recall the simultaneous processes of correspondences evident in the bureaucratic processes, material conditions, and embodied practices involved in *making* this anthropological field research possible amid an ongoing global health crisis.

We describe the bureaucratic hurdles encountered in preparation for the commencement of the UP AFS 2022 in an attempt to demonstrate that the way back to face-to-face field school was (re)made constantly as a result of correspondence with the volatile national, local, and institutional policies during the pandemic. In succeeding sections we emphasize a kind of (re)making that occurred through the participants' correspondence with health and material conditions in the field as they pursued various research topics under the theme "Flows of Things and Bodies: The Production of Flowers in La Trinidad, Benguet".

The Field School 2022 was comprised of 31 undergraduate students from the Department of Anthropology of the University of the Philippines Diliman, together with their professors Hector T. Guazon (Field School Director), Noreen H. Sapalo (Assistant Field School Director), and Marie Grace Pamela G. Faylona (Archaeology Field School Instructor). It was held in three distinct sites – Brgy. Bahong, Sitio Lamut, and Baguio City – from the 24th of June to the 9th of July 2022. The UP AFS 2022 also had an online component, where students were also given the option to incorporate the Dangwa flower market in Sampaloc, Manila in their research as a supplementary field site. The research frameworks employed revolved around actor-networks, as well as embodied cultural ecologies, putting into practice anthropological methodologies through ethnographic research papers.^{3,4}

We (authors of this article) were based in Baguio

City and were tasked to pursue agendas unique from the rest of the UP AFS participants. This circumstance created an interesting position, allowing us to simultaneously become insiders and outsiders of the field school. We were insiders as members of this year's batch of UP AFS students, enrolled and included in the official list of participants, but also outsiders in a sense that our role and responsibilities were glaringly distinct, removed (spatially and conceptually) from the rest who underwent a more traditional route of field school research in the community context.

Our unique viewpoint consequently allowed us insight into certain specific processes that must be attended to when conducting a field school, as well as the lived experiences of those who were part of the UP AFS 2022. We utilized data from our own personal participant-observation, in correspondence with interviews and focus group discussions with all people concerned throughout the in-person and online component of the field school.

(Re)Making the way back to the field

The UP AFS 2022 began with a vision—that conducting an on-site field school amid an ongoing health crisis was possible. Due to strict health protocols, the UP AFS 2020 and UP AFS 2021 were done solely in the virtual sphere, employing the mode of digital ethnographies instead of visiting communities face-to-face. But with the national health situation improving in the early months of 2022, the UP Department of Anthropology saw this as an opportunity to return to the in-person setup of doing field school.

Historically, the UP Department of Anthropology has been implementing the field school since its earlier days in the 1950s and has even claimed to be one of, if not the first, programs to incorporate a "field course" in its academic curriculum.⁵

Up until 2007, the field school spanned an entire semester, where a full load of courses were offered (17 units).⁶ However, due to financial and scheduling concerns, it was shortened to two courses (or total units of 6)—Anthro 195 (Field Methods in Archaeology) and

Anthro 196 (Field Methods in Social Anthropology)—incorporating one month of fieldwork during the Midyear Term in the succeeding academic years.

The realization of this vision of returning to the field was no easy feat primarily because of the volatile conditions posed by the pandemic. Dealing with ever-changing national, local, and institutional policies during this period of heightened uncertainty and anxiety was one of the biggest hurdles. How does one practice an engaged approach to anthropological field research at a time when isolation and distance are imposed there was a high risk of spreading the infection in communities we intend to live among and learn from?

The plans to conduct a face-to-face component for the UP AFS 2022 started when several colleges in the university requested to conduct limited on-campus classes. The Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (OVCAA) eventually released guidelines for the gradual reopening of on-campus and off-campus activities pursuant to the memorandum released jointly by the Commission for Higher Education and the Department of Health in 2021. Initially, the field site was envisioned to be within the premises of UP Diliman. Constraints imposed by health restrictions on accommodations within campus transformed the discussions about the field site until it was decided that the UP AFS 2022 will be conducted in La Trinidad, Benguet led by our field director, Dr. Hector Guazon. After two years of conducting the UP AFS online, the dream of going back to a physical field site was slowly starting to be realized.

Despite these motions to actualize the face-to-face component of the field school, previous modes of doing online research learned from the UP AFS 2020 and UP AFS 2021 remained an option for those whose circumstances prevented them from joining the on-site activity in Benguet. Hybrid modes of conducting research utilized online and on-site participation, although done differently for several students who eventually opted for Dangwa flower market in Manila as research site.

The constantly shifting circumstances created by the changing health protocols affected the stages, paces, and ways of corresponding with the administrative processes involved in making the field school possible among the flowering communities in La Trinidad. The uncertain conditions during the ongoing health crisis affected the stages of complying with the administrative requirements even threatening the viability of the Field School. Revisions in the administrative requirements imposed by institutional policies were among the things that the participants needed to correspond with so that the research project could commence. Had the health situation worsened, all the painstaking preparations would have been for naught.



UPD AFS 2022 Lamut Group

Despite the uncertainty, the Department of Anthropology, as a unit, trudged through the administrative processes with the conviction to fully realize the dream of physically going back to the field.

Conducting healthy research

Conducting a face-to-face field school in the middle of a pandemic meant additional and altered processes, for directors and students alike. Preparations were already underway prior to arrival since field sites were required retrofitting in accordance with social distancing protocols. Along with this, medical equipment such as face masks, vitamins, and COVID antigen test kits were sourced as ‘new normal’ field essentials. However, even as this set the precautionary groundwork for the health and safety of everyone involved, this would not spare the field school participants from expecting changes and adjustments in its implementation.

The first, and arguably the most memorable, of such circumstances involved one of the participants having to return to Manila. On June 27, J, one of the field students and a temporary resident of the Bahong group, presented with a fever while everyone was in Sitio Lamut for their first day of archaeology classes. A combined lack of orientation about isolation protocols, insufficient guidance from the faculty-in-charge, and a creeping sense of panic and distress pushed the students into overdrive. After an entire day of coordinating with the field school directors, hurriedly adjusting room placements and calming heightened emotions, the situation was resolved by isolating J from the group.

This incident would prompt stricter protocols, especially in Sitio Lamut’s accommodations. Students led the initiative (with helpful input from the field school directors) as they developed a detailed list of rules including an encouraged sleep schedule, regular temperature checks, and a system for segregating medical waste. J having to stay in the student accommodations the night before going home also led students to devise and enforce relatively strict social distancing, mask-wearing, and disinfection protocols for when field schoolers from other sites visited – a frequent occurrence due to communal archaeology classes and batch-wide social gatherings. Implementing these relatively stringent guidelines would become a point of comparison among students between the different sites since they were not uniformly observed across accommodations.

Meanwhile, the Bahong group constantly cited their living conditions as a constraint for them to strictly practice their own protocols. With relatively limited space, it was nearly impossible—“*walang* option”—for them to observe proper social distancing from one another. Instead, individual, more personalized measures were executed to safeguard health. One practice residents of Bahong reported was constant application of



alcohol to their bodies, both to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as well as to address concerns about the cleanliness of the surfaces in their lodging.

On the other hand, reiterating the need to be aware of our personal health status and its implications on our surroundings, the Baguio contingent took care of each other through constant reminders. Being situated in an urban context meant riding taxis and public transportation regularly, as well as working in enclosed public spaces such as libraries, offices, and coffee shops. When one of the authors presented with COVID-19-adjacent symptoms like a clogged nose and a sore throat, we immediately implemented isolation protocols in our lodging. While these symptoms could have been part of acclimatizing to the cold and rainy weather of Benguet at the time, these are also recognized symptoms of COVID-19. Suggestions to take one's daily dose of vitamins or the occasional cold medicine would be consistently announced as the group got ready for the day. Casual, yet insistent reprimands to properly wear masks could also be expected when someone was heard coughing or sneezing nearby.

Students in this batch of the UP AFS were also given the option to conduct their research in the safety of their own homes. At this point in time, the severity and number of COVID-19 cases in the country were only just beginning to subside, hence there was hesitation from some students and parents to consider attending a prolonged, face-to-face project, especially one far from Metro Manila, where the students resided.

These experiences, procedures, and practices—to our knowledge, as well as to our administrator's—were the first of its kind. No other UP AFS batch had ever gone through this excursion under a global pandemic situation, which made it all the more difficult to adjust and (re)make our expected field undertakings.

A simple cold in the pre-pandemic era would not have been given significant attention, nor would a stomachache arouse such emotional and technical agitation. Due to the unique conditions they had to contend with, UP AFS 2022 could not draw wisdom and guidance from previous batches, nor from other academic institutions. We were compelled to rely on our own understanding and knowledge of health and our bodies in the employment of certain strategies. Equipped with an acute awareness of the local COVID alert levels, as well as our minimal field training, prescribed protocols and standardized measures were primarily negotiated according to perceived notions of individual familiarity and bodily security. This



UPD AFS 2022 Bahong Group



extended to situations not only concerning ourselves, the field school students and directors, but also to the communities we partnered with. A constant reminder that loomed above our mask-wearing, note-taking heads was that as important as it was to preserve our own well-being especially amidst the virus, it was equally as crucial to keep in mind the welfare of our interlocutors and recognize the impact we made on communities when conducting anthropological research. This included infecting potentially unvaccinated interlocutors, or being non-compliant with municipal COVID protocols.

While we are unsure if these healthy field practices will continue in the future, especially when alert levels go down and social life returns to “normal”, the unique field experience of UP AFS 2022 may serve as a useful reference for succeeding batches on how to implement, manage, and adjust situational proceedings as students learning field research.

The materiality of research

As previous sections have shown, the UP AFS continued to be (re)made long after research proposals, study protocols, and personal expectations had been set. This (re)making extended onto our material context when disparate living conditions were encountered among the accommodations in Bahong, Baguio, and Sitio Lamut. Because the authors were not able to conduct participant observation among the students who conducted research in Dangwa, the scope of this section will be limited to the Benguet field site. Each of the three lodgings in Benguet had varying access to basic resources such as working spaces, clean water, and site accessibility. These conditions led to differences in the conduct of our activities and our research.

The accommodation in Bahong, for example, was generally described as “challenging” when limited access to space, clean water, and a clean bathroom made performing academic activities difficult. In the words of one of the students, “*Mahirap magwork ‘pag ‘di [ka] comfortable*. Despite this, the students found it fortunate that their lodging was nestled right in the midst of the community. Proximity to the community allowed easier integration with their research partners.

This stood in stark contrast with the lodging in Sitio Lamut. With more than ample space to accommodate our entire batch, students found the space comfortable enough for academic work. But the same comfort figured differently in their research when the pristine condition of the lodging’s amenities fostered a nagging feeling among the students that they were on holiday instead of engaging with the community. This fear of detachment was compounded by the

physical distance of the accommodation which was about an hour's trek – and sometimes a dangerous one – to their research partners. As one student lamented, “*Totoong factor 'yung physical toll*” when physical exhaustion sometimes drove them to perform inefficiently during site visits.

When the environment plays a significant role in (in) capacitating researchers, we (re)made our field school experience amid the novel yet disparate living conditions conditions in which we found ourselves.⁷ In our case, this came in the form of incorporating strategies into our daily field routine that respond to our material conditions. For instance, students had to wake up earlier to allot time for the bathroom queue, stay longer in the more spacious lodging for more conducive working facilities, or postpone their data gathering to another day because of physical exhaustion from traveling. It is these seemingly minute actions that comprised one's day-to-day (re)made our experience in the field.

But such conditions and strategies are not limited to the material attributes of our environment. Unpredictability also figured into our academic pursuits, prompting us to (re)make research proposals, topics, methodologies, and the academic aspect of our field school experience.

Corresponding with the circumstances

In the face of a pressing two-week timeframe, relenting to the stress brought about by external setbacks was impractical. There was a greater need for the participants of UP AFS 2022 to persist in pursuit of its core objective to apply anthropological knowledge outside the classroom through fieldwork.

Though we could not control the global health crisis nor the material conditions of the field, the realization of our roles as anthropologists-in-training was fueled by our correspondence to these very hindrances. In the process, we were challenged to (re)make existing circumstances to learn what was best for our practice.

Though our academic requirements were loosely structured according to previous UP AFS batches, we operated under the assumption that our plans were likely to change once we stepped into the field. This prospect was made more complicated by the global pandemic—not only did we have an acute awareness of our own health conditions and how we moved among a large number of people in the field, but we also had to consider how much we could realistically research about given all the existing limitations. Research proposals and plans of action were adjusted accordingly as the field school



UPD AFS 2022 Baguio Group



Lecture by Michael Tan



unfolded.

The students in Bahong and Sitio Lamut reported that the limited timeframe heavily impacted their findings. They often cited that there were instances where little to no rapport between the researchers and their research partners were established before conducting interviews. As one student recalled, “[*Njung kumukuha ka na ng informants, ang focus mo ay makatapos na lang*]” (When looking for informants, your only focus then is to just finish (the interview)). Another student lamented that the process of data gathering felt “extractive,” they felt like they had to steer their research partners towards the direction of a response fit for their research. There was little space for probing further into their research partners’ insights, resulting in “thin” data. Nevertheless, students had to maximize what they had gathered for their “rapid ethnography.” Gaps in their research were remedied by conducting online follow-ups with their research partners.

Meanwhile, two other field sites emerged: Baguio City and Dangwa in Manila. Despite not being included in original plans, their inclusion was essential in reinforcing our understanding of the field. The idea of having a separate team in Baguio was introduced to the batch several days before we arrived in the field; yet the exact role we had to fulfill was only revealed during the conduct of the field school itself. For us, doing research with the UP AFS meant allowing situations to unfurl first before deciding on the appropriate steps to take. No plans were set in stone. While we attended classes with the entire batch, we were often spontaneously asked to fulfill additional responsibilities in the city (e.g. courtesy calls with municipality leaders). Otherwise, we spent our time working on our own research projects alongside finding literature about the different field sites in public libraries. Data analysis for all of our research was done once we left Benguet, which posed a challenge to our productivity as a group since we had to shift to an online work setting.

Dangwa, on the other hand, was presented as an extension of the flower farming communities in La Trinidad, due to its role as a significant trade center for the province. Students who chose the online mode of the UP AFS had the option to adopt Dangwa into their digital ethnographies. However, their face-to-face visits to the site could not be carried out until the onsite UP AFS group departed from Benguet. As a result, they had to work under a limited timeframe for data analysis.

The field school was structured based on the idea that it would be the first in-person practicum for the student anthropologists since



the start of the pandemic. Preparations and adjustments were made before we went to Benguet in order to protect both the communities and the researchers from the threats presented by the global health crisis. Yet, the uncertainties of what would happen in the field left room for us to expect a lot of adjustments and sudden changes. Somehow, the process of (re) making the field was both intentional and inadvertent, up to the extent of modifying individual research plans of the students and the UP AFS 2022 itself.

The field work experience of UP AFS 2022 was both a reaction and a result of the current circumstances that we experienced—the pandemic and the material conditions of the sites. Our agency was shaped by the circumstances of not having the control over the novel circumstances we encountered, that is the COVID-19 pandemic. Such unpredictability will and always be part of the experience in the field. The only difference is the extent to which the circumstances will require the next batches to adapt to the conditions of the field.

Conclusion

The commencement of the UP AFS 2022 stands as a testament to the possibility of conducting in-person anthropological field research amidst a global pandemic. As the world “outside” opened itself up to field activities



UPD AFS 2022 Representatives in a courtesy call with the La Trinidad Mayor, Romeo K. Salda (center)

once more after years restricted to internet-mediated activity, novel ways of doing field work and anthropological field training are beginning to be realized, ushering in a “new normal” approach to doing field research.

As continually shifting bureaucratic, health, material, and academic conditions and requisites unfolded, those involved in the UP AFS 2022 were compelled to reconfigure their strategies which affected their experience in the field. At a time when circumstances surrounding such academic pursuits are uncertain and ever-changing, Ingold offers us a perspective to look at the process of “making” the field school.⁸

In the end, our proceedings point to the process of (re)making as an inevitable component of research. The actual conduct of academic research is not isolated from the world; rather, it is always implicated in the social, economic, political, and other broader, pertinent processes in which it is enmeshed. We hope that this experience becomes a resource for the conduct of anthropology field school and field research in the future.

Acknowledgments

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Hector Guazon, our field director, who allotted his time and resources over the course of conceptualizing and writing this paper to guide us in framing and analyzing the trajectory of our converging and diverging experiences into a coherent narrative. Our correspondence with him through countless Zoom meetings, emails, and even formal and casual conversations-turned-consultations is what made this research paper finally come to fruition. It is with utmost thanks to him, to Asst. Prof. Neen Sapalo, our fellow batchmates, the communities of Sitio Lamut and Brgy. Bahong in La Trinidad, and all other contributors to our anthropological field project that we dedicate the completion of this account.

Endnotes

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