

# Introduction

## The Flow of Things and Bodies: The Production of Flowers in La Trinidad, Benguet

University of the Philippines Diliman  
Anthropology Field School 2022



**Hector Guazon**

Field School Director

Issue Editor

Set against the backdrop of a global pandemic that has changed the flow and conditions of materials, the Anthropology Field School (AFS) examined the flower farming communities in La Trinidad, Benguet. The AFS is an integral part of the Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology program of the University of the Philippines Diliman that deems it necessary to hold immersion experience and research practice in communities. From among the sitios of La Trinidad, the Field School concentrated on Lamut and Central Bahong (see maps, pp. 6-7). For students who opted not to join or whose participation in the onsite AFS in La Trinidad was cut-short for medical reasons, the Dangwa Flower Market in Sampaloc, Manila became the third site toward the middle of the mid-year term.

*In these two sites, with the later addition of Dangwa, 31 undergraduate students had a canapé of experiences toward developing sound knowledge and understanding of “connection of things” in socio-cultural landscapes.*

They took part in local activities with consideration to the safety and well-being of students, faculty, and the community.

La Trinidad, Benguet has undergone material shifts in recent years. From rice farming to vegetable farming, the town bloomed into a community engaging in cut flower farming. This transition has been influenced by various forces that necessitated grappling with new conditions surrounding the production of flowers. As the pandemic presented another historical shift, how did the people in Benguet negotiate their circumstances?

The actual field experience lasted two weeks, divided into two components/modules: social anthropology and archaeological methods. For the social anthropology methods class of the Field School, the students were exposed to making, networks, and embodied ecologies involved in the production of flowers, including the event-ing process this involves in the life of its actors.

Appropriating Tim Ingold<sup>1</sup> and Bruno Latour<sup>2</sup>, making unveils the assemblage and (dis)entanglements of agents, materials, and geographies that bring form into being. Rather than being generally perceived as following the agents’ command, the agents follow the trajectories of these materials and geographies, like in bringing knowledge into being, redirecting pathways, and transforming lives. Given this knowledge, the field site extends to Baguio City and Manila. Five among the 31 students helped seek the connections and dug archival materials in Baguio City. Three students who did not join or whose participation in the onsite field school was cut-short, focused their observation on the (im)mobility of



A greenhouse full of radus in Sitio Lamut



Writing workshop in Masukal Bistro, Masukal St., Quezon City



flowers and agents in the Dangwa Flower Market.

For the Archaeological Methods component, students learned reconnaissance techniques in archaeology and cultural mapping while exploring traces on the ground of human-environment interaction. The focus is on the long-term human use of the area and historic developments. They have also acquired a practical skillset and a deeper understanding of the significance of cultural landscapes in contemporary society. The papers in this issue of the *Anthropozine*, however, all deal with Social Anthropology.

The interest in flower production developed from my casual visits until they became the sites of several field trips for my former students – both undergraduate and graduate. I initially made occasional visits as a guest of my former teaching assistant, who lives in Bahong. These tours took place during my time as the rector of the CICM-community at Saint Louis University (SLU) in Baguio City. On these occasions, I realized how interesting the sitios are for anthropological research, especially connected to the interplay between the flow of material things and social life. This prompted me to look for research grants. Prior to the AFS, a preliminary research under similar theme was conducted. It was funded by the SLU, under the presidency of Jesse Hechanova. This hastened the AFS entrée to the community. Grants were also given to students as part of the research collaboration of the AFS 2022 with and in exchange for the data aligned to the Embodied Ecologies Project of Wageningen University and Research, led by Anita Hardon and Michael Tan.

Various literatures has elucidated how the material resources of Benguet Province, to which La Trinidad belongs, influence the socio-economic life of its dwellers. They also point to the suitability of the site for archaeological and social anthropology studies.

As described by Olivia Habana, geologically, Benguet may be described as being of predominantly andesitic rock characterized by *true fissure veins, with subordinate contact deposits between andesite and diorite*<sup>3</sup>; conditions which indicate the presence of gold in lode or placer deposits. As she continues, Benguet's Baguio Gold District has one of the highest levels of concentration of mineral reserves in the Philippines. This is supported by the fact that gold was freely mined in tunnels or panned along the rivers of the province. As recent ethnohistorical research done with the Ibalois in Benguet may suggest, this may explain upland migration and lowland-highland trade and relationships.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, apart from agricultural trade, this intermingling may be connected to the presence of salt necessary for what appears to be the widespread practice of mummification when it existed in Benguet.<sup>5</sup>

As aforesaid, the past two decades witnessed La Trinidad's material



shift from rice and vegetable farming into a community engaging in cut flower farming. Despite these material resources in La Trinidad, however, the way people engage in knowledge and health practices is still negotiated and entangled in socio-cultural conditions and relations. Two researches on La Trinidad, one on Central Bahong, and another on Lamut expound on the experiences of the community members of La Trinidad regarding health and education amidst socio-cultural changes both tied to the *mambunong*, an important role in the indigenous rituals of Northern Luzon. These preliminary researches were undertaken—partly with the support of the Padre Pio Parish in Barangay Beckel of La Trinidad and the grant from SLU.

Maria Mercedes Arzadon<sup>6</sup> focuses on two different knowledge systems in Lamut, a municipality in La Trinidad, Benguet. Although various knowledge systems exist in the community such as the public school system, *mambunong* knowledge system, administrative and local politics, and technical-economic system, Arzadon chose the first two as a scholar of the anthropology of education. Arzadon's research depicts that the knowledge systems are basically parallel—both systems are hierarchical, where students reach higher ranks through the years; both subscribe to 'higher-ups', the DepEd administration for the public school system, and the *Kabunian* and spirits for the *mambunong*; and both equip their students with knowledge about the world. However, the two systems differ in other ways as well. The *mambunong* system teaches its students about the supernatural world, and its members' recognition relies solely on their community. The *mambunong* system also serves as an alternative knowledge system for those who cannot afford public or "formal" schooling.

Honey Libertine Achanzar-Labor<sup>7</sup> discusses the health practices of the people of Bahong, especially how the *mambunong* coexists along with the professional health sector. In her paper, Achanzar-Labor expounds on the embodied ecology practices of the people in Bahong; how shifts in agriculture and economic practices led to various diseases in the community such as pneumonia, diabetes, and hypertension. The study's results show that there is a holistic approach to the well-being of the citizens of Bahong which tackles various health dimensions. Achanzar-Labor defines the "pursuit of health" in Bahong as: life engaging, as seen in the coexistence of both folk and professional health sectors; life struggling; and life aspiring, as the citizens hope to attain a healthier way of living. With the challenges posed by the pandemic, it is important to investigate the ways people respond, reinterpret, and embody emerging practices in the cut flower industry.

The AFS 2022 considers the ethics of ensuring the welfare of the community, the students, and faculty by not implicating them to any



Feedback session with the community of Lamut



form of harm. For instance, I, the Field Director, and Neen Sapalo, my co-faculty and Assistant Field School Director, prepared health protocols that all field school participants need to adhere to. This has mitigated the possible infection of COVID-19 among the students, faculty, and the community. Other risks pertain to exposing strategies that may imperil the participants' business. We also obtained free prior and informed consent before gathering data, exclusively accessible only to the researchers and the faculty. Further, we sought the permission from the Municipality of La Trinidad, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples. The research was also reviewed by the UP Diliman Ethics Review Board. We made sure that we complied with the guidelines set by these institutions in conducting our research.

A year after the onsite AFS, the findings of the students was disseminated through a feedback forum with the community. Participants' non-disclosure of identity was assured by using pseudonyms in transcripts, reports, and data was stored in an encrypted USB or hard drive, encoded with a password. Certain data, such as selected transcripts/recordings and archaeological data, are preserved as part of the Field School and, another copy, for a local archive or library.

The thirteen papers that follow are the results of the findings presented in various academic fora and fine-tuned after the feedback session and single-blind peer reviews by people from diverse disciplines, ranks, places, and positionality. These papers unveil the layered cartography on the accumulation of body techne in the making of flowers and connections. Several of these papers deal with local knowledge referred to as techniques and practices that have come across the practices of the families and communities of the flower farmers, sellers, suppliers, and garage drivers. They provide novel insights on how these agents engage and expand their local knowledge as they face the challenges and opportunities in contemporary life, be they sociopolitical and environmental. They employ strategies that reduce or dampen loss and physical harm and highlight social gains and public exposure. In this multimodal ethnography, students attempt to illuminate the correspondences, networks, and embodiment tied to the practice of flower farming in La Trinidad, unmasking the lifeworld of the community flowing to and back from Baguio City and Manila amid crisis and precarity.

#### Endnotes

1. Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013).
2. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. (London: Oxford University Press, 2005).
3. Olivia M. Habana, "Gold Mining in Benguet 1900-1941", *Philippine Studies* 49, No. 1 (2001):3-41.
4. Michael Armand Canilao, "Fording upstream in search for balitok (gold): Ibaloi diaspora into Benguet (part 1). *Hukay* 14, (2009): 91-110.
5. Roland Rabang, "Origins of Benguet Mummification", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, (February 19, 2013), <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/361561/origins-of-benguet-mummification>
6. Maria Mercedes Arzadon, "The Mambunong and the School Knowledge Systems: Parallel and Interconnected", *The Cordillera Review*, (2016): 67-95.
7. Honey Libertine Achanzar-Labor, "The Ibalois of Benguet as Active Agents in Health Negotiations", *Philippine Journal of Health Research and Development* 22, No. 1 (2018): 37- 43.

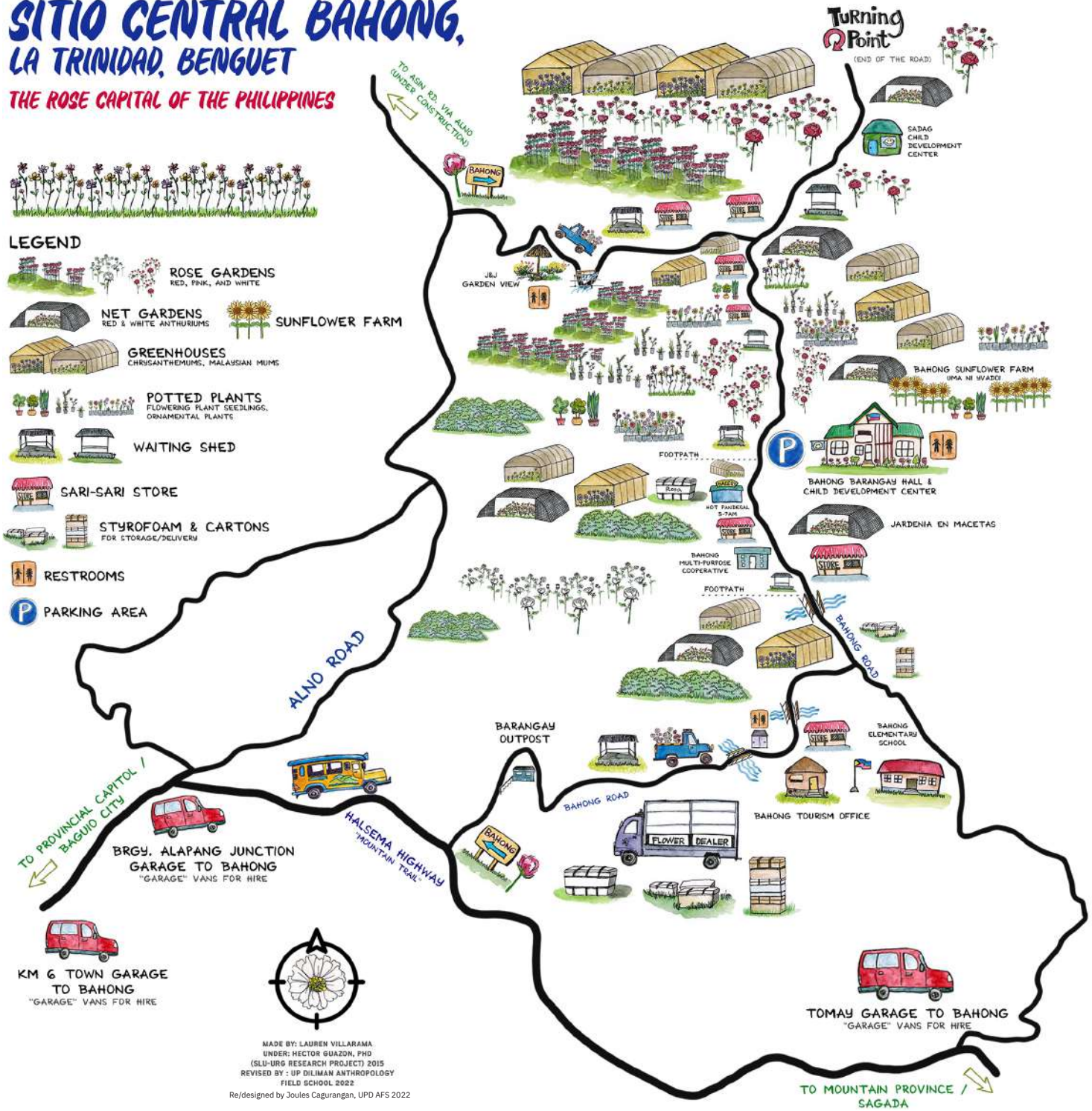
# SITIO CENTRAL BAHONG, LA TRINIDAD, BENGUET

THE ROSE CAPITAL OF THE PHILIPPINES



## LEGEND

-  ROSE GARDENS  
RED, PINK, AND WHITE
-  NET GARDENS  
RED & WHITE ANTHURIUMS
-  SUNFLOWER FARM
-  GREENHOUSES  
CHRYSANTHEMUMS, MALAYSIAN MUMS
-  POTTED PLANTS  
FLOWERING PLANT SEEDLINGS,  
ORNAMENTAL PLANTS
-  WAITING SHED
-  SARI-SARI STORE
-  STYROFOAM & CARTONS  
FOR STORAGE/DELIVERY
-  RESTROOMS
-  PARKING AREA



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# SITIO LAMUT, BRGY. BECKEL LA TRINIDAD, BENGUET



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