'Being,' 'Doing,' and 'Knowing': An Autoethnography of Everyday Ethnicity

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Abstract

Globally, ethnicity – the "sense of fellow feeling" – is considered in terms of its disruptive effects in modern society. The paper departs from this 'politicist' position by probing, instead, into the everyday ethnicity – the self-defining comforts of routine and authenticity. It aims to understand my Ilongo-ness as second generation diasporant in polyethnic milieus in Mindanao and the role *sugilanon* in the natural language in fostering it. It tries to interweave experience with *sugilanon* in Hiligaynon, as narrative and storytelling. Fishman's concept of everyday ethnicity as 'being', 'doing', and 'knowing informs, frames, and hems the analysis. The genre that obtains from the analysis is not only realist but also descriptive, narrative, and interpretive. It hopes further to our understanding of the paradox of ethnicity that is always in flux even as it resists change.

Keywords: autoethnography, ethnicity, sugilanon, Hiligaynon

Introduction

Ethnicity is difficult to define. Experts like Brass (1991) suggests that a first step towards definition is knowing what constitutes it in terms of objective and subjective criteria. The objective criteria try to answer to the question raised by Chapman: "[W]hat it is you have if you are an 'ethnic group'"? (cited in Hutchison and Smith, 1996: 4). It emphasizes external attributes, such as a proper group name, myth of common ancestry, historical memories, homeland, sense of solidarity, and one or more element/s of culture (Smith, 1986). It can be expanded to include food, clothing, or other index features, that are "easily seen, grasped, understood, and reacted to in social situations" (Nash, 1996: 10). This takes us to the unit of analysis, the ethnic group (Eller, 1999), that is, if it possesses qualities for 'self-other' distinctions (Eriksen, 1993: 4).

The subjective criteria are more difficult to determine because they are internal to the group. Experts cannot seem to agree on what constitutes the criteria but offer ways of determining them. Connor (1996) suggests the examination of how group members arrive at self-consciousness of their essence as a subjective, non-national, and an emotional experience. This is achieved through propaganda, mainly the speeches of leaders, poetry, music, and such "familial metaphors" as "motherland or fatherland, the ancestral land, land of our forefathers, this sacred soil, land where our fathers died, the native land, and, most commonly, the home – the homeland of our particular people" (Connor, 1996: 74).

I would like to add to this by suggesting the investigation of oral traditions, as "literature of voice" (Revel et al., 2005: 6), that in Ilongo heritage includes *sugilanon*. One needs to look into "songs, chants, sayings, prayers, invocation, formulas, rites, jokes, and riddles" (Fishman, 1996: 65) in the natural language, the idiom in which they were originally expressed. Literature of voice is deployed "through appeals to emotions" (Connor, 1996: 73) to reach individuals and trigger a response. The things that a group consider emblematic of themselves compose the subjective criteria. A group emerges when members arrive at a

self-consciousness of 'difference' from others and begin acting as such. Ethnicity then can be defined as a "sense of fellow feeling", "belongingness" (Maybury-Lewis, 2001: 9), that "binds people together and makes them distinct from others" (Esteban, 2002: 11-12). "This suggests that we should pay more attention to the subjective elements in ethnic survival, such as ethnic memories, values, symbols, myths and traditions" (Smith, 1996:189).

From an evolutionary perspective, Aiello and Dunbar (1993) theorize that ethnicity is one of the earliest forms of human association that makes survival possible. It keeps group members together and in contact with one another, frequently or infrequently, as they move and occupy new territories for home. Its pre-modern expression is "pre-mobilized," "untutored," "unconscious," and is "intuitively defined and experienced as part of the actor's 'being'" (Fishman, 1996: 63). Fishman calls this "everyday ethnicity" and defines it as "an experience of deeply rooted, intimate and eternal belonging" (1996: 68).

Ethnography that aims to describe the culture of a particular group denotes everyday ethnicity. Interestingly, Tylor's *Primitive Culture* in 1871, is not quite about it. It is the first exploration of the concept of culture, synonymously with civilization, not the particularistic ethnography that we are familiar with today. Nevertheless, his idea of culture as the fundamental subject of ethnographic investigation remains influential. Thus,

> Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (p. 1).

The definition carries with it the imprint of ethnicity, a sense of membership in or belonging to a group (Fishman, 1996). Belonging is based on living together and sharing a common culture as happens in 'primitive', 'traditional', or 'folk' societies (Redfield 1930). The ethnographies that Christie did on the Subanen in 1908, Cole on the Manobos of Davao in 1913, and

Garvan, also on the Davao Manobo, in 1939 are among the earliest examples of a particularistic ethnographic process and genre. The genre represents everyday ethnicity that centers on culture upon which the idea of ethnicity is established.

Everyday ethnicity differs from 'politicized' or 'mobilized' ethnicity (Fishman 1996). The modern form of the latter regards ethnicity as a resource that is a cause of conflict, of grievance and violence, in modern times. The literature on theory in this regard is abundant (Esteban, Mayoral, and Ray, 2012). There is also an abundance of literature on politicized ethnicity from around the world – from Eastern Europe (Krejči and Velìmský, 1996), Africa (Nasong'o, 2015), Latin America (Brisk and Wise 1997), to Southeast Asia (Snitwongse and Thompson, 2005). In the Philippines, most of the literature center on the conflict between Christians and Muslims in southern Philippines. Some of the important works on the conflict consider it from historical perspectives and informed by radical theory (George, 1980; Che Man 1990; Tan 1995). None is autoethnographic, and none deals with the links between everyday ethnicity and *sugilanon*.

Fishman is an American linguist who specialized in the sociology of language and ethnicity as everyday experience. His theory that language is the core of ethnicity based on his study of the role of Yiddish in Jewishness is an important contribution to ethnicity theory. Society, he says, is caught in a "perpetual dialectic of modernism and authenticism, with the new, the secular, the urban forever being re-valued as the traditional, the sacred, the rural" (Glinert, 2009, p. 193). His notions of everyday ethnicity as 'being', 'doing', and 'knowing' is an original contribution to historical subjectivism that tries to explain the resurgence of ethnicity and the emotional and quasi-physical force that it exerts in communities around the world (Hutchison and Smith, 1996). This is particularly true among diasporants (Smith, 1996) who experience, otherness, unhomeliness, and ambivalence in their adopted community that is invariably polyethnic (McNeill, 1986). It is this context that I find Fishman's ideas relevant in my paper.

Autoethnography traces its origins to reflexive ethnography that postpositivist analysis espouses. It is a

response to the challenges posed by postmodernism, feminism, marginalization, and post-trauma cultures, to mention only a few (Gannon, 2017). It is autobiography and ethnography rolled into one, and may be individual or group (Chang, Kurjiri, and Hernandez, 2016). Despite its 'newness', it is increasingly a popular mode of representation that anthropologists, sociologists, educators, and other scholars employ because of its strengths.

Scholars regard autoethnography differently, and the debate about its strengths and weaknesses continue to simmer and divide them. Mendez (2013) considers easy access to information, empathy from readers, and giving expression to formerly voiceless entities among the strengths of autoethnography. I would like, however, to go beyond these obvious strengths of autoethnography by situating it in theory and practice. To begin with, autoethnography is phenomenological; it represents a shift in the focus of analysis from society to the individual toward understanding experience (Pitard, 2017). It is reflexive and critical (Fontana and McGinnis, 2003) and narrative, descriptive, and interpretive at the same time (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Its product differs widely from fragmented, experimental, autobiographical, performative, and experiential writings to realist narratives (Fontana and McGillis, 2003).

Some scholars find autoethnography germane to understanding the experience of unhomeliness and alienation due to diaspora, hybridity, racism, classism, ethnicity, gender, and normativity. Knijnik (2014) illustrates how as a football fan helped him negotiate 'being' Australian in Sydney. Young (2009) analyzes Korean American mother-daughter relationship in an article on hybridity. Nook (2014) demonstrates the relationships between racism, classism, and the self in teacher-student relationships. Bekkout (2015) shows how Brazilian Portuguese navigate multiple identities by living at the margins of ethnic groups rather than limiting themselves to one group only. Scott (2011) takes us to her journey of recovery from a violent intimate relationship. Baurhoo (2017) questions dominant discourse about learners with disability and demonstrates how autoethnography can help facilitate social change.

Other scholars point that autoethnography answers to the need for relevance among diasporants in host countries. Sreerangarajan (2016) tells us that publishers and audiences demand from authors and artists materials that help revise and destabilize dominant representations of the native, hybrid, and diasporant in Western society. Bernards (2016) shows how the Chinese in Singapore used notions of Nanyang, the South Seas, as "a postcolonial literary trope of Chinese travel, migration, travel, and creolization in Southeast Asia" (p. 3).

Last, a few examples of autoethnographies from scholars of various persuasions about or tangent on the Philippines may be cited briefly. Maiquez (2017) explores notions of flow in the Sinulog from localized, performative, autoethnographic perspectives. As mothers, educators, and scholars, Wong and Tiu-Wu (2014) examine hybridity arising from being Filipino-Chinese and their North American education. Conrad (2015) uses autoethnography to account for her experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer when Typhoon Yolanda made landfall in Samar.

Critics consider autoethnography a complex method that grapples with issues pertaining to data quality, representation, objectivity, and ethics (Ellis, 2007; Mendez, 2013). Curiously, some practitioners of autoethnography like Wall (2008) accept these criticisms uncritically, including their ambiguities and biases. Data quality refers to the fitness of information to a given context based on such criteria as accuracy, completeness, reliability, relevance, and "freshness" (Cai and Zhu, 2015). The idea of data quality is suitable only to such empirical studies not to discursive studies such as autoethnography.

Representation is a flipside of objectivity. It refers to a value free representation that excludes the presence of the researcher in the study (Mantzoukas, 2004). This is conventional not a norm in qualitative research, and there is no consensus in this regard even among positivist critics of the method (Mendez, 2013). Autoethnography is autobiographical and introspective (Fontana and McGinnis, 2003). Thus: "the representation of the researcher in qualitative inquiries is inevitable, and the exclusion, or not, of the researcher from the text is a mere conventional

agreement founded on a paradigmatic consensus" (Mantzoukas, 2004: 994).

Dickerson (2003) and Burge (2010) argue that objectivity is either perceptual or conceptual. Perceptual objectivity is sensory, thus "primitive", based on the perception of something physical or empirical "in nature" (Burge, 2010: vi). Conceptual objectivity is non-perceptual, hence philosophical, that denotes the origins of representation in the mind. "It constitutes a distinctive 'species' or kind – a 'cut" in nature (Burge, 2010: vii). It is about a higher faculty for abstraction, deductive thought, that is strictly a human faculty (Dickerson, 2003). The distinction is important because it argues for the possibility of knowledge that is a *priori* to or independent of experience (Brinkmann, 2010). It shows as well that the grounding of objectivity in positivist science is Kantian, hence, philosophical in origin.

The rule of thumb in research ethics is to do no harm to others. In autoethnography, though, the 'others' are loved ones, family members, and other significant individuals in one's life. Recourse to the third or first person and anonymity do not suffice to allay fears of harm on others. Ellis (2007), however, believes that are no foolproof rules on research ethics regardless of the process and its products. He says, "The bad news is that there are no definitive rules or universal principles that can tell you precisely what to do in every situation or relationship you may encounter, other than the vague and generic 'do no harm'" (p. 6).

Fieldwork is not a *sine qua non* of anthropological practice, let alone ethnography (Berger, 1993). To reiterate, the first cannon, the classic, in anthropology, Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1891), was based on documents. Notions of "'field' where one works – of 'fieldwork' as a governing or regulatory trope" (Berger, 1993: 174) is challenged. Autoethnography constitutes a genre of "post(modern)-ethnography" (Berger, 1993: 174) that dares, disturbs the certitudes of positivist, particularistic, field ethnography. Berger (1993), citing Roland Barthes, states that postmodern ethnography constitutes a movement from text to (field)work and back again.

Autoethnography is as post(modern) as it is post(field) work where data, as knowledge of phenomena, is a *priori,* if not independent of perception (Dickerson, 2003; Burge, 2010; Brinkmann, 2010). It represents "a counter discursive practice that embraces creative and play while abandoning the need to maintain descriptive force" (Berger, 1993: 174). The crux of the matter is that some do fieldwork, while others do not, and the arguments for both are solid, strong, grounded. Autoethnography, as process, makes use of experience as a *priori* information, and, as product, the text that the process creates in the end (Pitard, 2017).

The paper is an autoethnography of everyday ethnicity, of 'being', 'doing', and 'knowing. Everyday ethnicity is "the self-defining comforts of routine and authenticity" (Fishman, 1996: 69). It aims to understand my Ilongo-ness as a second generation diasporant in polyethnic milieus in Mindanao, and the role sugilanon in the natural language in fostering it. It tries to interweave experience with *sugilanon* in Hiligaynon, as narrative and storytelling (Bas, n.d.; Motus, 1971; Yap and Bunye, 1971; Wolff, 1972). It is not only realist (Fontana and McGillis, 2003) but also descriptive, narrative, and interpretive (Clifford, 1986).

My practice of autoethnography is non-positivist. A such, it does not involve "'field' where one works – of 'fieldwork' as a governing or regulatory trope" (Berger, 1993: 174). It involves, instead, three processes. The first pertains to my reflections on ethnicity toward understanding Ilongo-ness. It is autobiographical, hence narrative and introspective. The second pertains to a return to text (Berger, 1993) – to folklore, "as expressions of social fears and wishes, ideals, and values" (Ben-Amos, 1983, p. 13). It is grounded on the belief that verbal art like folklore, as Ben-Amos (1983) puts it, "reflects the collective experience of society and is the mirror which the community constantly faces" (p. 13). It is interpretive in that I plumb, draw from, and 'dip' into the *sugilanons* (stories) that my mother told me while growing up for a sense of Ilongo-ness. The third pertains to analysis that is informed, framed, and hemmed by Fishman's (1996) concept of everyday ethnicity as 'being', 'doing', and 'knowing'.

My practice of autoethnography and the text that it produces is not triumphalist. It endeavors to eschew presentism by interpreting events in their proper historical contexts, not in terms of present attitudes, values, and concepts (Bernards, 2018). It is neither narcissistic nor indulgent as some positivist critics like Atkinson (1997) would like autoethnography would like to appear. The remainder of the text is structured based on Fishman's (1996) concept of everyday ethnicity as 'being', 'doing', and 'knowing', followed by his ideas about the mutability of ethnicity. A reconsideration of the arguments forwarded in the paper provides closure to some issues and problems raised in the discussion.

Ethnicity as 'Being'

Ethnicity is a kinship phenomenon that guarantees membership in a "super family" (Horowitz, cited in Hutchison and Smith, 2006: 7). It is an expression of descent, blood, or substance, as "bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh, and blood of their blood" (Fishman, 1996: 63). It maybe fictive. What is important, though, are the sentiments for a community that enfolds the individual within group identity. The individual, at once begotten and begetting, forms a link "from generation to generation – from past ancestors to those in the future" (Fishman, 1996: 63).

Land, territory, home, or homeland is the place of birth or origin of the group. This is easily grasped by those who stayed in the homeland. Is it also the same with those who left the homeland for another place? I am referring to migrants from central and northern islands of the country who opted to resettle in Mindanao and adjacent islands as homesteaders since 1913, and their descendants (Esteban, 2004). Those who settled in the towns of Titay and Ipil in Zamboanga del Sur in 1949, from the province of Iloilo in Panay would include members of my lineage. We are seven siblings in the family. Two of my older siblings were born in Iloilo, and the rest of us in either Titay or Ipil. We trace our ancestry to Iloilo, the homeland, place of origin, the place of our forefathers.

None in the lineage keeps a genealogy, and we had our first reunion only in 2010. This is sixty-two years since the first members of the lineage settled in Titay. There was a political motive to this: some relatives were running for political office, and the reunion was considered the most effective way of ensuring their votes. In a sense, we were a 'scattered' group until then, riven apart by conflicting persuasions, interests, and uncongenial emotions. If it were not for 'blood' and speaking Hiligaynon, I wonder how we had carried on as such for so long.

We come from Central Visayas, but we identify ourselves as Ilongos, not Bisaya, as the natives of Visayas are called, for distinction. We grew up listening to *sugilanon* about our roots in Panay. When mother took me to Iloilo in 1968, I was told that we were vacationing in Panay not Iloilo (*Mabakasyon sa Panay*). I would hear about this so many times from return migrants, those who opted to return to the homeland. Some families who failed to find land in Mindanao or feared the Muslims during the Christian-Muslim conflict in 1972 (George, 1980; Che Man, 1990; Tan, 1995) passed the night in our house. They would tell my parents, "*Mapauli kami sa Panay*" [We are going home to Panay]. The island world of Panay was the homeland, an inclusive land-people nexus, to all those who trace their ancestry to the island.

From the first generation to the second, the generalities of origins were emphasized – Ilongos from Panay, suggesting unity with the language group and a common homeland. It made sense because as new arrivals in Mindanao, the Ilongos, some from outside Iloilo, tended to band together for mutual help, protection, and a sense of community in new, polyethnic environments. This is not unique to the group because individuals anywhere in the world seek community (Barth, 1969), and when they find one they remain loyal to it. Nevertheless, individuals drifted in and out of the community in search of better opportunities.

Migration may blur the generalities of origins and arouse interest in its specificities. It replies to the call for identity, for rootedness, in a dynamic new world that is ethnically ambiguous and unstable. Iloilo now takes precedence over Panay for a

homeland. Our vacation to Iloilo in 1968, the first by family members, had the effect of specifying our place of origin. We are from northern Iloilo because father is from Batad and mother from Sara (Esteban, 2004). The poor in these towns are as stricken by 'violence of everyday life' (Scheper-Hughes, 1992), of 'social suffering', as it were when my family left in 1950.

My mother once mentioned to me that my father went with his uncles and aunts to Titay, now part of Zamboanga Sibugay, for a better life in 1949. Notions of 'better life' were linked with land, and my study would show that most land seekers in Mindanao from Luzon and Visayas were either landless or small landowners (Esteban 2004). My father belonged to the first group. Four uncles of my father succeeded in acquiring land in Titay. I would know later from my mother that the older of two aunts of my father remained landless in Titay or Ipil. My father did not have land when he returned to Iloilo in 1950, and brought my mother and the two older siblings to Titay in the same year. He started out as a tenant of an Ilocano landlord in Titay. Through hard work, he managed to acquire two parcels for a total of twelve hectares in Ipil that he would later sell for capital as a cattle merchant in the town. I recall that he rationalized his move by saying, *"Anhon mo ang duta? Maagrot!"* [What would you do with land? It is grainy!].

Language is a bodily experience because it is produced in and expressed from the body (Fishman, 1996). It names and keeps groups distinct from one another, especially in polyethnic milieus (McNeill, 1986). It is magnified, drummed up, plumbed as the most reliable inclusion criterion of recruitment to ensure loyalty to struggle and its agenda (Krejči and Velìmský, 1981). It "links the present generation to the preceding and succeeding ones" (Peña, 2008: 14), "in a peculiarly sensitive web of intimacy and mutuality" (Fishman, 1996: 65). Because of differences obtaining from separation, alienation, and exogamy, speaking Hiligaynon, memories of a homeland, and belief in common ancestry help promote unity in the lineage.

Everyone in the lineage speaks Hiligaynon. We communicate only in Hiligaynon, keeping the language alive in

the family and in the lineage even after more than half a century of separation from the homeland. The idiom of those who still live in Titay is like that of visitors from Iloilo. Ours, though, represents the kind with a vocabulary populated with words borrowed from other Visayan groups.

Why everyone still speaks Hiligaynon needs comment. For example, father never spoke another tongue despite his varied occupations – cattle merchant, butcher, and farmer, that brought him face to face with individuals who spoke different languages. Mother managed with very little Cebuano, Tagalog, or English at all. When we did not understand a command or instruction in Hiligaynon, they tersely reprimanded us, saying, "*Ano ka, Ingles?*" [Are you English?]. The gesture reminds us of the language natural to us. Speaking the language is disciplining, keeping members within the fold (Barth, 1969). English, though, is a prime achievement, a source of pride, considered important in school and in transactions where it is the idiom of exchange.

Being polyglot is an advantage in polyethnic settings. Expectedly, the children of exogamic marriages speak the most number of languages. Some of my relatives speak also Magindanao or Tausug, the language of their fathers. It helps them negotiate life as merchants in a polyethnic town and forge and renew kinship bonds. Some in the family are polyglots. My older brother speaks Cebuano as lingua franca, Ilocano, Chavacano, Tausug, Kalibugan, Tagalog, and Manobo because his wife is a Manobo from Agusan. Three of my four sisters and many of my nephews and nieces are polyglots. An older sister and I, however, pale in comparison with them because we pick up another language quite slowly.

Such aspects of the language as vocabulary and tone have changed. However, my relatives in Titay Valley still sound like the forefathers, speaking in sing-song tone that my family had lost. I try speaking sing-song when in the company of relatives, but my siblings do not at all. The third and fourth generations speak Cebuano in school, but they shift to Hiligaynon when at home and when relating with relatives. They arrive at self-

consciousness of 'being' Ilongos at the onset of puberty, signifying a transition from childhood to early adulthood (Robertson, 2006). This sort of 'coming of age' passes unnoticed because it is neither ritualized, dressed in taboo, nor celebrated with feasting. It is unlike in many cultures where the initiation into adult life is an event of great social significance (Jackson, 2006). It is the familiar way to 'authenticate' membership and invite acceptance by 'doing' and 'knowing' as adults do. It involves a change in *batasan* (character) and acquiring buot (*bu-ot*, good; *bu-ot'*, consciousness). These concepts denote acting one's age, responsibility, and control over one's impulses. They contrast with payaon (*pa-ya-on'*, childish) and *wala buot* (unaware), two traits associated with children who are deemed rash, impudent, and ill-mannered (*wala batasan*).

What is significant is the yearning to speak the language, of 'doing' in the manner of the ancestors, to signal "sharing the same psychic structure" (Connor, 1996: 68). Keeping *sugilanon* alive is like coming into contact with the forefathers. It is an experiencing, a rejuvenating zone of action, of how it possibly was in their world. Personae from the sugilanon are used as yardsticks for analogous traits. "*Daw si Kanhaw*" [Like Kanhaw], a philandering husband. "Daw si Pacheco" [Like Pacheco], a suffering wife. "*Daw si Lipong Kayo*" [Like Lipong Kayo], a simpleton. Comparisons reinforce or discourage a trait. "*Kaalam sa iya daw si Estela*" [She is smart like Estela], a character in "Juan Inigo", for praise, especially for doing well in school. "*Ano ka, hari?*" [Are you king?], a character in same story, for being smart-alecky and pomposity in speech and manners.

Ethnicity as 'Doing'

The kind of 'doing' that I engage here is unrelated to 'doing' in the sense of civility or rationality. By 'doing' I mean "behaving as the ancestors behaved and preserving their great heritage by transmitting it to generation after generation" (Fishman, 1996: 65). I use heritage to mean the past that all cultures possess, the "historically evolved patterns of belief and action… a legacy of history: they are tradition" (Grosby, 1996: 55).

Heritage, as oral tradition, includes not only poetry and music (Connor, 1996), but also

> Songs, chants, sayings, prayers, invocations, formulas, rites, jokes, and riddles are all required, recognized, expected, rewarded, and undetachable from ethnic communities. They are viewed and fully available only through the linguistic systems to which they are naturally related (Fishman, 1996: 65).

Sugilanon is a category of literature of voice (Revel et al., 2005:8). It purveys a knowledge system, both as something that postulates reality principles and as a universe of significance into which the individual 'dips' for meanings. "Humans may be said to: dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, believe, doubt, plan, construct, criticize, hate and love by narrative" (Rapport and Overing, 2000: 283). The *sugilanon* is a way of telling "the story or plot of a narrative" (Rapport and Overing, 2000: 283). A narrative is a statement of events, places, peoples, states of mind, and emotions in sequence. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It is hemmed. Sequentiality and temporality differentiate it from other ways of providing information in order to impose order or structure, frame, or give shape and definition to something in a chaotic world (Rapport and Overing, 2000).

The sequence of events is difficult to remember the first time the *sugilanon* is told. We had to hear the stories over and over again to gain mastery of the plots. Yet even those who cannot remember the entire story can tell when the sequence is altered or when some details are effaced. I cannot narrate in full either the relatively long *sugilanon*. In December 2007, I asked my mother to tell me again the stories that she could still remember for a book project that I had in mind at the time. She was eighty-two years old then, and she died two years after.

My mother narrated seven stories, two of which are short, namely, the stories about Bakwa and Gorio, that we included in our second collection of folktales from Mindanao in English (Esteban, Casanova, and Esteban, 2011) and in Filipino (Casanova,

Esteban, and Esteban, 2011). Meanwhile, the five stories that are relatively longer I reserved for a separate collection. These are *Ang Tatlo ka Mag-utod* (The Three Siblings), Juan Inigo, Lipong Kayo (The Simpleton), *Nati* (literally, "fawn), and *Pacheco kag Kanhaw* (Pacheco and Kanhaw). However, on second thought, I believed that the seven stories need to be published together as *Sugilanon: Stories That My Mother Told Me.*

The manuscript of *Sugilanon* exists in Ilongo and in English since July 2010. The translations of the *sugilanon* in Ilongo into Filipino, though, have still to be done. In the summer of 2010, an older sister was in Manila to look after our younger sister who underwent surgery at the Philippine General Hospital. One day, she told me that one of her sons wanted to know about the status of my plan to have the collection published. I told her that the collection has not been translated into Filipino yet. This satisfied her. She expressed her interest to read the collection, so I let her read it.

She was aghast with my version of "Bakwa", saying, *"Indi man na amo. Kahilabtanon gid sa imo. Ibalik na!"* [That is not what it is. You are such as tinker]. I said that it had to be extended because it is too short. She insisted, saying, *"Indi na kay nanay sugilanon. Imo na. Sala. Ibalik na sa daan"* [That is not mother's sugilanon. It is yours. It is not what it is. Write it again like in the original]. Her reaction surprised me. Her horror towards my tinkering, fiddling, within tradition, though, convinced me. Since *sala* is also Hiligaynon for "sin", my version is akin to violating something sacred, pure. The *sugilanon* can be told only in the original because it is tradition. Retelling it, *as is,* "cultivates a heightened sense of collective distinction and mission" (Smith, 1996: 189).

We grew up with mother's sugilanon. However, the young ones, especially my nephews and nieces, mostly by my older brother, cannot retell the *sugilano*n in detail. This needs some explanation because he knows a lot of sugilanon from an aunt of my father. I do not remember him, though, telling stories to his children, and mother did not baby sit for them. Be that as it may, the boys laugh, without blushing, at elements of ribaldry when they hear a *sugilanon* told to their cousins. In the story of

"Nati" [The Fawn], for example, Kausa [a buck] asks Nati to tell its mother, Inay-inayon, that she has a visitor.

Inay-inayon, ara si Kausa, siling ni Nati.
[Mother, Kausa is here, Nati says].

Mamirapiray sungay nya?, pamangkot ni Inay-inayon.
[How many horns does he have?, asks Inay-inayon]

Mangin-apat, siling ni Nati.
[Four, Nati says].

Ah, gamay inugkarantog nya, siling ni Inay-inayon.
[Ah, he has a small penis, Inay-inayon says].

I do not recall my brothers and sisters reproducing the *sugilanon* to their children. For sure, the young ones first heard the *sugilanon* from me when they were still small. Two of these *sugilanon*, "Bakwa" and "Why Rice is Scarce", were included in the English (Esteban, Casanova, and Esteban, 2002) and Pilipino (Casanova, Esteban, and Casanova, 2002) versions of a collection of folktales that my sister and I co-authored with a friend. My co-author suggested the inclusion of Bisaya folklore, e.g., Ilongo, in the collection, while I provided the historical and cultural rationalizations for it.

By the time the Spaniard arrived in the country, the Visayans had colonized parts of northern and eastern Mindanao and called these parts "Visaya" (Noone, 1982). This attests to the fluidity of events, the mobility of populations, and the porosity of boundaries, if any, between groups. Mindanao is as much a homeland to the Visayans as it is to the indigenes and Muslims. This bit of information may help allay the sense of being 'unhomely', being neither here nor there, among the Visayans in Mindanao. The 'unhomely' describes the estrangement of the familiar that we share with migrants from around the world, refugees, colonial subjects, slaves, women, and gays (Bhabha, 1994).

The 'unhomely', though, has specific referents. It refers to the marginalized, the exotica, and so forth. Marginalization

is the condition of many descendants of migrants who are as poor and powerless as they were. It is a complex reality that can be attributed to the nation-state (Paderanga, 1995), the conditions in the 'frontiers' and individual differences (Perez, 1981), environmental factors (Pelzer, 1945), local resistance (Esteban, 2004), and the dynamics of land settlement (Simkins and Wernstedt, 1971). In a sense, it is an effect of discourses that make strange what was once familiar (Majul, 1973). These discourses consider migrants to Mindanao interlopers, colonists, exploiters, and so forth (Majul, 1973; Gowing, 1977; George, 1980; Che Man, 1990; Tan, 1995). They are not *tumandok* (native) to the island. Everyone, though, has a homeland, thus *tumandok*, that maybe physically inhabited or in the mind.

It is suggested that an anthropology of exotica is possible. The exotica are associated with notions of the 'authentic', the 'native'. If by exotica we mean the 'bizarre', the 'strange', the 'different in the eyes' of 'natives' and diasporants, then *sugilanon* suffuses a world with a sense of the 'difference' that is neither bizarre nor strange since all groups have narratives (Barthes, 1975). The *sugilanon*, of course, is different because they are imaginings of a group with a different temperament.

The *sugilanon* purveys a temperament suffused with a sense of justice as told in "Bakwa". It is a sentiment for unrequited love in "Si Pacheco kag si Kanhaw" [Pacheco and Kanhaw], reproach for greed in "Why Rice is Scarce" (Esteban, Casanova, and Esteban, 2002; Esteban, Casanova, and Esteban, 2011; Casanova, Esteban, and Esteban, 2002; Casanova, Esteban, and Esteban, 2011), and a predilection for repartee in "Juan Inigo". What is important here is the 'difference' that our heritage makes for self-other distinctions. It makes us feel that we are "unique, a super family, with 'irreplaceable cultural values'" (Smith, 1996: 189). The elements and their combinations that give local color to the *sugilanon*, as the craft of retelling, are incommensurable in reflecting a mode understanding the 'world' – the reality, the way things are.

Mother, the storyteller in the family, passed away in 2008. I thought that a collection of her *sugilanon* would excite

everyone in the family. It was a bit of a surprise that it is my married nephews, more than my nieces, who showed greater interest in the book. I tried to explain this by rationalizing it on notions of paternity, and the desire of my nephews to populate the memory of their children with Ilongo-ness. But on second thought, there is also an affect to it – filiation, so to speak. The pressure to finish the book is great, especially that they cannot seem to wait for it because the young ones may lose interest in them as they grow old. The sense of urgency and eagerness to reproduce the *sugilanon* in the fourth generation is unsettling, imposing, cruel.

I can only guess that my nieces, as teachers, are impelled to read stories to their children straight from English children's books to keep up with a globalizing world (Geertz, 1995). Besides, *telenovelas, fantaseryes,* and stores from children's books have taken the place of *sugilanon*. It attests to 'hybridity', the 'unhomely' state of mind (Bhabha, 1994). Yet, when I reflect that four of them are married to Subanen and one to a Muslim, I could only wonder about the possibilities. Is ethnicity irrelevant in the context of hybridity? Is ethnicity an anachronism in modernity? Is identity autonomous from the influence of culture?

Modernity creates new pressures and aspirations mediated by technology. The pressure of work has taken precedence over other imperatives of parenting, especially rekindling the memories of the children about the heritage of the forefathers. Television has become the principal cultural broker, creating, providing, and imposing new tastes and needs. It supplants, revises, erases notions about what constitutes 'culture', as divertissement, at home. It closes the gap (Geertz, 1995), making the aspiration for the 'new' and 'interesting' possible.

Television is the new parent, and *telenovelas* and *fantaseryes* the new *sugilanon*. Some proponents of heritage, as tradition, may regard these programs alienating and irrelevant. But humans are reflexive decision makers. The preference for television shows become feasible partly because they are grounded on our penchant for the imaginary. The imaginary

is construed as something fantastic, exotica, bizarre, grotesque, ribald, gory, and carnivalesque.

Retelling the *sugilanon* in the fourth generation signifies interest in a past considered forgotten. It "culturally tags" (Van den Berghe, 1999: 61) them as a group with a 'great heritage'. It is a counterpoint to the hegemonic effects of *telenovelas* and *fantaseryes* as everyday cultural fare (Esteban, Casanova, and Esteban, 2011; Casanova, Esteban, and Esteban, 2011). It is an internal response to the need to reaffirm ethnicity even as the need for change is appreciated. It preserves, confirms, and augments ethnicity as a meaningful experience of association. It is "expressable only within traditional ethnic networks" (Fishman, 1996: 65) through symbolic 'objects' such as language and tradition.

Ethnic groups operate as "networks of communication, and seeks to ascertain how customs, language and other symbolic codes bind the members of communities together over generations" (Smith, 1996: 189). Where exogamy challenges the myth of 'pure' Ilongo descent, speaking Hiligaynon as 'doing' authenticates Ilongo-ness. It is hospitable to the idea that language is an "unfalsifiable marker" (Van den Berghe, 1996: 57) in polyethnic contexts because it is difficult to mimic. An individual who has not picked up the phonetic system of another language before puberty is not likely to speak like a native of the place and so betrays his 'real' identity.

Unlike 'being', retelling the *sugilanon* as 'doing' is more prone to change no matter the pre-eminence that a group gives to language. Language change, though, can never be total, willy-nilly, or careless, and is neither "capricious nor accidental" (Grosby, 1999: 55). Besides its communicative role, language remains an "important private symbolic resource of ethnic groups" (Hutchison and Smith, 1996: 187). *Sugilanon* makes likely "the revitalization and recapture of authentic linguistic expressions" (Fishman, 1996: 65). The use of these expressions in everyday life authenticates behavior and tends to "relate partially and symbolically to the ancestral patrimony befitting the 'corpus mysticum'" (Fishman, 1996: 65) of the group. Members of the family and the kindred talk like in the *sugilanon.*

Forgetting the past happens in all generations in response to immediate needs and problems. However, while one generation shows disinterest in the *sugilanon,* another expresses sensitivity to it. Sensitivity involves reproduction because diasporic groups tends toward "periodic revitalization" (Fishman, 1996: 65) through language and oral traditions. Ethnicity is such a powerful experience that the past "needs to be recaptured, used, interpreted, and exploited to resolve current problems" (Fishman, 1996: 65). As identity becomes diffused, un-definable, and hybridized (Bhabha, 1994), *sugilanon* tries to recapture and preserve the past (Brown, 1994). It also "has the potential of giving direction and providing group identity during change" (Fishman, 1996: 66). Where tension arises between hostile groups, between Ilongos and Muslims in Mindanao (Majul, 1973; George, 1980; Che Man, 1990; Tan, 1995), the resort to cultural forms for inclusion becomes intense (Brown, 1994). Change is welcome, but the assertion of Ilongo-ness demands authentication that relies on speaking Hiligaynon as 'doing' when other boundaries fail.

Dress, cuisine, tattoo, circumcision, scarification, and so forth, cannot be 'true markers' of ethnicity because they can be mimicked (Van den Berghe, 1996). Narratives are ubiquitous in that humans express and transact relations mostly in linguistic ways (Rapport and Overing, 2000). However, the *sugilanon* cannot be anyone's way of telling things for they are difficult to decouple from the group that originated and use it for peculiar ends. Behaving in the 'authentic' manner or speaking in the natural language is used to achieve "new 'collective purposes" and to "authenticate those purposes and maximize their attainment" (Fishman, 1996: 66).

Ethnicity as 'Knowing'

"Ethnic knowing has deep roots in all cultures" (Fishman, 1996:66), and knowing though narratives is the most common. Barthes (1975) says that, narrative, "Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural" (p. 237). It is a world view, a mode of thought, that enables group members "to intuit what others cannot grasp" (Fishman, 1996: 66). An aunt from

Iloilo demanded *balos* (revenge) for a son who was murdered in a *baile* (dance) where he won the roast chicken by placing the highest bet on a local belle. The way that we handled the situation dissatisfied here. She said, *"Kun sa Panay pa na, ginkuot na sila"* (If it were in Panay, they [the killers] would have been disposed already with impunity).

I was too young to intuit it then. The killers had since eluded capture and never returned to the village. Our relationship with their families remains nervous, suspect, overwrought, distancing. Our silence is considered out of form for a 'big' family, whatever that means in the village worldview. In the mind of the Bisaya, the Ilongos are known to exact vengeance with impunity. It is not inimitably Ilongo because *balos* is as Visayan as it is Ilongo (Bas, n.d.; Kauffman, n.d.; Motus, 1971; Yap and Bunye, 1971; Wolff, 1972). What is essential here is the stereotype that borders on caricature and how it helps create group identity (Nash, 1996).

As a kid, I often heard the expression, *"Ang nabuhi sa binangon, mapatay sa binangon"* [One who lives by the blade dies by the blade]. My aunt and relatives insisted on *balos* because it is 'the way of our ancestors.' Does wergild occur in the *sugilanon*? The story of Bakwa (a black bird) and Ungoy (monkey) comes to mind.

Bakwa and Ungoy were friends. One day after dark when Bakwa was home in the bamboo grove, Ungoy grabbed Bakwa from his perch, plucked her feathers, and left her on a rotting stump. Bakwa survived the cold and by feeding on insects that crept up the stump. While she grew back her feathers, her droppings had risen up to a pile that she built into a *baroto* (dugout canoe). One day Ungoy passed by her, saw the *baroto,* and asked her its purpose. She told Ungoy that she will sail on it to Borneo. Ungoy wanted to join her. She told Ungoy to wear a belt of big stones so that the boat would float. He did as Bakwa suggested. When they were already at sea, the *baroto* broke up, Ungoy drowned, and Bakwa flew back to her perch at the bamboo grove. That night Bakwa had the soundest sleep in her entire life.

The *sugilanon* conveys reality postulates or a universe of significance (Rapport and Overing, 2000). Consider for instance the story of Bakwa and Ungoy. To pursue the postulate further, I ponder if retributive justice was 'the way of our forefathers'. Retributive justice was at play at a time when there were no courts, arresting officers, judges, and a code of law (Esteban, 2002). Be that as it may, we need to be cautious in 'seeing' culture in folklore. As pointed out by Benedict (2013), the abundance of narratives on infanticide in Zuñi folklore is a contradiction to the care that the group devote to children.

'Knowing' is a *Welstanschauung* that "helps to explain origins, clarify eternal questions, rationalize destiny, and purports an *entre* to universal truths" (Fishman, 1996: 66). "Why Rice Is Scarce" (Esteban, Casanova, and Esteban, 2002; Casanova, Esteban, and Esteban, 2002), which I retitled "Gorio" in the new edition of our collection of folktales (Esteban, Casanova, and Esteban, 2011; Casanova, Esteban, and Esteban, 2011) comes to mind. Gorio was a poor and kindhearted *laon* (bachelor), an *ilo* (orphan) by both parents, and a *labasero* (fish hawker). One day, while resting in an abandoned *kamalig* (shack), he heard a chick calling for its mother. It annoyed him, so he went down the shack and tried to look for it. He traced the sound to a tuft of grass, but there was no chick. He found, instead, rice grains that he put in the pocket of his shirt. He discovered the following day that the pocket was full of rice. That night he put the rice in a *bayoong* (rice container made of reeds or another material), and he was surprised that the *bayoong* was full of rice the next morning. Next, he put the rice at the center of his *kamalig*, and the *kamalig* was full of rice the next day, so he stopped hawking fish and began selling rice. One day, Gorio thought of leaving some rice in the town plaza, and the following morning it was full of rice. The people were happy about it, and they stopped buying rice from him. To make people buy rice (*dalawat*) from him again, he burned the rice in the plaza and went home. As he was nearing home, he saw his *kamalig* burning. He became a labasero again.

In Ilongo society, *dalawat* (strictly, buying rice for food), describes the condition of the poor. I hear it often among relatives. When asked about their condition in life, they would say,

"Gadalawat lang gihapon" [We still buy rice (for food)]. *Dalawat* is an idiom for distinction in traditional, agricultural society. The poor (tenants and small landowners) do it, while the rich (big landowners) do not. The *sugilanon* of Gorio is about greed, an intense desire for wealth, power, and recognition. It is universally considered evil and a cause of moral corruption.

The links between 'knowing' and language are well established in the *sugilanon* of Gorio. Language mediates 'knowing' that is akin to reacting to stimuli in the natural language. 'Knowing' is an 'authenticator within groups, and of groups in relation to their heritages of wisdom" (Fishman, 1996: 66). Group behavior tends towards marking identities for distinction, a collective act that is as bodily as it is cultural (Van den Berghe, 1996; Nash, 1996; Barth, 1969). While language in general responds to the "need to belong intimately, inter-generationally, authentically" (Fishman, 1996: 67), cultural signaling establishes ancestry through generations.

Mutability of Ethnicity

There is the mistaken notion that the essence of ethnicity is tradition, which is understood as the past of culture. The 'past' is considered 'dead', hence, immutable. This arises from the idea that ethnicity is a 'thing' of traditional society that is opposed to innovation. The key word here is tradition to which anthropology exhibits ambivalent attitudes. Graburn (2001), citing Levi-Strauss, states that there are societies that recreate the past and consider time in cycles and there are those that are conscious of change and therefore innovate on the past. It is against this background that I use tradition to refer to "those cultural features which, in situations of change, were to be continued to be handed on, thought about, preserved and not lost" (Graburn, 2001: 6).

Ethnicity is a product of the past, but not a thing of the past. It is conscious of the "irreversible direction of history" (Graburn, 2001: 6). The "essence of ethnicity", thus, is change, and "membership, content, and saliency" (Fishman, 1996: 68) are dynamic. However, experts differ in the way they approach

change. The revivalists believe that "decline [of] interest in ethnicity" is a justification of "renewed dedication, effort, and devotion to pristine authenticity" (Fishman, 1996: 68). For the "within the fold" adherents, the "mainspring or essence of authenticity is believed to be the preordained 'wisdom' essential to the acceptance of necessary and desirable change, growth, alteration and self-correction" (Fishman, 1996: 68). The kind of ethnic awareness among the Ilongos in Mindanao is similar to this: they yearn for change even as they try to keep a distinct identity. It is the aspiration for a better life premised on a desire for land that motivated the forefathers to relocate to Mindanao, not conquest, persecution, and forced scattering as happened with the Jews (Smith, 1996) and Armenians (Armstrong, 1996).

The economistic premise of migration may explain the openness of Ilongo-ness to change in other relational fields. Unlike economic change which can be rapid, culture change is an everyday experience. It is conscious and harmonized with the group's 'heritage', implying compatibility, utility, and plasticity. It is an effect of reflexivity about a "situation of necessity" (Grosby, 1996: 65). It would be misinformed, imprudent to argue for a 'golden age' (Smith, 1996) in Ilongo society because there is none such. What exists, instead, is 'great heritage', as oral traditions in general and as *sugilanon* in particular.

Conclusion

Everyday ethnicity "is an experience of deeply rooted, intimate and eternal belonging" (Fishman, 1996: 68). It engages change, accepting or rejecting influences, "depending on the particular social, historical, and personal environment" (Fishman, 1996: 68). It is historically and culturally catalyzed, canalized, and guarantees authenticity amid change (Grosby, 1996; Connor, 1996). It is not disruptive because groups can exist without a homeland and for diasporants like the Jews (Smith, 1996) and Armenians (Grosby, 1996), also sovereignty. *Sugilanon* does not only provide an "inner psychic unity" (Connor, 1996: 68); it also compensates for "absences" (Smith, 1996: 189), such as the homeland. It eases the way for the preservation of authenticity—the ways, the heritage, the wisdom of the forefathers. *Sugilanon* in

the natural language is an expression of everyday ethnicity. This refers to, "[t]he quiet, self-defining routines of habitual comfort and authenticity is the core of ethnicity" (Fishman, 1996: 69).

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