

External Paper

Some Prospects for Travel Studies in Philippine Women's University

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Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo, Professor Emeritus of English & Comparative Literature at the University of the Philippines (UP) and one of the foremost contemporary Filipina scholars on travel studies, once wrote:

All travel writing is, in a sense translation. Travelers come to an unknown place and try to “translate” it, i.e. to make it comprehensible, for themselves first, and then for their readers (Hidalgo 2020).

Travel writing as an act of translation is not only personal (i.e., making the unknown known through personal experiences) but also cultural. When we travel and write about these travels, we are not looking at the foreign places and peoples simply as they are (or in Kantian terminology, “noumenon” or “thing-in-itself”). We always see foreign places and peoples through a glass colored by our identities (gender, social class, religion, political orientation, education, age, etc.). Culture is also one of those identities that mold our perception of the world when we travel. An Indian travelling in Australia will not have the same experience as a German travelling the same place, even if they both go to the same tourist spots and do the same set of activities. Consciously or unconsciously, travelers almost always “bring the homeland” within them. The same is true in the case with the Filipino travelers. In fact, in many cases, it is when we are in foreign lands that we realize our unique identity as Filipinos. As Mary Dorothy Jose (2023) puts it:

Tunay na may katotohanan ang realisasyon ng ibang nangingibang-bayan na mas lumilinaw sa atin ang sariling pagkakakilanlan kung tayo ay nahaharap sa ibang kabihasnan.

In the homeland, we have the tendency to take our culture for granted because everyone around us is like us. But in foreign lands, *sarili* (self) becomes more pronounced in the midst of *iba* (others). As one of the authors in this Issue (Earl Clarence Jimenez) writes:

...the pursuit of familiarity intensifies in foreign climes... While the joy of travel includes wandering into the unknown, one can never really be far away from the roots one has left behind.

To cite again Hidalgo (2020), travel writing as a genre in the Philippines is relatively more recent than other forms of literary writing. In fact, the *Asian Studies* journal of UP Diliman’s Asian Center might be the only social scientific journal in the country which publishes travel narratives of Filipinos in their issues (Tugano 2023). Yet,

the publication of travel narratives in this journal is irregular. Actually, among its 93 issues from its first volume in 1963 to the latest 2022 issue, only 9 issues contain travel narratives (58:2, 58:1, 57:2, 56:2, 56:1, 53:2, 53:1, 52:1, 50:2). The journal only began publishing travel narratives in 2014, when they featured the travel narrative of Caroline Hau (2014) about Japan. The infant status of travel studies in the Philippines might be the reason why the attempt to indigenize/Filipinize it is also relatively new. Although the culture-bound nature of all travelogues is almost commonsensical (as described above), the first systematic attempt to center Filipino culture-and-language in travel studies found its expression in Axle Tugano's *Araling Pangmanlalakbay*, which only started around 2022 (see Tugano 2022).

It is in the context of this young existence of travel studies in the Philippines that this special issue of Philippine Women's University's (PWU) *Bidlisiw* journal can be situated. It is the first issue not only of *Bidlisiw* but of all PWU-based journals that publish an anthology of travelogues. There is no single travelogue that was ever published in the previous issues of any of these PWU-based journals. Nevertheless, some travel-related studies are already present in some of the issues. For instance, volume 2:1 of *PWU Research Journal* contains a psychological study on Overseas Filipino Workers' personality and coping mechanisms (Napeña-Selidio et al 2017), while one of the articles in volume 9:1 shares the experiences of backpackers in Catanduanes (Fortuna & Alejandro 2022). In *Compendium* (collection of thesis and dissertation abstracts of PWU's graduate students), volume 1 features a work on OFW COVID-19 survivors in Abu Dhabi (Torrechilla 2020), and there are also 3 studies on different topics in domestic tourism: cultural and heritage tourism in Camarines Norte (Bernas 2020), tourists' motivations in Batanes (Benicta 2020), and tourism marketing campaign in Romblon (Cordero 2020). In *Bugkos* (collection of abstracts presented in PWU conferences), apart from the earlier abstract version of Fortuna and Alejandro's (2021) paper on backpackers in Catanduanes, there is also Lalisan and Alejandro's (2021) study on accessible tourism from the perspective of travel and tour agencies. In *Bidlisiw* itself, Macapas

and Alejandro (2021) published a paper on the travel services sector. Meanwhile, neither travelogue nor any travel-related studies can be found in other PWU-based journals such as *Sabangan* and *PEERspective*.

All of these shows that although this special issue is the very first collection of PWU dedicated to travelogues, there are already small seeds of travel studies in the university, scattered in the different issues of its journals. But I mentioned these publications not only to establish a precedence of travel studies in PWU, but also to offer some prospects for this field in the context of the university. Aside from these previous travel-related publications in PWU-based journals, the special issue of *Bidlisiw* itself, as well as the model of travel narratives of UP Asian Center's *Asian Studies* shows patterns, strengths, and gaps which can be instructive for the future of travel studies in PWU.

Firstly, the existing travel-related studies in PWU-based journals show that the majority of these are coming from the perspective of tourism. A dialogue and collaboration between PWU's School of Tourism and other schools, such as School of Arts and Sciences (SAS), would possibly lead to a fruitful result for travel studies. The latter's travel studies can benefit from the former's technical knowledge on tourism, while the latter can offer social scientific insights to the former.

Secondly, one of the strengths of PWU's nascent travel studies is its domestic focus. Many of these are about the travels and tourism of Filipinos and foreigners to different parts of the Philippines. But this strength also implies that travel-related works in the university are lacking with regard to international travel. Even the study about OFWs (Napeña-Selidio et al 2017) has an inward direction, as it is focused on the personality and coping mechanisms of OFWs who have already returned to the country. It might be in this aspect that *Asian Studies* journal could serve as a model. Contrary to travel-related studies of PWU, UP's *Asian Studies* contains many international travel studies articles and few domestic travel studies works. In fact, among the total 17 travel narratives of *Asian Studies*, 16 are focused

on other countries, while only 1 is purely about domestic travel. This lone article on the Super Typhoon Yolanda narrates the travel experience in Tacloban of PWU SAS Dean Dr. Leonardo Munalim (2020). The strength of *Asian Studies* in international travel studies can be emulated by PWU. The publication of this special issue on travelogues can serve as a beginning of this emulation, in the attempt to increase the production of international travel studies, especially because the majority of these issues are travel narratives in foreign lands (particularly in Antwerp, Belgium). Other practical steps could also be done toward this endeavor such as the following:

1. increase the encouragement and support for faculty members and students to present their research in international conferences;
2. solicit travel-related studies from the faculty members and students, which are naturally outward-focused such as the Helena Z Benitez School of International Relations and Diplomacy;
3. intensify external linkages with other universities and organizations abroad, which can lead to travel opportunities for faculty members and students.

Thirdly, the existence of a foreign student population in PWU could be capitalized for travel studies. Aside from the travel of Filipinos in other countries and Filipinos in other parts of the Philippines, the travel experiences of foreigners in the Philippines are also a legitimate aspect of travel studies. The Research and Development Office (RDO) can invite some selected foreign students to write their travel experiences in the Philippines, or it can also be done by some faculty members who can encourage their foreign students to write travel narratives (especially in classes like Introduction to ASEAN).

Fourthly, Satwinder Rehal's article in another issue of *Bidlisiw* can be instructive for our quest to enrich travel studies in the university. The article that I am

referring to is entitled “Filipino teleseryes in Africa as a new frontier in Afrasian encounters.” Against the mainstream media consumption from the Global North, Rehal explores rare Global South interactions, particularly African-Filipino relations through teleseryes. Though not strictly a travel-related study, Rehal’s article can be instructive of how we can approach travel studies in a different and interesting way. Aside from the more common way of studying it through travel observations, it can also be dealt with using creative outputs such as films, novels, short stories, and other artistic pieces. Axle Christien Tugano, one of this current issue editors as well as its contributor, has some works along this line, particularly his articles on Filipino communities abroad using the films of the award-winning director Olivia Lamasan (Tugano 2021a, Tugano 2021b).

Fifthly, two strands of travel studies can be pursued in PWU: cultural travel studies and social travel studies. As their names suggest, the former is focused on analyzing cultural elements in foreign lands and correlating it to our own cultural experiences; meanwhile, the latter refer to studies focused on issues such as power struggles and social justice in places where we travel. The two strands are represented well by the two particular essays in this special issue. Tugano’s “Linga travel” falls under the category of cultural travel studies, wherein he surveys phallic symbols in different countries in South and Southeast Asia such as Nepal, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Indonesia. Meanwhile, Earl Clarence Jimenez’s “Of flat breads, Ma Ling, and protests” can be considered as a social travel study, wherein he observes some pro-Palestinian protests in Belgium. The seeds of cultural and social travel studies, which are already present in this special issue, can germinate and develop roots if other contributions in the future would replicate the method/approach of the two aforementioned articles in different topics and about different places.

Sixthly, there is a need to go beyond mere travelogues. Typical travelogues are relatively short and sometimes contain random observations about the places we visit. Though a travelogue is an important starting point in travel studies, more academic travel-related studies must be produced if we want to have theoretical

advances in the field of travel studies. Again, in this issue, we can see an attempt to go beyond mere travelogues in the essays of Jimenez and Tugano. Jimenez himself hints this need to go beyond mere travelogues when he crisply states:

If travel is supposed to widen your purview of the world and of the humanity (at least to me), then discarding the tourist lenses and peering beyond the manufactured gloss and veneer of tourism allows us to truly inhabit, though fleetingly, the places we visit. Traveling should be more than seeing places. It should be more of sensing and “reading” people.

This statement by Jimenez gives us one practical way to go beyond mere travelogues: we must focus more on people rather than places. It is important, as cultural and social travel studies cannot be done by focusing only on fascinating natural spaces and magnificent architectural works. In the context of *Araling Kabanwahan* (a Filipinization of Area Studies), historians Atoy Navarro and Adonis Elumbre formulate the concept of “*lakbay-kabanwahan*,” a way of travel writing that seeks to go beyond travelogues. Elumbre (2019) describes *lakbay-kabanwahan* in this way:

Sa konteksto ng pangingibang-bayan, hindi lamang ito travelogue o simpleng pagtalala ng personal na karanasan sa paglalakbay at pananatili sa ibang lupalop. Nakapaloob sa proseso ng pagdadalumat ang malay na pagbibigay-kahulugan at pagbibigay-kabuluhan sa mismong karanasan bilang iskolar sa ibayong dagat. Dito nalilininaw ang kapookan ng mag-aaral at mananaliksik: inilalahad niya ang kaniyang kamalayan at paninindigan sa konteksto ng pag-aaral at pananaliksik habang nangingibang-bayan.

Any tourist can write a travelogue; academics should write academic travel studies. In academic travel studies, observations are not just listed down in a random way; it is organized, centered on a particular theme that the travel writer wants to study.

And this kind of travel studies does not only contain observations; it also supplies analysis using a particular academic perspective/method/approach. There will be much more positive prospects for travel studies in PWU in the future if we strive to go beyond travelogues.

Seventhly, the members of Bayanihan Philippine National Folk Dance Company can be invited to submit their travelogues. These member-dancers are also teaching at the undergraduate level of The Philippine Women's University (PWU). Former PWU President and Chairman of PWU Board of Trustees Helena Zoila Benitez founded the group in 1956 (Namiki 2011). One of their goals is to showcase the folk dances of Filipinos both at national and international levels. As such, the group seriously do their research about the music and dance culture of various ethnic groups in the country. Cadar (1970) states that the music and dance of the Bayanihan dancers came from at least 28 ethnolinguistic groups all over the Philippines. Because of its achievements and various national and international awards, the Philippine government declared the group as the "Philippine National Folk Dance Company" through Republic Act No. 8626 in 1998 (Republic of the Philippines 1998). Throughout the years, they consistently win prestigious awards. Some of these are the following: Tempio d'Oro or Gold Temple Award during the 60th International Folklore Festival in Sicily, Italy in 2015 (Official Gazette 2015); World Dance title at 15th International Folklore Fest in Brazil in 2019 (Pornel 2019); grand prize at the Cheonan World Dance Festival in South Korea in 2022 (Lim 2022); and Ramon Magsaysay Award (Sagisag Kultura n.d.), among many others. It is continuously regarded as the "most prominent folkloric music and dance group of the Philippines" (Castro 2011). Since they regularly perform abroad to represent the country, they certainly have many stories to tell about their travel experiences. In fact, according to the Cultural Center of the Philippines (2021), the group has already performed in 66 countries and 700 cities worldwide. For sure, the current Bayanihan Director and the Director for PWU Campus Life Mrs. Marielle Benitez-Javellana can encourage her dancers to share with the PWU community some of the important gleanings and insights from their local and

international travels.

Meanwhile, it must be noted that all the articles in this special issue are in the English language. The same is true in the case of all travel-related studies in PWU-based journals, as well as in all of the travel narratives of *Asian Studies* journal. Of course, this is just a reflection of the general state of travel studies in the Philippines. The continuing domination of English intensifies further what the Father of New Filipino Historiography Zeus Salazar (2015) calls “*Dambuhalang Pagkakahating Pangkalinangan*” (Great Cultural Divide). It describes the situation of the Philippines, wherein our society is divided into two language-and-culture groups: the *nacion* where Westernized English-speaking and educated middle/upper class belong, and the *bayan* which consists of marginalized Filipinos who speak either Filipino or other local languages in the country. In this divide, it is the *nacion* which greatly benefits, as they monopolized the three channels of power: education, politics, and commerce (since all of these three sectors are in the English language) (Santos 2023). The reality of the Great Cultural Divide is also present in travel studies. The domination of English in travel studies means that it is only accessible to *nacion*. And aside from the fact that only those who belong to *nacion* can read works on travel studies, even the leisure of travel itself is only available for *nacion* as they are the only group which have the financial means to travel. Of course, the case of OFWs is different since the purpose of them going abroad is not to travel for leisure, but to work for the *ginhawa* (*well-being*) of their families. Thus, there is this double marginalization of the masses in travel studies: travel writings are not accessible to them because they are written in English (cultural), and they themselves cannot travel for leisure because of economic inequalities in the country (social).

The use of Filipino can help in democratizing travel studies in the Philippines. Of course, it will not automatically solve the social dimension of the problem since even if travel studies publications are in Filipino, the opportunity to travel is still inaccessible to them unless wealth is more equally distributed in our society.

But it can contribute to the cultural aspect of the issue, as travel writings will be more accessible to *bayán* if these are written in the language that they use for everyday living. Tugano (2023) tries to advocate for this through his *Araling Pangmanlalakbay*. Aside from making travel writings more accessible to *bayán*, *Araling Pangmanlalakbay*'s use of Filipino language helps in centering the Filipino culture in travel studies discourses. Since language is not just a medium of communication but also a reflection of culture, the use of Filipino in travel studies will facilitate a more Filipino perspective in the field. As stated in the epigraph, all travel writing is a form of cultural translation, as travelers have the tendency to “bring the homeland” within them when going to foreign places. But Filipino travel writings have different levels of Filipinoness. What I mean is that some travel writings have implicit ways of showing their Filipino perspective, while other travel writings express this Filipino perspective more explicitly. The use of Filipino language will help the Filipino perspective to be more explicit in travel writings, as it can facilitate the use of Filipino cultural concepts in analyzing foreign peoples and places. This is important since ideally, travelling does not only help us discover *iba* (others), but could also lead us in discovering our *sarili* (self) more fully. In this sense, the use of the Filipino language is a potent and potential tool, not only in democratizing travel studies, but also in decolonizing the field. These are the reasons future intellectual productions of travel studies in PWU should be done in the Filipino language. (Lately, Dr. Leonardo O. Munalim informed me that *Atong Bahandi Journal* will be the next PWU in-house journal, which codifies articles in Filipino. This could serve as an opportunity for the publication of future works on travel studies in the Filipino language).

The publication of this special issue of *Bidlisiw* is a milestone for travel studies in PWU, being the first compilation of travelogue/travel-related studies in all PWU-based journals. It must be noted that travel studies in the Philippines started through travelogues (beginning with colonial travelogues of Spaniards, Americans, and other Western travelers in the country), as it is also the case in many other countries of the world. So, it is only fitting for travel studies in PWU to

start with travelogues as well. As noted above, some important mustard seeds for the development of travel studies are already present in this special issue as well as in scattered travel-related studies in PWU-based journals, such as the following: social and cultural strands of travel studies, its domestic-focus, the use of artistic outputs in writing travel studies such as films, novels, and short stories, and the need to go beyond travelogues. The international focus of *Asian Studies* journal can also serve as a model for travel studies in PWU. Other opportunities for travel studies can be found in the unique situation of PWU itself, such as having a population of foreign students who can be enticed to write travel narratives regarding their experiences in the Philippines. Aside from these, there are also other steps which could be pursued such as the collaboration of tourism and social sciences in travel studies, and the use of Filipino language in travel studies in the university for the democratization and decolonization of the field. All these prospects, if maximized, could result in potentially vibrant travel studies in our university, which can be institutionalized by a periodic publication of travelogues and travel-related articles in *Bidlisiw* or in other PWU-based journals in the future.

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