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Doing Philosophy in Northern Philippines: Interviews with Serrano, Centeno, and Alterado, Officers of the Philosophical Association of Northern Luzon

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Abstract

Established in the northernmost part of the country in 2003, the Philosophical Association of Northern Luzon, Incorporated (PANL) is one of the regional philosophical organizations in the country. This interview article aims to produce the first published historical account of this organization as it marked its 18th year of existence and in connection with the development of Filipino philosophy. Thus, this interview article focused on the history of PANL as it differentiates itself from the national philosophical organizations, such as the Philosophical Association of the Philippines, the Philosophy Circle of the Philippines, and the Philippine National Philosophical Research Society. Using the method of oral history, this interview article specifically documented and assessed: 1) the circumstances behind the foundation of PANL; 2) how PANL differentiated itself from the other major Philippine national philosophical organizations; 3) PANL's general stand on the development of Filipino philosophy, the contextualization of philosophy to the realities of northern Luzon, and the use of Ilocano language in philosophizing; 4) the trends of the research projects of its leading writers/thinkers; 5) the lasting imprints of its presidents on the organization; and 6) the general direction where the organization is heading to. The respondents of this interview article were: 1) Dr. Fernando Martin Serrano, the founding president of the organization; 2) Dr. Jeffrey Centeno, a founding member of the organization and the one who drafted its constitution and by-laws; and 3) Dr. Danilo Alterado, the current president of the same organization.

Keywords: Filipino Philosophy, Philippine Philosophical Organizations, Philosophical Association of Northern Luzon (PANL), Fernando Martin Serrano, Jeffrey Centeno, Danilo Alterado



Introduction

The Philosophical Association of Northern Luzon, Incorporated (PANL) is one of the regional philosophical organizations in the country. It was established in the northernmost part of the country in 2003. In 2018, two of the co-authors of this interview article published an earlier interview article entitled 'Doing Philosophy in Central and Southern Philippines: Interviews with PhAVisMinda Presidents Velez, Gallamaso and Suazo.' Such earlier interview article is not only the template for this present interview article but also its prelude, for one of the distinguished leaders of the Philosophical Association of Visayas and Mindanao, the late Eduardo Babor of the Holy Name University-Tagbilaran, proved to be instrumental in the foundation of PANL (Kahambing & Demeterio, 2018).

As PANL celebrates almost two decades – specifically its 18th year – of existence, there are no published works yet about its history and development. With the use of oral history as a methodology, this interview article aimed to fill in this gap. This interview article specifically inquired about the past and future directions of the organization. The initial and crucial question is on the circumstances behind the foundation of PANL. While this might be generally known for the early members, philosophers and scholars of other persuasions cannot readily trace the events that led to its establishment.

While each of the regional philosophical associations has a distinctive charism and while there are similarities and overlaps in philosophical investigations among the members, it is not quite clear how national philosophical organizations differ from their regional counterparts. Thus, the article also wants to determine how PANL differentiated itself from the other major Philippine national philosophical organizations such as the Philosophical Association of the Philippines, the Philippine Academy of Philosophical Research, the Philosophy Circle of the Philippines, and the Philippine National Philosophical Research Society. An interesting point, moreover, is that there are two philosophical associations in Northern Luzon, PANL and Pagarubangan; thus, this translates to an inquiry as well.

In relation to the broader project and question of Filipino philosophy, the article inquires on PANL's general stand on the development of Filipino philosophy, the contextualization of philosophy to the realities of northern Luzon, and the use of Ilocano dialect in philosophizing. Often, these are questions that might suggest cases of either dwelling within local context or possibilities of transgressing geographic borders as well. A vital follow-up would be to trace the trends of the research projects of its leading writers/thinkers and who they are. It is important to locate the past and ongoing research trajectory of the members so that through literature mapping, scholars can have routes on how to navigate into an initial bibliography of the leading writers. Although a bibliography paper is another worthy project to pursue, what can be expected here at least are the leading writers' fundamental research concerns, rather than the entirety of their works.

A penultimate question can also be raised on the lasting imprints of its presidents on the organization and how they shape a certain character in seeing the association. Finally,

there is the broader course that the organization takes, that is, the question of where the organization is heading as its general direction in the future.

Methodology

This interview article depended on oral history, a methodology that was originally made popular by the American historian Allan Nevins in 1948. Nevins was doing particular research at a time when Americans were already using the telephone in their day-to-day communications. A subtle impact of the use of this device was the sudden reduction of the reliance on written memoranda and written correspondences, documents that can end up in archives. With a dearth of documentary sources, Nevins thought of gathering the views, thoughts, and other information from living informants. These views, thoughts, and other information were audio-recorded, transcribed, and archived afterward for the benefit of future researchers. Oral history, at present, is taken as a purposive collection and archiving of elicited data. This methodology has to rely on a recording device, audio, or video, to produce “near-verbatim transcripts” (Nishimoto, 2007, p. 3). The authors of this interview article decided to use oral history in the sense that there are also not many written accounts yet about PANL, or even about any of the national philosophical organizations in the Philippines.

In its 18 years of existence, PANL only had two presidents: Serrano, who served from 2003 up to 2004; and Alterado, also from Saint Louis University-Baguio, who is the current president starting in 2004. These two presidents of PANL were therefore chosen as respondents of this interview article. Centeno, as the person who drafted the constitution and by-laws of PANL, was chosen as another respondent of this interview article.

An essential requirement in recording oral history is the presence of a prior set-up: there needs to be an acknowledgment of the project’s “assumptions – if not hypothesis or questions – that direct the researcher’s attention to some aspects of behavior or testimony” (Yow, 2005, p. 8). Such is a prerequisite to avoid misleading the respondents into some directionless ramblings. Hence, “it is necessary to understand precisely what it is one is about to evaluate” (Grele, 2003, p. 42). Thus, very initial and raw questions were drafted to elicit the respondents’ preliminary testimonies and other necessary information. Then, initial correspondences and conversations were done with the selected respondents. One of the co-authors of this interview article is based in Saint Louis University-Baguio, where all of the three respondents are also based. Thus, it was very easy for the team to informally get the initial information. The co-authors ensured that all of the three respondents were aware that the final output of the interviews will be published in this interview article.

After reflecting on these short interactions and reviewing the few related texts about the organization, the main questions for the three separate interviews were drawn by the co-authors of this interview article. It must be stated that one of the co-authors of this paper is a scholar who has dedicated more than two decades of his academic career researching Filipino philosophy and has already produced scores of publications on this general topic. Two of the co-authors of this interview article, as already stated in the introductory section,

had already published a similar work on PhAVisMinda. One of the co-authors of this same interview article is based in Baguio City and is working at Saint Louis University-Baguio, and can therefore perfectly and functionally relate with the cultures and languages of northern Luzon. Hence, the crafting of the main questions for the three separate interviews had been done with fairly reliable fore-structures of understanding in the co-authors' minds and a clear overall direction of the research project at hand. The co-authors of this interview article would like to assure their readers that the former did not just arise in the lifeworld of PANL, forcefully elicited information from some unwilling interviewees, and popped out of such lifeworld to weave this present interview article. After the main questions were drawn, one of the co-authors conducted the actual interviews at Saint Louis University-Baguio. The testimonies of two respondents were recorded and transcribed. One respondent, due to his busy schedule, opted to have the actual interview through email. Whenever needed, additional questions and clarifications were communicated to the concerned respondents, with their consequent answers spliced into the transcript. The edited and polished transcripts were sent to the respective respondents for their approval before this final interview article was constructed, except in the case of Serrano who passed away before the actual editing and polishing of the said transcripts.

This interview article utilized the following levels of oral history: 1) preliminary correspondence, informal conversations, and consultations; 2) the "near-verbatim transcripts" and typescripts; 3) the objective and analysis of data; and 4) the publication of this interview article for dissemination and archiving. The actual electronic voice recordings of the two respondents, as well as the actual email exchanges with one respondent, are momentarily kept by the co-authors. The final manuscript of this project decided to rely solely on the transcripts and typescripts, resulting in the paper's interview format, due to the idea shared by the co-authors that the whole project was able to record the voices and typescripts of key actors of the still-unfolding history of PANL. As stated by Kahambing and Demeterio in their PhAVisMinda paper: "An interview article can only be as good as its respondents, the design of the interviews, and the usefulness and appropriateness of the resultant interviews to the goals and objectives of the same interview article" (2018, 167). In addition to that, without a reliably identified oral history archive, this paper deemed that this same paper could effectively serve as the repository of these valuable voices for future researchers who might be interested in PANL in particular and Filipino philosophy in general. The value of such voices can survive the persons, especially the founding members.

Significance of the Paper

This interview article is significant in a number of aspects and levels: 1) it provides some oral histories of PANL and stands as the first academic publication on this important Philippine philosophical organization; 2) it offers the people of the other parts of the country, especially those in the National Capital Region, an appreciation of how philosophy is done and pursued at the northernmost parts of the Philippines; 3) it creates an opportunity for the PANL to reflect on its history and its evolution, specifically its engagement with Filipino philosophy, its utilization of the Ilokano and other northern Luzon dialects, and its anchorage on the diverse, colorful and dynamic realities of northern Luzon; 4) it gives the

other Philippine philosophical organizations, especially the regional organizations, a benchmark for their respective histories, evolutions, directions, and re-directions; 5) it educates the other Philippine philosophical organizations, especially the ones with a national scope, on how to deal with the PANL and the other regional philosophical organizations; 6) it demonstrates the usefulness of the methodology of oral history in exploring the many facets of Filipino philosophy; and 7) it argues for the value of a carefully planned and designed interview article as a legitimate medium for analyzing and, in the process, developing Filipino philosophy. The authors of this paper also intend this to be their belated tribute to the PANL on its 18th year of existence and service to the Philippine academe and Filipino philosophy, as well as a memorial to the leadership and vision of the organization's founding president.

Interview with Dr. Serrano

The late Eduardo Babor and now the late Fernando Martin Serrano met in Manila in the early part of 2003 during one of the events of the Philosophical Association of the Philippines. In that meeting, Babor probably talked about the advantages of having a regional philosophical organization based on his first-hand experiences with PhAVisMinda. At that time, PhAVisMinda was already a 24-year-old organization. The charismatic and passionate Babor was able to convince Serrano about putting up a philosophical organization in northern Luzon to counter the hegemony of the Metro Manila-based national philosophical organizations. In that same year, Serrano convened a meeting of philosophy professors and instructors from different educational institutions of northern Luzon at Saint Louis University-Baguio. Meanwhile, Babor would serve as president of PhAVisMinda from 2006 to 2010, before passing away in 2013.

Serrano finished his Master of Arts in Teaching Philosophy at Ateneo de Manila University and his doctor's degree in Management at Saint Louis University. He was the chair of the Philosophy Department of Saint Louis University-Baguio from 2002 to 2005. His philosophical specialization is on Nietzsche and Existentialism. He served as the founding president of PANL from 2003 to 2004.

The first conversation with Serrano about this project happened on July 20, 2018 at Saint Louis University-Baguio. The actual interview was conducted on September 11, 2018 at the same university. Unfortunately, Serrano died from cardiac dysrhythmia in January of 2020. Below is the transcript of this interview:

Ronald Taggaoa: What were the circumstances behind the foundation of the PANL?

Fernando Martin Serrano: It was actually a reaction against the Philosophical Association of the Philippines. We wanted to show that philosophy is not only in Metro Manila but also alive in the outskirts of the national capital. Every time I attended conventions of the Philosophical Association of the Philippines, I observed how those from the provinces were mere spectators who just applauded the speakers from time to time (*mga taga-palakpak lang*). Aside from this, there was also the issue of leadership. None among the

officers of that national organization were from northern Luzon. The idea of putting up PANL was initially suggested by Dr. Eduardo Babor of PhAVisMinda when he asked me why we should not have a philosophical association that will be based in northern Luzon.

Ronald Taggao: What happened after that conversation with Dr. Babor?

Fernando Martin Serrano: Immediately, I discussed the idea with Jeffrey Centeno back in Baguio City, then we prepared invitation letters to philosophy department heads of the different schools in northern Luzon. It was Jeffrey who drafted the Constitution and by-laws. It was really of great help that a number of them were students in the Graduate School of Saint Louis University-Baguio. I was also then the department head of philosophy of the said university. But of course, we could not have done it without the affirmation of Fr. Paul van Parijs, CICM, the university president at that time. In fact, he joined the meeting and even gave the inspirational talk. This was on May 3, 2003. During that meeting... we had the resolution to put up PANL, and immediately elected the officers. We also put up committees to work on the legal recognition of the said organization, including its registration at the Securities and Exchange Commission. The meeting was not only attended by Baguio-based philosophy departments but also from the provinces of Cagayan, Nueva Vizcaya, and La Union. There were also those who came from the seminaries... The objectives of the association were discussed and adopted, while ensuring at the same time that leadership is not centralized or monopolized by a few. We also planned to extend the association in Pangasinan, Tarlac, and Central Luzon, but this did not materialize.

Ronald Taggao: Can you still recall what was the first major activity of PANL?

Fernando Martin Serrano: In the same year, 2003, PANL held its first regional convention at Balatoc Mines, Benguet. Following its objective of promoting philosophical explorations and research on local cultures, the convention was centered on celebrating indigenous culture, specifically the *cañao*, a festive celebration, and ritual among the Igorot indigenous peoples. We wanted to talk about the philosophy of *cañao*. Mr. Ike Picpican, of the Saint Louis University-Baguio Museum, and Dr. Henry Galuba, of Lorma Colleges, La Union, were the main speakers. We also butchered a pig as part of demonstrating the rituals and we danced to the beat of the gongs. The non-Igorots, the lowlanders, were re-introduced to a cultural practice probably centuries ago that was theirs too but which Spanish colonization had taken away from them. Such activities provided avenues for us to talk about our lives, cultures, and stories. It also helped us to understand our differences in beliefs, practices or worldviews, and yet realized that we can relate to a common celebration. That was kind of liberating for us. As we celebrated our differences, we built understanding. That was why we also initially agreed to welcome those who wanted to attend the philosophical convention despite their financial limitations, allowing them even if they could not fully pay their registration fees. *Isu nga adda ti nag-join idi uray nu awan kwarta na. Kasla ngay nga utang lang, kagudua lang ti maited da okay lang ta we are not after, haan met nga, money making* (That was why there were those who joined before even if they did not have money or only paid half. It was not a money making event anyway). It is unfortunate that such an ideal was not continued.

Taggaoo: Was PANL benchmarked on PhAVisMinda?

Serrano: No. But as I said earlier, I had an informal meeting with Dr. Babor. When he asked me why we should not establish a regional association in northern Luzon, I realized that that was precisely what was needed to decentralize philosophizing in the country, as well as activate philosophical events in northern Luzon.

Taggaoo: What do you think are the differences between PANL and the national philosophical organizations, such as the Philosophical Association of the Philippines, the Philosophy Circle of the Philippines, and the Philippine National Philosophical Research Society?

Serrano: It is more on, as we put in the PANL constitution, that we are trying to philosophize on the local cultures. The first regional convention of PANL was on Igorot culture, and so with the succeeding event in Cagayan we talked about Ibanag culture. Furthermore, we envisioned that our philosophy gatherings should be a mixture of discussions and celebrations of our local indigenous cultures.

Taggaoo: Right now, philosophical associations are measured by their publications and research output, how about PANL?

Serrano: We started with a plan to put up a journal but this did not materialize until now. This journal would have been a great help for the publication of the research output of our members.

Taggaoo: What is the general stand of PANL on the initiatives towards establishing and developing Filipino philosophy?

Serrano: We do agree on developing Filipino philosophy. But to do so we need to establish and recognize our local philosophies. We need to strengthen, for instance, those from the Cordilleras. Just like the human body. You cannot talk of a strong human body without making the other parts strong first. We strengthen Mindanao, strengthen Visayas, strengthen Luzon. You cannot actually talk about Filipino philosophy when philosophy in the country is Manila-centric.

Taggaoo: Do you mean that the development of Filipino philosophy should also take into consideration the dissolution of the philosophical hegemony of the national capital?

Serrano: For Filipino philosophy to develop, local philosophies from the different regions must be developed and ventured into. Like what is happening right now in northern Luzon. We are beginning to work on Ilocano philosophy because of the establishment of PANL. We have a link with Hawaii, and we are offering more avenues to advance local philosophy/ies. I hope they are also doing this in Visayas and Mindanao... I hope PANL and other regional philosophical organizations will keep on exploring the connection between philosophy and local cultures. If this happens, then we can be sure of the

development of what we call Filipino philosophy... Every region has its own philosophy, and we can get a lot of philosophical ideas from these local cultures. Once we try to unify these, I believe we can have a better and stronger Filipino philosophy. We should continue to write and reflect on local cultures. It is high time to reflect on our cultural identities and on our own philosophies, and not just follow the philosophical thoughts of foreign philosophers.

Taggaoa: PANL is therefore interested in a philosophy, or philosophies, that is, or that are, anchored on the realities of the communities of northern Luzon.

Serrano: We continue to write about our own local cultures. We must pursue these and reflect on these. It is high time to reflect on our own cultural identities and on our own philosophies. Of course, philosophy, like hermeneutics or phenomenology, can help us accomplish these. We do not need to start from zero. But it does not mean that we simply follow these foreign thoughts. These could just be our jumping boards, so that we can move forward and reflect on our cultures and local philosophies...

Taggaoa: Who do you think are the leading thinkers/writers of PANL?

Serrano: Dennis Placido can write... There are few individuals who have been able to publish their works like Danilo Alterado, Jeffrey Centeno, Wilfried Vanhoutte, and if I may include Julius Mendoza who is an honorary member and has been our lecturer in PANL gatherings... There is also Joefrey Almazan.

Taggaoa: Their numbers seem so few.

Serrano: We have a lot of members, but they need some push for them to pursue and continue their writing... It is just a matter of encouraging them and giving them some inspiration. I think this is one of the supposed purposes of PANL: to inspire and encourage members to write their own ideas and reflections. Yet, I must admit that we do not have much research output. Maybe because we lack the motivation or the needed support in doing research. Even the PANL is helpless as it is unable to fund the research activities of its members. We lack research output for publication... While PANL has provided avenues where individuals could initially present their writings, admittedly PANL does not have an actual project or program to help the members learn to do research for publication... Maybe PANL can have workshops on doing research. It could be an agenda later on.

Taggaoa: Are there common themes in the research projects of the various members of PANL?

Serrano: Alterado and Almazan have been exploring topics on Iloko mind and philosophy. Not only that their works were about the Iloko perspectives, they also have utilized the Iloko language.

Taggaoa: Is there any initiative among your members, who are mostly Ilocano-speaking, to philosophize and publish using the Ilokano language?

Serrano: One does not need to write using the local language. What is important is their thoughts or topics about local cultures. So, we need to motivate and encourage PANL members to write about their own cultures.

Taggaoo: How do you characterize your presidency?

Serrano: I was the founding president of PANL and served as its head for two years. It was I who conceptualized the name of the organization... My intention was just to establish the organization, and I was not really interested in staying as president longer than needed. So, after two years, I had to pass the leadership to Danilo Alterado. I am happy that the organization remains alive since I left as president in 2004. The founding convention was in my birthplace, Balatoc Mines... As far as I know, it is the PANL convention where we had the biggest number of participants from this part of northern Luzon.

Taggaoo: How do you characterize the presidency of Dr. Alterado?

Serrano: It is okay. But I think it is time for some other person to lead the organization too. There are others who can handle it also. I do not know but he has been in the position for so long. Anyway, he can always take the presidency again in case the new set of leaders cannot manage the organization well. Without doubt, he has done quite well in managing PANL, for how could the organization continue to exist if he has not done well? His leadership though is more of the traditional kind, and that members have to renew their membership annually. In the Constitution, we supposedly have lifetime memberships. But under his leadership, one loses membership when one misses to attend the convention, or when one does not pay for the renewal of his/her membership. You cannot also join the convention without paying. In the first convention, we had to generate funds so that participants could come with a minimal registration fee. We did solicitations to finance the convention... PANL has become like another Philosophical Association of the Philippines. It has evolved into something I despised. The organization has become too academic with backbreaking two-days of talks and lectures... I envisioned PANL to be a venue for camaraderie where participants do engage in lighthearted and relaxed discussions, not another classroom-type activity. PANL was supposed to be doing the kind of symposium that we learned from Socrates. The PANL convention these days has too many speakers and plenary sessions... It is saddening to see PANL moving towards these directions. The Balatoc Mines founding convention should remain a template for PANL to differentiate itself from the Philosophical Association of the Philippines.

Taggaoo: Do you think that PANL was able to achieve its original vision?

Serrano: I do not think so. As I said, PANL has become more of a traditional kind of organization, offering the traditional type of doing conventions and seminars. It simply followed the traditional ways of having an organization. It has deviated from its original purpose. For me, I wanted to go away from the traditional ways of an organization like the Philosophical Association of the Philippines. What I wanted was to strengthen the

friendship and unity of philosophy faculty members, students and even graduates of the philosophy programs who are in the academe in northern Luzon through philosophy, but not too academic as it has turned into these days. One or two talks would be good enough to facilitate discussions during a convention. PANL can still try to go back to its original purpose. Or maybe we can put a Neo-PANL. But I think we must talk about the direction PANL has taken. Also, PANL did not need to be subsumed or become a member-organization of the Philosophical Association of the Philippines. Hopefully, we can have a dialogue on these issues soon.

Taggaoa: What do you think would be the future direction of PANL?

Serrano: I hope PANL will live for a long time. Because that is the testing ground of every organization, that it could withstand the test of time. It is really my hope that PANL will be able to do it. But as I said it must try to go back to its original purpose. Also, the organization's leadership must be spread out and should not be dominated by Baguio-based individuals, or by people from Saint Louis University-Baguio. The organization must again tap the departments and individuals from other schools and provinces. PANL should remake its image as an organization of various individuals and localities.

Taggaoa: Are there things that you might still want to say?

Serrano: I think I have already said enough.

Interview with Dr. Centeno

Jeffrey Centeno is one of the founding members of PANL and has served as one of its officers in various capacities for several years. When Serrano became the founding president of PANL, Jeffrey Centeno drafted the organization's constitution and by-laws. In these foundational documents, the objectives of PANL were stated as: 1) to promote philosophical explorations and researches in local cultures in northern Luzon, specifically in the respective provinces of Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte, La Union, Pangasinan, Isabela, Cagayan, Nueva Ecija, Nueva Vizcaya, and in the Cordilleras; 2) to improve the quality of the teaching of philosophy in the colleges, universities, and seminaries in northern Luzon; and 3) to promote advocacy work for a democratized public sphere by way of philosophical engagements.

Centeno finished his master's degree in philosophy at Ateneo De Manila University and his doctor's degree in the same field at De La Salle University-Manila. His Ph.D. Dissertation at DLSU, supervised by Napoleon Mabaquiao, Jr., is titled *To be just: The significance of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction for political pedagogy* (2009). He has been a professor of philosophy at Saint Louis University-Baguio since 1995. He is currently assigned as the executive assistant to the president of the said university. His philosophical specialization is on political philosophy and hermeneutics.



The first conversation with Centeno happened in September 2018 at Saint Louis University-Baguio. Because of his busy administrative assignment, the co-authors of this interview article opted to redesign the interview session as email correspondence. Such correspondence started on December 7, 2018, and ended on July 18, 2020. Below are the typescripts from such email correspondence:

Ronald Taggaoa: We understand that PANL emerged during the May 3, 2003 meeting at Saint Louis University-Baguio. Can you still recount the persons and circumstances involved during that day?

Jeffrey Centeno: Mainly to create a localized association for philosophy instructors and students in regions 1, 2, and CAR. It was Dr. Ding Serrano, then department chair of philosophy at Saint Louis University-Baguio, who initiated the foundation of PANL.

Taggaoa: When you drafted the constitution and by-laws of PANL, what were the ideas and contexts that inspired you?

Centeno: Mainly to provide an organizational forum for philosophical exchanges among faculty and students in northern Luzon.

Taggaoa: What do you think are the differences between PANL and the national philosophical organizations, such as the Philosophical Association of the Philippines, the Philosophy Circle of the Philippines, and the Philippine National Philosophical Research Society?

Centeno: For one, the intention of founding PANL was to bring in a more cultural approach to doing philosophy, and to provide an Ilocano and Cordilleran voice to intellectual discourses.

Taggaoa: What is the general stand of PANL on the initiatives towards establishing and developing Filipino philosophy?

Centeno: PANL supports doing philosophy from below.

Taggaoa: Is PANL interested in a Philosophy that is anchored on the realities of the communities in Northern Luzon?

Centeno: Definitely. That has always been PANL's advocacy.

Taggaoa: One of PANL's objectives is "to promote advocacy work for a democratized public sphere by way of philosophical engagements." Can you explain to us how PANL carries this very political objective?

Centeno: PANL was never meant to be an instrument of partisan politics. Its emphasis on democracy was more of creating the needed discursive space to engage people in respectful and reasonable dialogue on current issues affecting society.

Taggaoa: Do you think PANL was able to achieve this highly political objective?

Centeno: Significantly. The annual conferences and casual discussions, including the social media platform, among members of PANL and with others, have always been vibrant occasions of these exchanges, all done in the spirit of dialogue and mutual respect.

Taggaoa: Who do you think are the leading thinkers/writers of PANL?

Centeno: Among the reasons for creating PANL was to provide a venue for local philosophers from the Ilocano and Cordilleran regions to present their research interests in a public forum to generate healthy discussions. Speakers and presenters from the Northern regions during annual conferences can be considered contributors to PANL's intellectual depository.

Taggaoa: Are there common themes in the research projects of the various members of PANL?

Centeno: Surely. The themes are clearly about doing and teaching philosophy in the context of cultural reflections.

Taggaoa: Is there any initiative among your members, who are mostly Ilocano-speaking, to philosophize and publish using the Ilokano language?

Centeno: That is the goal. Attempts are underway to write philosophy in Ilocano or Cordillera languages.

Taggaoa: How do you characterize the presidency of Dr. Fernando Martin Serrano?

Centeno: Being the founding president of PANL, Dr. Serrano was a visionary.

Taggaoa: How do you characterize the presidency of Dr. Danilo Alterado?

Centeno: The presidency of Dr. Alterado has seen the growth and development of PANL, from a small group of philosophy enthusiasts into what it is today.

Taggaoa: Do you think that PANL was able to achieve its original vision?

Centeno: Yes, it was. It was able to provide a venue for doing and teaching philosophy for Ilocanos and Cordillerans.

Taggaoa: What do you think would be the future direction of PANL?

Centeno: The key to a sustainable future is an adaptation to an evolving world. PANL can revisit its institutional reason for existence in the light of change, and decide on its revitalized purpose.

Taggaoa: Are there things that you might still want to say?

Centeno: Thank you for the opportunity.

Interview with Dr. Alterado

Danilo Alterado is one of the founding members of PANL. Together with Serrano and Centeno, they officially formed PANL, elected their first set of officers, and started drafting the organization's constitution and by-laws. Soon after that meeting, a philosophical conference was convened at the Balatoc Mines in Benguet that was participated by the philosophy faculty members from Saint Louis College-La Union, University of the Cordilleras, University of Baguio, University of Saint Louis-Tuguegarao, Saint Louis University-Baguio, and the Philippine Military Academy. He has been active in the organization since its inception until today. He is currently serving as its second president since 2004.

Alterado finished his master's degree in philosophy at Saint Louis University-Baguio with the thesis titled *Ernst Bloch Philosophy of the Future in the Light of Christian Eschatology*. He then pursued his doctor's degree in the same field at Ateneo de Manila University. His Ph.D. dissertation is titled *Self-Reflection as Methodological Foundation of Jürgen Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action*. He has been a professor of philosophy at Saint Louis University-Baguio since 1996. He is currently the Associate Dean for Humanities of the same university. True to PANL's identity and cause, his most recent publication is titled *Wisdom & Silence. Essays on Philippine Nakem Philosophy* (2021). His philosophical specialization is on critical theory and Ilokano philosophy.

The first conversation with Alterado about this project happened on July 31, 2018, at Saint Louis University-Baguio. The actual interview was conducted on December 10, 2018, at the same university. Below is the transcript of this interview:

Ronald Taggaoa: How do you characterize PANL at the time when you assumed the presidency?

Danilo Alterado: I succeeded the presidency from the founding president, Dr. Fernando Martin Serrano, in December 2004, so PANL was still in its infancy or it was in its very early stage of existence. I was with Dr. Serrano and Dr. Centeno during the inception of PANL, and was one of the founding members of the association. For the preparation and conduct of the Balatoc Mines Conference in December of 2003, I was the conference director. Just like any newly founded professional organization of philosophy faculty, researchers,

and students, the first in the northern Philippines, the promises were very lofty and the challenges numerous.

Taggaoa: What do you think are the differences between PANL and the national philosophical organizations, such as the Philosophical Association of the Philippines, the Philosophy Circle of the Philippines, and the Philippine National Philosophical Research Society?

Alterado: PANL was organized with a very specific goal and this is clearly stated in its constitution and by-laws. It is the first professional association of philosophy professors, researchers, graduates, and students in northern Luzon. It is committed to the creative formation of philosophical approaches to the study of local cultures, in view of enriching cultural heritage and achieving an adequate understanding of the complexity of human society. PANL recognizes that the rich and diversified cultures in northern Luzon deserve to be preserved and promoted to ensure the identity of the people in this part of the country in the age of globalization. For me, the distinctive difference of PANL with the other national associations is its commitment to the creative formation of philosophical approaches to the study of "*Amianan*" cultures and peoples in view of enriching cultural heritage, and the ethos of cultural self-understanding. We took inspiration and challenge from PAP and PNPRS. But we felt and believed that we have a very unique task for the *Amianan* people: to inquire, speak of and expound the rich resource of cultures and peoples. As for the PCP, this is the national organization of philosophy students but its membership has been limited to the philosophy students in universities and colleges in the National Capital Region. They have not expanded really to different regions.

Taggaoa: What is the general stand of PANL on the initiatives towards establishing and developing Filipino philosophy?

Alterado: PANL supports all efforts and initiatives towards establishing and developing Filipino philosophy. Specifically, PANL wants to underscore here that the Filipino is a plurality of peoples and a diversity of cultures. PANL wants to contribute the Ilokano and *Amianan* perspectives of Filipino philosophy.

Taggaoa: Is PANL interested in a Philosophy that is anchored on the realities of the communities in northern Luzon?

Alterado: Definitely a big YES! This is the direction we are taking: Ilokano and *Amianan* philosophies that are anchored on the realities of the diverse ethnolinguistic communities of northern Luzon. The mediation of our languages is crucial in this philosophical inquiry and the Ilokano language is pivotal in the mediation process.

Taggaoa: Who do you think are the leading thinkers/writers of PANL?

Alterado: Dr. Fernando Martin Serrano, our founding president, and Dr. Jeffrey Centeno are first on my list. They are the "think tanks" of the organization. I have another

list of thinkers/writers from northern Luzon, they may not be members of PANL but the organization is engaged with them and they are supportive of the organization's goals. We have Dr. Julius Mendoza, Dr. Narcisa Paredes Canilao, and Dr. Aurelio Solver Agcaoili. Dr. Agcaoili is an Ilokano from Laoag, Ilocos Norte, but is now living in Honolulu, Hawaii. He is the program chair of the Ilokano Language and Literature program under the Indo-Pacific Languages and Literatures Department of the University of Hawaii-Manoa. He is the founder of the Nakem Conference International. He publishes on Ilokano philosophy and *Amianan* cultures. PANL's encounter with him was pivotal, as his way of doing Ilokano philosophy gave us a clearer and firmer resolve for our direction of doing philosophy. I, myself, am doing researches on Ilokano and *Amianan* philosophy. I have some publications already on these themes. We have young and promising philosophy faculty from different universities in the *Amianan* like Rex Belli Alejandro, Aldrin Jaramilla, and Fides Bitanga. We have another philosophical association in the north which is based in the Lyceum of Aparri, Aparri, Cagayan. The name is Pagarubangan, an Ibanag word that means gathering/discussion/party. There are young and promising thinkers of philosophy there. I do believe they also have philosophical researches/writings about the Cagayanos and their local culture there.

Taggaoa: How does PANL deal or relate with this other northern Luzon philosophical organization, Pagarubangan?

Alterado: Pagarubangan is a younger brother/sister philosophical association in the northeastern part of Luzon. I want to believe that PANL had been instrumental, indirectly, to the birth of Pagarubangan. Some of their leaders and active members are also members of PANL. They usually attend the conferences we organize until now. I see no problem or conflict of interest in our co-existence in northern Luzon. PANL supports their cause. The PANL regional conferences in 2004, 2005, and 2010 were actually held in northeastern Luzon: at Saint Mary's University, in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya; at the University of Saint Louis-Tuguegarao; and at the University of La Sallette in Santiago City, Isabela, respectively. I look forward to having a joint conference with Pagarubangan in the near future.

Taggaoa: Are there common themes in the research projects of the various members of PANL?

Alterado: The individual members of PANL come from diverse philosophical backgrounds, and therefore have differences in their research interests. But a common understanding among us, especially the older members, is that we pursue studies on Ilokano and *Amianan* philosophies, such as Nakem philosophy, indigenous Ilokano methods of philosophical inquiry, and critical heritage, among others.

Taggaoa: Is there any initiative among your members, who are mostly Ilocano-speaking, to philosophize and publish using the Ilokano language?

Alterado: Yes, of course. This is a standing challenge to many of us: to write and philosophize in Ilokano. My current research papers are still written in English because of

my facility with the language and for a wider readership. But the challenge now is to have these translated to Ilokano. I have to mention that Dr. Agcaoili writes in Ilokano and that he has a book on Ilokano philosophy published in Ilokano. In 2014, PANL was able to publish its first book which featured select papers presented in a PANL conference. The title of the book is *AMIANAN*, A philosophical Anthology. By the way, *Amianan* means *norte* or north. The term is a configuration instructive of the confluences of enduring ethno-cultures (e.g. Iloko, Igorot or Cordilleran, Ibanag, Pangasinense, etc.) since pre-colonial times. The anthology includes among others Dr. Canilao's "Adda Kadi Kaes-eskan Ti Biag?, Ike Picpican's Igorot worship and worldview as reflected in ritual performance, Gerry Palcon's on the Cultural spirituality among Itnegs of Abra, Bulatao's Linawa in Pangasinense spirituality, etc. In our 10th anniversary conference in 2013, the late Dr. Florentino Hornedo graced our conference as the plenary speaker and shared with us his work on the Ivatan way of service and leadership. We intend to feature his work in our next publication but due to financial constraints, the said project has to be temporarily shelved.

Taggaoa: How do you characterize the presidency of Dr. Fernando Martin Serrano?

Alterado: Dr. Serrano is a visionary, he shared his vision with us, and he made sure that such a vision of establishing the first professional philosophical organization in the north of Manila would become a reality. His leadership can be characterized as laying down the foundations and providing the impetus for PANL. For him, PANL is also an acronym for the phrase "Philosophy is Alive in Northern Luzon."

Taggaoa: Why was Dr. Serrano's presidency so short (2003-2004)?

Alterado: It was Dr.Serrano's own decision to cut short his being at the helm of PANL leadership. He really took the time to persuade me to accept the leadership then. I want to put it this way: Dr. Serrano's presidency may be short but impactful. He is the founding president of the first professional association of philosophy professors, researchers, students, and scholars in the northern Philippines.

Taggaoa: How do you characterize your presidency?

Alterado: This is the most difficult part of the interview. Maybe, what I can say is that I succeeded as PANL president during its very early stage. I have seen how it grew through all these years. PANL is now 15 years old, and still very much alive, vibrant, and promising. It has accomplished a lot of things.

Taggaoa: How did you manage to be the president of PANL for so long?

Alterado: Being the PANL President since 2004 is rather difficult, yet challenging. The question of organizational sustainability, membership, and finance are hurdles year in and year out. Thanks to the generosity and enthusiasm of our young members, which inspire me to continue the leadership. I have submitted myself more than 5 times in PANL general assembly and election, and have asked our younger members to take on the

challenge of leadership, but they kept on giving me the fresh mandate of leadership. I am very optimistic that in the next election, somebody will eventually rise to the challenge of PANL leadership.

Taggaoa: Do you think that PANL was able to achieve its original vision?

Alterado: My answers are YES and NOT YET. Yes, because I am confident that we are gearing towards our goals; and not yet, because we are not yet fully there. Allow me to mention some fruits of our labor, or indicators of our progress: we have a growing number of publications on Ilokano and *Amianan* philosophies; we have more students in philosophy who are considering undertaking researches on Ilokano and *Amianan* philosophies; we have allied with other professional associations and institutions to strengthen our resolve of achieving our goals; and currently, the US Library Congress has included Ilokano philosophy as one separate category in its catalog system.

Taggaoa: What do you think would be the future direction of PANL?

Alterado: PANL's future direction is clear as it is enshrined in its goals and objectives. However, our task is to strengthen the organization in terms of its financial sustainability. Of course, this is in view of achieving our avowed tasks. The condition of teaching philosophy in our schools and universities remains to be one of our main priorities. The current change of our educational system in the country could have a negative impact on philosophy, both on those who teach philosophy and the teaching of philosophy itself. But this concern should be collectively addressed by all philosophical associations in the Philippines. PANL supports efforts to collectively address this common concern.

Taggaoa: Are there things that you might still want to say?

Alterado: As per current conversations and exchanges among us leaders of different philosophical associations in the country, PANL supports efforts to strengthen the cooperation and coordination among the different organizations, mainstreaming Filipino philosophy, and the professionalization of philosophy, among others.

Synthesis/Conclusion

As mentioned in the introductory section, this interview article specifically aimed to document and assess: 1) the circumstances behind the foundation of PANL; 2) how PANL differentiated itself from the other major Philippine national philosophical organizations; 3) PANL's general stand on the development of Filipino philosophy, the contextualization of philosophy to the realities of northern Luzon, and the use of Ilocano language in philosophizing; 4) the trends of the research projects of its leading writers/thinkers; 5) the lasting imprints of its presidents on the organization, and 6) the general direction where the organization is heading to.

On the matter concerning the circumstances behind the foundation of PANL, Serrano observed how the participants from Northern Luzon have been applauders of the presentations from the National Capital Region. After Babor, then president of the Philosophical Association of the Visayas and Mindanao (PhAVisMinda), suggested putting up a local organization of philosophy, Serrano realized its importance and acted on its foundation. This was, for Alterado, a lofty ideal with challenges met gradually with the support of many philosophy departments. Unlike minding some of the practical challenges that led to the creation of PhAVisMinda such as long-distance travel and being away from families (Kahambing & Demeterio, 2018), the creation of such an organization primarily aimed for the localization of philosophy for instructors and students in Regions 1, 2, and the Cordillera Administrative Region. For Serrano, it was a matter of decentralizing the stage of philosophizing in the country.

The emphasis on localization distinguished PANL from other philosophical associations in the country. Philosophizing on local cultures such as the Igorot and Ibanag, culture became a locus as well as a space for intellectual discourses or the “Cordilleran voice” to be heard. Some of the themes, for example, of the PANL conferences are the following: “Understanding Culture: Towards an Interface between Philosophy and Spirituality” (2007), “Trailblazing *Amianan* Philosophies and Cultures” (2013), “Epitomizing the *Amianan* Lexes of Love of Wisdom” (2014), “Engaging *Amianan* Knowledge and Heritage Discourses” (2016), and “Philosophy, Indigenous Cultures and Earth Studies” (2019).

This difference was based on the creativity of the PANL philosophers to shape new approaches in looking at *Amianan* (“Northern”) cultures. However, this distinctiveness is not far-fetched from the other philosophical organizations in the country but is a form of taking up the challenge and inspiration from them.

On the development of Filipino philosophy and contextualization of the realities of northern Luzon, the officers of PANL unanimously support the initiative but with greater stress on local philosophies. The development of Filipino philosophy, accordingly, must rely on local philosophies or, in Centeno’s words, “doing philosophy from below.” Alterado underscored that the Filipino is diverse in culture and plural in terms of its people. This stems from the fact that the cultural philosophical project of PANL is mediated by the diversity of the languages from the local communities so that methodologies lean towards ethnolinguistic approaches. Another contextualization the PANL engages in is the democratization of the public sphere. PANL’s advocacy for locality acknowledges here the vital contribution of philosophy in creating forums for mutual respect and the spirit of dialogue. Politically, it is non-partisan and supports reasonable dialogue within the political sphere that local communities participate in. Alongside this, Pagarubangan, a younger philosophical association from the north as well, shares the same mission without conflict.

On the matter concerning the research projects and trends, common themes, and philosophizing using the Ilokano language, PANL emphasizes diversity but minding the theme to local philosophy. Projects are underway on the Iloko mind, doing and teaching philosophy through cultural reflections, Nakem philosophy, indigenous Ilokano methods,

and critical heritage. While it is not necessary for Serrano that writing should be in Ilokano, Centeno and Alterado consider this as a standing challenge. As a 15-year organization, PANL's writers/thinkers, albeit few with some honorary members, have already published a body of texts on Ilokano philosophy or philosophizing on Ilokano culture. Based on the interviews, this article briefly introduces them to their general philosophical concerns.

Dennis Placido earned his M.A. in Philosophy and Ph.D. in Educational Management at Saint Louis University. He is the department head of Philosophy at Saint Louis University. He specializes in Martin Heidegger (2003). He co-wrote a book on the philosophy of the human person (2016) and logic (2013).

Danilo Alterado earned his M.A. in Philosophy at Saint Louis University and Ph.D. in Philosophy at Ateneo de Manila University and his Doctor of Management at Saint Louis University. He has written a lot about Ilokano philosophy and its convergence with other topics such as Aquinas (2011), hermeneutics (2015; 2018), the *Aniinan* people (2017), and Filipino philosophy (2017). His recent work focuses on the Ilokano indigenous doing of philosophy (2019).

Jeffrey Centeno earned his M.A. in Philosophy at Ateneo de Manila University and Ph.D. in Philosophy at De La Salle University-Manila. He specializes in political philosophy and hermeneutics. Among his works include Bernard Lonergan's transcendental philosophy of education (2007) and most recently on 'Writing and Being Human' (2021). One with the goals of PANL, he has written on Charles Taylor's ethics of intercultural dialogue (2009).

Wilfried Vanhoutte earned his M.A. and Ph.D. at Université Catholique de Louvain. He specializes in medieval philosophy and Nicholas of Cusa. He is the book review editor of *Philosophia*. He writes on the rights of human and non-human animals (2011) and values within postmodernity (2010).

Julius Mendoza earned his M.A. in Philosophy at Maryhurst Seminary and Ph.D. in Philosophy (with great distinction) at Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven specializing in Anthony Giddens's Theory of Structuration (1989). His works on contextualizing philosophy include a roundtable discussion on indigenous knowledge, worldviews, and philosophy (1999) and philosophy and transformative learning from the Cordillera Communities (2013).

Joefrey Almazan earned his B.A. in Philosophy at San Pablo Seminary, M.A. in Religious Studies at the *Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae* (CICM), Maryhill School of Theology, and Ph.D. in Theology at the University of Santo Tomas. He is a professor of religion, culture, and society at Saint Louis University and the Head of the Department of Religion (2015-2017). He also participated as a scholar at KADOC, KU Leuven. He presented a paper on the inculturation of the Eucharist in Ilocano dynamic equivalence and contextualization at PANL's 12th Regional Conference in 2016.

Fernando Martin Serrano received his M.A.T. in Teaching Philosophy at Ateneo de Manila University and Doctor of Management at Saint Louis University. He specializes in

Nietzsche and Existentialism. He co-authored *Ethics: Modular Worktext for College Students* (2017).

Narcisa Paredes-Canilao earned her M.A. at the University of the Philippines and Ph.D. at the University of Santo Tomas. She is a professor of philosophy at the University of the Philippines-Baguio specializing in Epistemology, Development Ethics, and Indigenous Knowledge. Her recent work engages indigenous psychologies and critical-emancipatory psychology (Paredes-Canilao, Babaran-Diaz, et. al., 2015). Her most cited work talks about decolonizing subjects from the discourse of difference (2006).

Aurelio Solver Agcaoili earned his M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of the Philippines. He specializes in the Ilokano Language, Literature of Indo-Pacific Languages, and *Amianan* Studies. He is based at the University of Hawaii-Manoa and an associate of the Institute of Creative Writing at the University of the Philippines. As was mentioned, he is the founder of the Nakem Conference International. Among his broad corpus, he published the *Contemporary English-Ilokano Dictionary* (2011) and *Balabala ti filosofia nga Ilokano* (2016).

Rex Belli Alejandro earned his M.A.T. in Teaching Philosophy at Ateneo de Manila University and is currently taking his Ph.D. at De La Salle University. He specializes in indigenous philosophy and philosophy of mind. His works on doing philosophy in Ilokano (2015a) and language games towards an Ilokano philosophical anthropology (2015b) have appeared in anthologies from Nakem conferences.

Aldrin Jaramilla earned his M.A. and Ph.D. at Saint Louis University. He specializes in hermeneutics and indigenous/Ilokano philosophy. His recent work explored, together with Alterado (2019), an “Appropriate Philosophizing” or “Philosophizing Cultural Life with Prudence” as a methodological paradigm for Ilokano ontology, epistemology, and ethics.

Fides Bitanga earned his M.A. and Ph.D. at Saint Louis University. He specializes in the philosophy of education and religion. He has written on moral education focused on comfort women (2013) and Derrida’s philosophy of hospitality and the English Test (2019).

Going back to the lasting imprint of PANL’s presidents, Serrano’s intention and conceptualization in establishing the organization became visionary and Alterado’s management and leadership have been vital in the growth of PANL. Serrano’s vision was to bring about symposiums that are Socratic and not academic. His fear has been the reduction of the organization into a ‘traditional’ kind so that for him the original vision has not been sustained. Such an original vision, however, can be a prior lofty promise while taking into consideration the contemporary challenges of education. For Centeno, the very existence of PANL and its work in providing venues for teaching and doing philosophy for Ilocanos and Cordillerans have already achieved the vision. Serrano’s short presidency, indeed for Alterado, was “impactive.” The longevity of Alterado’s presidency is borne out of his members’ renewed trust and enthusiasm. For Alterado, the original vision of the



organization is both achieved and not yet. The publication numbers on Ilokano and *Amianan* philosophies are yet to grow more.

In the direction that PANL undertakes, the common answer is sustainability. Serrano hopes for PANL's long future ahead and that it will soon outgrow its base by having more individuals aside from those in Baguio. There is, Centeno highlights, the importance of adapting to the fast-changing world. Prior visions can be revisited and revitalized to new ends. Under Alterado's leadership, PANL was able to extend its link to other philosophical associations in the country. In such a way, the direction it is heading is no longer alone. Professionalization of philosophy and mainstreaming of Filipino philosophy might be a future that is shared and what PANL brings to the table is its sustained vision of doing philosophy from below but ironically done from the north.

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