SAVORING OUR FOOD CAN SAVE US – COUNTERING THE GLOBAL WITH THE LOCAL

Fernando N. Zialcita

Protecting biodiversity could be one way of combatting climate change and creating sustainable employment in the countryside. This strategy can become more palpable if protection is accorded to specific ‘terroirs’ (kapookan) in the Philippines whose products are unique because they result from the interplay between an ecosystem and a cultural tradition. Internationally, both in Europe and Asia, the labelling system called “Geographic Indications” is being used to protect such localities and their products. The essay looks into how these two concepts, “terroir” and “Geographical Indications” could help protect biodiversity and the rural sector in the Philippines. On the one hand, it shows how issues raised by the implementation of the two concepts are meaningful to anthropology. On the other hand, it shows how anthropology could contribute to broadening and deepening these concepts. Because anthropology examines the interaction between communities and their ecosystems, it can locate and define particular terroirs. Moreover, because anthropology tries to interpret objects in their concrete particularity, it can highlight why a particular product is unique both nationally and internationally. Finally, recent anthropology has become more sensitive to the impact of outside forces on the environment. Sadly, international forces are intervening in the implementation of a meaningful version of Geographical Indications.

Keywords: Terroir, kapookan, Geographic Indications, multisensorial enjoyment, dialogic versus monologic globalization

Looking for bananas in the wet market is often a more satisfying experience than in a supermarket because of the variety. Usually, there are at least two to choose from: Lakatan (Musa acuminata Colla), whose thick bright yellow skin sheathes a sweet, aromatic flesh, and Latundan (Musa acuminata x Musa balbisiana), whose thin pale yellow skin protects a whitish flesh that, though sweet, has a faint acidity. Sometimes, we find the tiny finger-sized Señorita
Savoring our food can save us

(Musa acuminata Señorita), whose notoriously clingy skin yields a banana whose intense sweetness hints of sulphur when hailing from the volcanic highlands of Tagaytay. In a supermarket, these varieties are not always available. One constant however is the so-called “Cavendish” banana, which is massively cultivated on Del Monte plantations in Mindanao. Longer and bigger than even Lakatan, it seems cleaner than the three varieties above because its pale yellow skin has none of their natural brown streaks. Cavendish has a synthetic taste. However, because of efficient production, distribution, and branding (it carries the label “Del Monte”), it appeals to those who mistakenly believe that fruits should look immaculate. It has edged out its tastier competitors from the supermarkets.

Cavendish banana does not appeal to Filipinos who patronize the wet market. Yet, because it is easier to package and export abroad, many imagine that monocrop plantations may be the one viable way to create widespread employment for farmers while generating profits (Isenhour 2014, Lian Pin Koh et al. 2011). Unfortunately, there is a danger that always threatens monocrop plantations. Because they rely on a single species, a blight can quickly spread and destroy an entire plantation. Biodiversity, that is, diversity in genes, species and ecosystems, can better assure us of food security. For this reason, the Philippine government in partnership with the private sector has developed a biodiversity strategy and action plan for 2015-2028 (DENR-BMB 2016). The strategy and action plan provide a clear vision. However, this vision could become more palpable if we begin looking at specific localities in the Philippines as conjunctions of unique natural features and cultural practices that yield crops found nowhere else in the world.

Let us examine the concepts of terroir and “Geographical Indications” (GI). The questions to ask are how can these two concepts help protect biodiversity and ultimately our rural sector in the Philippines? What issues do they raise which are meaningful to anthropology? What can anthropology contribute to broadening and deepening these concepts?

Promoting cultural and biological diversity via Geographical Indications

“Geographical Indications” is a branding system, which is now used by many states including our neighbors in Asia, to protect particular agricultural products, and lately even nonagricultural ones by connecting them to a place. It has implications for some of our key concerns in anthropology, as will be seen. Together with the concept of terroir, it can help protect biodiversity because it gives rural communities pride of place and economic benefits.
Otherwise farmers could switch to a generic monocrop regime if they see the latter as offering a better livelihood (Feintrenie et al. 2010).

**Terroir.** To understand GI, we should start with the French concept of “terroir” because it is at the heart of such a labeling system – at least as understood in Europe, but not necessarily in the U.S. A terroir is both an ecosystem and a cultural system. It is a specific spot on this vast planet whose particular food product is the result of a conjunction of natural factors: 1) topography, soil, water distribution, climate, genetic ancestry and 2) traditional cultural practices connected with its production from planting to processing to final presentation. The product’s label is connected with its place of origin (Albert 1998, Prévost 2014, Priori et al. 2014). The label cannot be used for other products, even from the same nation-state, no matter how similar. In French, the term is “Appellation d’origine contrôlée”; in Spanish “Denominación de origen”; in Italian “Denominazione d’origine”. Wines can be called Bordeaux only if produced in Southwestern France in the plains surrounding the Garonne River, while wines from Burgundy can only come from the province of Burgundy in the hills of Eastern France in the Jura region. The logic is that the flavor, aroma and texture are the products of a unique fusion of both natural environment and cultural tradition. What is a vineyard’s soil? Is it a rich loam? Or is it sandy? Or full of pebbles? French tradition does not encourage watering a vineyard. The soil, together with the sun, must speak through the finished product.

To elucidate the meaning of terroir and labelling according to origin, I shall explain the case of Champagne. Then I shall show how the rationale for protecting the label “Champagne” could be extended to our own lamhanog.

The art of making a bubbly wine was perfected in the province of Champagne in northeastern France during the 18th century. Contrary to its elitist image, the region where the grapes are grown is neither fertile nor gracious. The soil is actually poor, being a limestone stratum, the winters are harsh because two masses of air collide here: the Continental and the Atlantic. The harshness of the climate and the poverty of the soil of Champagne are considered ideal for a wine that has a slightly astringent taste but has a delicate flavor. Three grape varieties are carefully blended – Pinot noir, Pinot meunier, and Chardonnay. The legal framework that protects the label dictates that these grapes should be picked by hand rather than by a mechanical apparatus. The fermentation of the blend results in a still wine. To make it a bubbly, sugar and yeast are added to create a second fermentation. The bottles are kept in a cool cellar for several years. Eventually the yeast dies, thereby completing the
fermentation process. To remove the dead yeast, the bottles are turned and inverted to attract the yeast to the neck. This process is called rémuage. It is done daily. Again, this process is regulated, it must be done by hand. To force the yeast out, the neck of the bottle is frozen in an ice-salt bath. Here that portion of the wine where the dead yeast has collected freezes into a tube. When the bottle is slowly opened, the pressure from the carbon dioxide forces the frozen tube out (dégorgement), leaving a clear Champagne. To adjust the flavor, white wine, brandy and some sugar are added. Champagne is aged for some more time – the length depends on the maker – until it is finally deemed ready to be opened (Henri’s Reserve 2021, Michelin Guide 2018, Jarvis 2017).

The process of making a bubbly wine has spread. But even in France, other bubblies made in other regions cannot be called Champagne, they can only be called Crémant. In Spain, a bubbly is called a Cava; in Italy, a Spumante; in Germany, a Sekt. Hence in an era where prices of goods drop because capital easily migrates across national boundaries, the price of a Champagne can be protected because the label and the lore it carries cannot be duplicated. Moreover, the landscape in which the wine is produced with its rolling hills on strata of limestone is equally protected. It commands a price because of the expensive bubbly it produces. Even as globalization fosters homogeneity on a planetary scale, intensified connectivity creates a counter-narrative. Heterogeneity is appreciated and rewarded with a good price. Labelling according to origin has been applied to other products from other countries in the European Union, such as cheese or ham from a particular definable terroir.

What about the Philippines, do we have identifiable terroirs? In principle, yes, but these have not been studied in depth. By this, I mean that the relationship between the finished personality of a product vis-à-vis natural factors, such as soil, climate, water, and topography, and cultural processes involved in its production has not yet been studied. Nor do we have a system in the Philippines that applies labeling by origin. Experts tell me there is a difference in taste between mangoes from Zambales, Guimaras, and Cebu. But such qualities have to be articulated through formal description and ultimately through labeling so that only mangoes grown within a particular zone in Zambales can be labeled “Zambales mangoes”.

Kapookan. Let us discuss elements in the terroir of lambanog of Tayabas. (I became interested in Tayabas lambanog because of the field school, the Ateneo Cultural Laboratory, that we held in Tayabas, Quezon in 2009 for three weeks. I followed up my interest with subsequent visits.) Ige Ramos, a food expert, has proposed that terroir be translated into Tagalog as kapookan.
Zialcita

(Ramos 2019:27). This is more emphatic than the French terroir, for it stresses the “is-ness” of a place (pook).¹

The historical origins of lambanog have yet to be determined. But one area associated with it is Banahaw Volcano and its foothills in Quezon Province where the municipalities of Lucban, Tayabas and Sariaya are found. Tayabas is a major producer of lambanog, both branded and unbranded.

Banahaw is regarded as a sacred mountain by Tagalogs. Sacred sites are located on its sides from its foot to its peak overlooking a crater. Although the sites carry Christian names like Balon ni Sta. Lucia (St. Lucy’s Well) or Kuweba ng Santisima Trinidad (The Cave of the Most Holy Trinity), they are natural formations that, in an animist context, inspire awe: a waterfall or a huge cave opening in the middle of a primary forest. On the Tayabas side, the visitor enters into a world of clear waterfalls and springs and dense forest vegetation. The clarity of the water and the coconut trees growing on the lava-filled slopes of a volcano could be emphasized in the marketing of lambanog. Unfortunately, they are not. One obvious reason is that the impact of both on the flavor of Tayabas lambanog has not been studied. Nor is the lore of the mountain alluded to either. Not mentioned too is how the sap of the coconut palm is extracted. The coconut flower is bent and its sap collected daily. Accessing this is a dangerous occupation. The manggagarit [coconut tree sap collector] must climb not only one nearly vertical trunk but must cross to another coconut tree on bridges consisting of bamboo poles tied from the top of one coconut tree to the other. Deaths and injuries have resulted from these crossings. Surely the risk involved should have an effect on the pricing. The sap is fermented first to turn into tuba (coconut wine), then it is distilled into the powerful liquor that is lambanog.

The distillation process itself has a story to it. Today a metal distiller is used. But in earlier centuries, it was a hollowed-out wooden trunk with a metal still connected to it. Mexicans call this the destilador filipino.² Why so? Filipino migrants to the Pacific Coast of Mexico brought with them two arts: (1) The art of making tuba wine and (2) the art of distilling liquor from this wine (Machuca 2009a, 2009b, 2010). Tuba-making continues to be very popular in the Mexican states of Colima, Jalisco and Guerrero where Acapulco is located. Indeed, tuba is more available there than in Tagalog or Visayan

¹ Ige Ramos proposed either kalupaan or kapookan. I told him the latter is more appropriate. Hence, the term is truly his. [Cf Ramos 2019]
² This is based on my visits to museums in Guadalajara and San Luis Potosi, both in Mexico.
provinces I have visited! Tubâ on the Pacific Coast of Mexico is daily fare and is sold at stands along the roadside with nuts and fruits thrown in. Filipino migrants also taught Mexicans how to distil liquor from tubâ (Machuca 2009a). They called it “vino de coco” (“coconut wine”) but official documents of the 17th century said it was more correct to call it aguardiente (liquor) because it was distilled with alambique (stills) (Zizumbo & Colungo 2007:95). Coconut liquor became very popular; it was credited as benefiting the body in many ways, such as helping digestion. However, throughout the 17th century, authorities tried unsuccessfully to ban the liquor because it competed with wines from Spain. Its manufacture was successfully prohibited in 1724 (Zizumbo & Colungo 2007:192). But tubâ-making continued. In the meantime, the destilador filipino apparatus was used on the Pacific Coast, which had many Filipino migrants, for the distillation of a new liquor, mezcal (Machuca 2010:15) which was eventually refined into tequila. Mezcal was distilled from the fermented sap of the agave cactus as early as 1619 (Zizumbo & Colungo 2007:100). This link between lambanog and the world-famous tequila is not mentioned either in promotionals for lambanog. And yet it shows that lambanog has a long, illustrious tradition behind it. It surely is not a poor man’s copy of vodka (contrary to the misleading label of “Lambanog: Philippine Vodka”).

**Geographical Indication (GI).** Both nationally and internationally, terroirs are protected by a system of labelling called “Geographical Indications” (Giovanucci et al. 2009). GIs are protected internally within the European Union because of legal recognition. To broaden international support for GIs, the EU has been encouraging Asian countries to have their specialty products included in the GI list. India and China each have many products, from tea to textiles, in this list (European Commission 2021, Hirwade & Hirwade 2006, Patel & Zala 2021). Southeast Asian states have also entered particular products in this list (Wongprawmas et al. 2012). A good example is Cambodia’s kampot pepper.

One understandable exception is Singapore, a city-state. Less understandable is why the Philippines has not entered any product into the list. In 2020, two webinars organized by ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) Philippines, described potential candidates. For food: Davao pummelo (others would use “pomelo”) and Guimaras mangoes. I spoke on Tayabas lambanog. For weaving: T’boli t’nalak and Basey straw mats. Three experts on GIs, Estela Duque and Patrick Belisario, both Filipinos, and Peter Damary, a Swiss, spoke (Duque et al. 2020a, Duque et al. 2020b). A revelation was that issues of hegemony and power are present.
Although the U.S. is a signatory to GI (United States Patent and Trademark Office n.d.), it disagrees with the European Union on the meaning of place-labeling. While Europeans apply place-labeling only to products created within a specific locality using particular local materials and following a particular protocol, Americans regard a place name as a mere generic label that can be applied to any product depending on what its maker decides, resulting to a collision with Europeans. Italians insist that the label “Parmigiano Regiano”, translated as Parmesan, can only be applied to cheese coming from Parma-Reggio and not to cheese from another zone in Italy. The cattle in a delimited zone feed on grass which carry three kinds of microbes that thrive only in that locality. It is these cattle that yield the milk used for the local cheese. Moreover, the process that turns the milk into cheese is partly by hand, and therefore artisanal. It involves lifting blocks of whey and shaping them into the famous Parmigiano Reggiano wheels. Cheeses are inspected regularly using manual techniques. Aging, as in champagne, is important because a set number of years of aging, in this case a minimum of two years, gives more depth to the flavor and scent (Romeo 2018). But cheese makers in the US want to use “Parmesan” as a generic term for cheese that, though seemingly like the original, is more speedily done, therefore cheaper, and uses additives for better storage life. Hence, trademark labels such as “Kraft 100% Grated Parmesan Cheese” which carry additives like potassium sorbate, cellulose powder and cheese cultures that are banned in authentic Parmigiano-Reggiano (Olmsted 2012). Europeans use GIs, both as an end in itself and as a means to impel rural development and conserve local artisanal traditions. A place of origin label, such as “Champagne”, can be used by producers in that region, whether large or small, to identify their products because it is regarded as a public good (Curzi & Huysmans 2021). In contrast Americans tend to divorce GIs from a locality and regard such labels as part of a privately-owned trademark (Curzi & Huysmans 2021). To be sure, safeguarding a terroir with a GI does not automatically protect a terroir. In a capitalist setting, there exists the temptation to expand the land allocated for a profitable crop and to produce in ever-growing volume. But at least, the GI system, as conceived of by Europeans, compels producers and consumers alike to value a place in its specificity.

Though sectors in the Philippine State want GIs for selected products and are encouraged by the European Union, we are told that they are being discouraged by the US (Duque et al. 2020a, 2020b). The Americans say they want to defend “free trade”. But free trade can exacerbate social and economic inequality if it benefits those who have ready and prior access to capital (Borras 2006). In the Champagne and Burgundy regions, not all producers have the capital to mount an expensive promotional campaign. The use of such
labels as “Champagne” or “Burgundy” gives them a fighting chance. Looked at more closely, the subtext is that they want American businesses to have the freedom to develop products, whether original or copied, that they can sell more quickly and more cheaply because of various factors like superior mechanization and substitutions. The Europeans’ emphasis on the value of the organic, the artisanal and the uniqueness of locale is seen as a hindrance.

There are key issues underlining terroirs and Geographical Indications which are significant for anthropology.

Some key issues demanding anthropology’s attention

Some key issues are the following: (1) How to emphasize “place” and “locality” vis-à-vis the widespread tendency to value Unilinear Time defined as “Progress”? (2) How to highlight the importance of sensorial knowledge in a world that prioritizes quantitative, manipulative Reason? (3) How to keep attention focused on the reality of coloniality in and through the seeming neutrality of “globalization” and “free trade”?

Place versus Time. In David Harvey’s famous formula, globalization is ‘time overcoming space’ (Harvey 1989); remote regions easily connect to each other today through advanced technology. The formula hints at another of globalization’s prejudices: The notion that local particularities do not matter vis-à-vis “Progress”. Supposedly if we take the capitalist highway dictated by the dominant countries of the Global North, we shall arrive at universal prosperity, even at the cost of flattening out variety. Time (speed, efficiency, connectivity) is regarded as more important than space. Supposedly space is an empty entity that can be manipulated at will.

Doreen Massey, a geographer, counters that space is in fact active. It is “exhilarating and threatening... because it [is] unfinished and always becoming” (Massey 2005:59). As human beings we inhabit space, we relate to each other in space. Let me qualify this by saying that “space” is too general. It is better to talk of a particular form of space, namely a “place”. A place is where we relate to fellow human beings, where we create and arrive at meaning. Stories occur within a place which is essentially local. Though agreeing with Massey, Tim Ingold, an anthropologist, prefers to use the expression “life-worlds” (2011), People inhabit life-worlds that are particular configurations of time and place. Massey urges that we ask which sector benefits when local spaces are regarded as manipulable entities 2005:130, 141). Who benefits: ordinary people, employees, consultants, managers, owners? The myth of unstoppable progress benefits a powerful few, while
blotting out particular time-spaces which have their own stories (Massey 2005:82-82). Who are these powerful few? I prefer to be more explicit. The paradigmatic figure in our contemporary world is the capitalist who assures his investors that annual growth is unstoppable. How this growth is attained does not matter to him. The monocrop plantation promises a homogenizing “Progress”. The biodiverse farm resists it with the narrative of a Place.

Massey does not say we should shun the global, for the specificity of a place may in fact connect it with other places on the globe (1994:156). An example is our cacao \textit{[Theobroma cacao]}. Hitherto ignored, our cacao has a story to tell that is distinct from the better-known cacao coming from its neighbors. The Philippines was a captaincy general of the Viceroyalty of New Spain\textsuperscript{3} from 1565 to 1821 when the latter broke off from Spain. Every year it traded with the Mexican core of New Spain via the galleon trade. Cacao, which was a domesticate of the indigenous Mexican world, entered the Philippines and became a choice everyday drink [\textit{tsokolate}].

Aside from clarifying the relationship between the local and the global, the case of cacao can show how protecting biodiversity and cultural diversity benefits our farmers. The Philippine government encourages the cultivation of cacao as a good source of income for farmers. Here the farmer has two options: 1) raise cacao for the bulk market, or 2) raise cacao for premium chocolate bar makers in foreign countries. The first option will mix the farmer’s cacao with that from other places. It is a mass market that aims for cheapness and is not interested in the local. The second option, however, is a select market of connoisseurs that values the uniqueness of a place and will pay for the experience.

Estela Duque, a Filipino expert in the manufacture of premium chocolate bars, has succeeded in connecting cacao growers in Southern Cotabato, beginning with her uncle’s Kablon Farms, to premium chocolate makers in Europe such as Duffy. Such premium chocolate makers emphasize terroir because this is believed to influence taste. Hence when such makers make use of cacao from Kablon, they emphasize that the cacao comes from Kablon on the slopes of Mount Apo in Southern Cotabato. The identity of both the farm and the location is recognized. The difference in pricing is notable, says Estela

\textsuperscript{3}During the 16th-18th centuries, the Spanish empire was divided into viceroyalties, of which the largest was that of New Spain which covered what is now the Western US, Mexico and Central America and the Philippines and the Marianas. The capital was Mexico City. [Map of the Viceroyalty of New Spain: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nueva_España_1795.png#/media/File:Nueva_España_1795.png]
in public dégustations of premium chocolate bars that she has organized in different places in Metro Manila in 2017, 2018, and 2019. If it is bulk cacao, the price is ₱90-150/kg. If it is fine flavor cacao from South Cotabato, the price is a much higher €5/kg or ₱283.45. However, she warns that the pricing does not hold for all parts of the country. The pricing for South Cotabato, which is a flat plain, has to change in the Cordillera, where she too is involved. Because of the hilly terrain, Cordillera farmers and representatives face hurdles when consolidating their pods at a processing point with a 6-hour limit. Nonetheless the lesson is clear. All things being equal, the cacao farmer supplying premium chocolate makers, while emphasizing particularity of terroir, receives a better compensation than one who supplies bulk cacao.

Here we meet the paradox of globalization. By transforming the globe into a vast market, it promises everyone, whether producer or customer, a steady supply of cheap raw materials. At the same time, however, within this market, admiration is given to products that stand out because of their singularity. Even as globalization fosters homogenization across political and geographical boundaries, a counter-narrative has spread. As different nationalities increasingly meet each other, they want to know how, on the one hand, they are similar as fellow human beings, but how on the other hand, they differ from each other because of history and culture.

Anthropology is the one discipline that has excelled in the study of the local: it studies communities located within a particular, definable area. Anthropologists can record the look, feel, taste, smell of the product; the process by which it is made, its several uses in the community, and variations in the product according to place. Ecological anthropology, as developed by Julian Steward, stressed the need to locate a community’s social organization, its beliefs and its practices vis-à-vis a specific physical environment. Studies on terroir can make ecological anthropology’s interest in biodiversity more focused by showing how the convergence of topography, soil, climate, and water distribution and traditional cultural practices enables a unique product to emerge. Ecological anthropology allows us to heed the call of Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin ([1755-1826] 1949) to develop gastronomy into a science that looks into all phases of food production from its cultivation to its cooking. At the same time, new developments in ecological anthropology or, more precisely in the environmental anthropology that claims to be more inclusive, can broaden our understanding of who the actors are. Traditional

---

4 It is noteworthy that, in India, interviewed consumers express a preference for products with GI certification because of assurance that they have been organically grown (Dhamotharan et al. 2015).
ecological anthropology conceived of the ecosystem and the human actors as an isolable, closed system. Environmental anthropology bids us realize that the actors may have connections both regionally, nationally and internationally (Kottak 1999, Jaiswal 2018). The terroir may be local, it may be a counterweight to a globally spreading homogenization. Nonetheless the farmers involved in it may be making decisions with an eye on the city and beyond. Hence there may exist a dialectical relationship between the local and the global.

Anthropology in general, whether environmental or not, has always been inclusive, it is open to working with experts from other fields. This would be the case in the study of a terroir. Anthropologists could work with natural scientists who would analyze the soil, water, climate and genetics of the organism. One shared goal could well be a map of different terroirs in the Philippines that will enable us to appreciate, for instance, the differences between mangoes in Zambales, Guimaras and Cebu and thus brand accordingly.

Multisensorial enjoyment as an act of resistance. The defense of a terroir can be linked to a new interest in both sociology and anthropology in analyzing the role of the senses vis-à-vis culture and society, and in developing an ethnography that is more sensuous, using sensory words and metaphors. This interest can be expanded by introducing a political economic dimension by showing how the act of producing and enjoying food from a terroir can be a form of resistance to capitalism’s obsession with speed and homogenization. But first, let us listen to how sensory sociology links enjoyment to identity.

Kelvin Low sociologist of the sensorium, says that 1) it is through our senses that we create a world, and 2) it is through the sensory choices we make that we fashion our identity either as individuals or as a group (Low 2012). He quotes Adam Chau who asks if social actors are “simply being in the world? Or are they actively producing this world, and doing so sensorially?” Chau (2008:490, Low 2012:274). As embodied selves, individuals conceive their selves as “perceived sensations and active sense-making practices” (Waskul et al. 2009:6, quoted in Low 2012:275).

Applying these, we can say that the world we create and the identity we fashion could be an alternative to the hegemony of Fast Food and mass-production. When, for instance, I devote some time to cooking and savoring adobo that has been carefully soaked in garlic, pepper and vinegar, I affirm my Filipino-ness and refuse to succumb to quicker ways of assimilating food because there is a garlicky fragrance that I hanker for. This identity could also
be an affirmation of my ethnic identity vis-à-vis another. The Ilocano who prefers *pakbet* the Ilocano way – eggplants, tomatoes and small bittermelons cooked in their juices aided by just a small amount of water and a pinch of Ilocano *bugguong* (fermented anchovies) – affirms this identity vis-à-vis the Tagalog who takes almost the same ingredients, but sautés them in oil, garlic, and Tagalog *bagoong* (fermented shrimps), and calls the dish *pinakbet*. Though Ilocos produces garlic as a cash crop, much of it is exported to Pampangos and Tagalogs who use it heavily in their everyday cooking where oil becomes aromatic through sautéed garlic and onions. Rural Ilocanos find Tagalog cooking stinky, because of the everyday use of garlic, and too oily.

The identity could also be of one locality vis-à-vis another within the same ethno-linguistic group. Bulakenyos and Tayabasin are both Tagalog speakers. Yet there are distinct differences between their food cultures and ultimately their identities. Bulacan has swamps that border Manila Bay, while Tayabas and its coconut plantations spread out on the shoulder of Mt. Banahaw. Much more than in Bulacan, its foods rely on the coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) with their heavy use of its milk (*gata*) and its sweetish vinegar. In Bulacan, the swamp-loving nipa palm (*Nypa fruticans*) yields a vinegar that is slightly salty because of its brackish habitat. There are markers that Tayabasin employ to define their identity vis-à-vis other Tagalogs. One of them is the Tayabasin version of Tagalog, which is used in townhall meetings to encourage participation by all. A conspicuous emblem is the *pako* (*Diplazium esculentum*) or mountain fern which, as the Tayabasin say, can be cooked with eggs for breakfast, sautéed in garlic and onion for lunch, and stewed with *gata* for dinner. Anthropology can show how local identity is constructed in and through the products of the *kapookan*.

Sensorial anthropology can link the importance of the terroir to an emerging reaction to the hegemony of Fast Food. It can explore how this resistance is taking place within the realm of taste.

George Ritzer coined the term “McDonaldization” to denote practices, even outside the food industry, that prioritize speed, efficiency and quantity over care, deliberation, and quality (2015). He sees McDonaldization happening in other domains such as mass-produced housing and in educational trends which encourage fast turnovers of students. The Slow Food Movement, (Dowd 2016, Pietrykowski 2004, Gaytan 2004) begun in 1986 by Carlo Petrini as a protest against the opening of a McDonald’s in the heart of Rome, calls itself such because it decries the obsession with Speed in today’s food production. Petrini, a former sociology student who had been involved in politics, wanted “to imbue political action with song and pleasure”
Food, for the Slow Food Movement, must be “Good”, that is, the ‘educated, well-trained’ palate can recognize that the food has been prepared with care without prejudice to the naturalness of its ingredients. It should be “Clean” because every stage in its production respects the environment and biodiversity and is thus healthy. It should be “Fair” because it respects both cultural diversity and the labor expended by people at every stage of its production (Slow Food 2015). Unfortunately, all these are contravened by profit-obsessed mass-production.

Slow Food bids us take time out once in a while to prepare our food with care, and, to relish it by opening our several senses to its subtle interplay of taste, texture and aroma. As the Slow Food Manifesto says,

“A firm defense of quiet material pleasure is the only way to oppose the universal folly of Fast Life.

May suitable doses of sensual pleasure and slow, long-lasting enjoyment preserve us from the contagion of the multitude who mistake frenzy for efficiency” (Slow Food n.d.).

This should not be mistaken for sheer hedonism. On one level, this is an active defense of the very human act of enjoyment. ‘Savoring’ is better translated into Tagalog as “namnamin” [namnam, ‘to savor’]. Such a translation highlights the holistic nature of the act of eating. Pagnanamnam involves carefully enjoying an experience, like for instance getting up from siesta and gently allowing the feeling of being rested to envelope our body. Applied to food, it would mean carefully exploring and analyzing the experience of a dish with our different senses. Such enjoyment is crucial for saving our products and our terroirs. A family cook says she prefers Taiwanese garlic to Ilocano garlic. The bulbs are bigger, thin-skinned and therefore easier to peel. Ilocano garlic

---

5 The picture for mass-produced beef is sordid. The meat comes from cattle that have more fat because they are not allowed to range freely and are instead cooped up in pens. Because they are fed corn rather than their natural meal of grass, they expel much manure in which they wallow while immobile the whole day. The danger of contamination of meat by E. coli bacteria is a threat especially to young children and the elderly. Outbreaks have taken place in the US and other countries, resulting in severe illness and even death (Kenner 2016). Moreover, the craze for beef has an ecological consequence as it requires clearing land, including forest, to raise soybeans and corn for cattle. This is happening in Costa Rica and Central America, which are major suppliers of beef for the USA (Myers 1981). It is also happening in the Amazon. More than logging, the craving for more pastureland is a key reason for reducing the Amazon’s forests, described as the “lungs of the Earth” (Khadse 2018). Note too that methane emissions of cattle are regarded by climate experts as being as serious a cause of global warming as carbon emissions.
garlic bulbs are small and thick-skinned. ‘But isn’t Ilocano garlic more pungent (*mas matapang*) in taste?’ ‘It doesn’t matter,’ she replies. ‘Because it is smaller, it takes time to peel, so the imported garlic comes out cheaper.’ The temptation of speed trumps the chances of a native product.

On another level Slow Food links enjoyment with practical action. It has a taste education program operating institutionally through its University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy and through seminars. It encourages developing networks with farmers to promote sustainable agriculture and the cultivation of endangered crops. Slow Food is now an international movement with chapters in the Philippines that are actively fighting to conserve endangered crop species. Anthropology can look into the experiences Filipinos report when enjoying food. It could also look into how a movement like Slow Food is doing two things: educating people to enjoy food and developing networks with farmers to protect endangered food species. To paraphrase Ajee Jaiswal, an Indian environmental anthropologist, the study of terroirs should investigate not only the specific features of a terroir, but likewise movements that defend it (2018).

An anthropology of the senses (*antropolohiya ng pandama* in Filipino) will help communicate the specificity of a terroir. François Laplantine reminds us that “social phenomena are sonorous, visual, tactile, gustatory and olfactory phenomena” (quoted in Howes 2015:viii). He criticizes Emile Durkheim’s “idea of the ‘social fact’ as a purely objective construct, stripped of any temporality, subjectivity, or sense ability.” Standard scholarly language, as we all know, is dry, highly technical, and privileges the sense of sight. Instead Laplantine proposes fieldwork as a form of “participant sensation” where “we observe, we listen, we speak with others, we partake of their cuisine, we try to feel along with them what they experience” (Howes 2015:viii). My comment on this is that Durkheim sought to establish that sociology was a science by following Descartes’ prescription that the senses should be doubted, being but

---

6 The option should surely not be between René Descartes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, between quantitative thinking and sensible or sensorial thinking. We should use both depending on the context. Descartes’ emphasis on quantification as the basis for certitude came at a turning point in world history. Careful measurements of planetary movements contradicted everyday sensory data that the sun revolved around the earth. Quantification of empirical data enabled Galileo and Newton in the 17th century to establish the principles of modern science with physics as the first-born. Emil Durkheim in the 19th century used these principles to establish sociology as a science that, like the natural sciences, can study magnitude and intensity. The goal of sensorial thinking is different – it wishes to foster a dialogue between the scientist and the chosen world of study using the several senses.
secondary qualities of an object, and that only the quantifiable can yield certitude. Laplantine reminds us that there is a counter-tradition to this within the West itself, as typified by Rousseau and Henri Bergson, which values “la pensée sensible” (roughly translated as ‘sensible thinking’ or ‘modal thinking’), which is “sensitive to the slightest gradations and movements and affects” of the world (Howes 2015:x). If we were to translate this into Filipino, I propose “kaisipang dumadama” or “kaisipang nakakadama” because this captures better than the English the dynamic quality of a thinking that is ever in tune with changes in the ecosystem.

Clifford Geertz called for “thick description” when doing an ethnography (1973). A multisensorial way of writing an ethnography adds more weight to his call, for the anthropologist who thinks and writes multisensorially communicates the fullness of a significant experience, using, not only sight and hearing, but also touch, taste and smell, in a language that is rich in concrete words and metaphors. Working with the insight that it is through our senses that we fashion both our identity and the world around us, while deploying a sensation-filled language, we anthropologists may find ourselves better equipped than most to communicate the interfacing of experiences within a kapookan.

**Against a continuing hegemony.** Conrad Kottak pointed out that the study of ecological relations cannot be divorced from the political (1999:25). “Commercial logging, environmental pollution, radioactivity, environmental racism and classism, ecocide, and the imposition of culturally insensitive external management systems”, along with “neocolonial actions and attitudes” constitute threats to communities and should be identified. American efforts at dissuading Filipinos from prioritizing the protection of a terroir are an instance of “coloniality” at work. (The term, as used by Walter Mignolo (2021) is a better one than “post-colonial” because it clearly articulates a continuing power relationship.)

Some Filipinos are vulnerable to such dissuasion because of the mistaken belief that the Philippines enjoys a “special relationship” with the US. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the discourse on “free trade versus protectionism” and on the benefits of “globalization”. Anthropologists should describe the reigning economy for what it is, namely as capitalist, and to distinguish between types of globalization. While there is a globalization that is really but capitalism seeking to transform the planet into its factory, another type of globalization fosters diversity of products.
Renato Ortiz, a Brazilian sociologist, distinguishes between “mundialización” and “globalización” (Ortiz 2004, Soto 2007). The former is an economic and technological process that began in the middle of the 19th century when capitalism, aided by industrialization, penetrated all corners of the world. The entire planet slowly became a giant factory with a clear division of labor where dominated countries became suppliers of raw materials and the buyers of finished products exported by the dominant countries. Today, because of digital technology, capital quickly crosses political and natural boundaries. Should labor become too expensive, whether in the home country or in a given country overseas, capital shifts to a place where labor costs are cheaper. Jobs can flee from once thriving regions, wages can stagnate in their wake (Ortiz 2004, Soto 2007).

*Mundialización*, in contrast to *globalización*, is a cultural process which began earlier than the spread of capitalism and industrialization. In this process, cultures refer to each other. Even as they affirm their singularity, they influence others while being influenced by them in exchange (Ortiz 2004). The example that comes to mind is the cultural process unleashed by the Galleon Trade 1565-1815 whose node in Asia was Manila. Here goods from all over Asia, including the rest of the Philippines, were exchanged for Mexican silver which had become the unit of exchange in the Chinese empire and in East Asia. Southeast Asian cooking is unimaginable without chili pepper, yet the product is a Mexican domesticate. Entering Indianized countries like Thailand, Cambodia, the Malay Peninsula and Java, which valued a medley of spices in their food, chili pepper became the flavor whose incandescence climaxed all the spices. Yet the cooking styles of these countries remain distinct from each other. Sweet potatoes and peanuts define the regional food of Fujian, from where many Chinese migrants in the Philippines come. In the mostly mountainous province, they helped stave off the once-frequent famines. Yet sweet potatoes and peanuts are likewise domesticates from Mexico that entered China through trade.

For Ortiz, *mundialización* is a desirable phenomenon as long as no hierarchies spring up that will set up one culture as dominant over the rest, but *globalización* is undesirable because the economic hierarchy can reduce an economy to poverty (2004). To be sure, Ortiz’s use of *mundialización* is not universal in the Spanish-speaking world. Other authors like Fernando Soler, a Spanish philosopher, regard it as a purely economic process just like *globalización* (Soler 2001). But the distinction Ortiz makes remains pertinent to our discussion. There are forms of intensified cultural connectivity we should welcome. Our contemporary communications media make it possible
for our farmers to reach out to a wider public both here and all over the world. But we should be wary of other forms of connectivity. Walden Bello, Filipino sociologist, calls for “de-globalization” (2006). He urges fighting against the tendency to turn over the production of food exclusively to large transnational enterprises whose aim is solely monopoly and profit. Though seemingly efficient, their practices can lead to more poverty while devastating the environment. Instead he calls for supporting family farms, such as those we have, to promote diversity. He points to France as an example of a wealthy country that is intent on saving its family farms. Indirectly, without him using the term, he lauds efforts to save terroirs.

Improving on Ortiz, I propose using “dialogic globalization” versus “monologic globalization”\footnote{Abderrahman Hassi and Giovanna Storti (2012) distinguish two effects of globalization. One is homogenization, the other heterogenization. For clarity, it is better to have two separate terms, as Ortiz does, or to distinguish two forms of globalization using two distinct adjectives, as I have done.}. Measures to promote the specificity of a locale through Geographical Indications encourage dialogues across political boundaries. While savoring a tea from the upland of West Java or a pepper from a farm in southeastern Cambodia, we become curious about a kapookan that is physically distant from us but whose product is now present in us. We wish to know more about the people responsible for the unique product. We would not be as curious if the tea were cheap and bland because it is mass-produced.

Unmasked as capitalism, monologic globalization confirms the warning of anti-colonial theorists (Mignolo 2021, Moghadam 2021) that the roles of dominator versus dominated may persist in subtle forms despite the grant of political independence. American pressure on the Philippines not to accept Geographical Indications as defined by the European Union and as accepted by other Asian states indicates a lingering “colonialist” relationship.

Studies on the impact of not branding products are needed. Crops that are endemic to particular parts of the Philippines are being marginalized by imported crops that are less tasty but which are bigger, easier to produce, and therefore more profitable. Equally important are studies on why many informed Filipinos are skeptical about biodiversity and prefer monocrop plantations. Finally, the relationship between Filipinos and representatives of the American State should be studied. We need to understand the process by which Filipinos, particularly those in government, define what is “in the national interest” and what is not. Why do many Filipinos imagine that the
Philippines has a “special relationship” with the U.S. and are therefore amenable to granting American requests even when these work against local interests? As Tim Ingold clarifies, anthropology is more than ethnography (2011). While the anthropologist writes about people, the anthropologist writes with people. Societies and communities are always in a state of becoming. The narratives that the anthropologist creates record a phase in a continuous process. It is very important to understand, not only those who agree with us, but likewise those who do not.

**Conclusion**

Biodiversity and cultural diversity on the planet are endangered by the spread of monocrop plantations that promise to feed all while creating employment. We are in danger of losing our finger-sized señorita bananas and our small but biting Ilocano garlic bulbs to products that are easier to grow and to market. Protecting terroir/kapookan with Geographical Indications may be one way to safeguard biodiversity and cultural diversity, although one must always be wary of the capitalist temptation to maximize production thereby homogenizing ecosystems. Geographical Indications, as a label, can raise incomes for farmers because it assures customers that the products come from a unique habitat and are produced according to certified procedures. Anthropology can contribute to the challenge of interpreting and protecting kapookan via Geographical Indications because its holistic approach will show how the particularities of an ecosystem and existing cultural practices in the production of a crop weave together into a single system. Moreover, emergent sensory anthropology can interpret how people create their identity in and through the product of a kapookan and will do so using multisensorial language to communicate the precise qualities of the product. Because anthropology tries to listen to differing and clashing perspectives, it can communicate as well the views of those who are either indifferent to or oppose any strategy to protect diversity. At the same time, anthropology’s ability to disclose systems of power inherent in particular situations will throw light on how colonialist relationships manage to block local attempts at protecting biological and cultural diversity.

**References**

Albert, Céline. (1998). The Appellation d’ Origine Controlée (AOC) and other official product identification standards. MS [https://www.cadenagro.org/images/Descargas/articuloswilson/the%20aoc]


https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328262633_Anthropology_Role_of_Ecological_Anthropologists_in_the_Debate_of_Environmentalism


[https://selforganizedseminar.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/massey_space_place_gender.pdf].
Savoring our food can save us


Fernando N. Zialcita obtained his BA Humanities and MA Philosophy at the Ateneo de Manila University, MA and Ph.D. Anthropology at the University of Hawai‘i. He is a Professor Emeritus at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Ateneo de Manila University where he heads the Cultural Heritage Studies Program. Though the focus of his advocacy on behalf of heritage has largely been on architecture, he has been active in promoting food traditions because of their multiple roles in everyday life.

Email: fzialcita@ateneo.edu