

**VISAYAN CULTURAL HYPHENATIONS:  
BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN LOCAL  
AND GLOBAL PROCESSES\***

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Let me start by stating what I understand a hyphen to be or to do. A written, yet silent mark, the hyphen links two words that would otherwise be taken as separate from and independent of each other. The point of the hyphen at the end of a line is to get the reader's attention: the word is not finished, it continues on the next line. The point of the hyphen between two words is to radically alter the meaning of each component and to mingle them, to juxtapose them, and to mold them into a new compound with an altogether different meaning, irreducible to the sum of the added meanings of its components. Hence, we have truth-value, self-determination, nation-state and even Philippine-Americans.

Hyphenation, on the other hand, refers to a dialectical process, to the process through which hyphens are inserted, allocated and inscribed in a given text. Using text only as a metaphor, and framing hyphenations in terms that are more familiar to sociocultural anthropologists, one can begin to focus on some local-(hyphen)-global issues.

But neither local nor global can be taken for granted, because formally at least, the local tends asymptotically towards the personal, while, at the other end

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of the spectrum, the global tends asymptotically towards the universal. In short, the local and the global are themselves social constructions that vary, depending upon the context of their elaboration. And thus, if I add that I want to operate in the specific context of the Philippines, I begin to situate or to contextualize my concern. However, I also compromise my reflection by taking an unreflected position on a median term, between localization and globalization, on the Philippine hyphen—as if, in mentioning a specific nation-state, a specific point on the continuum between local and global, I had prejudged the identity of the process as well as its necessity.

I would very much like to avoid this, so as to avoid taking for granted that which precisely cannot be taken for granted. For, while what is local and what is global may be considered as antithetic terms at the extremities of a continuum, how local is local and how global is global remain to be seen if we intend to understand that which links each to the other.

Let me start with the local. At least a direct sense of what local means is inescapable for anyone who has lived for any length of time on the island of Siquijor, in the central Visayas, particularly towards the end of the Marcos regime, when electricity had not yet reached the island, when no planes landed any more on any strip and when interisland boat services had become increasingly unreliable. Siquijorians were patient to a fault, and persistence always paid off for would-be voyagers. As a result, few islanders probably experienced, with the same acuity as I did, the sense of isolation that such insularity entailed, even though news from the outside—filtered by transistor radios, by gossip, and of course by the powers that be—reached the most remote settlement.

I have elaborated elsewhere on the attraction I felt for that island in particular, the musicality of its name and the exoticism I had constructed around it. I have documented at length the process by which I have progressively transformed such an apprehension into some kind of understanding, flawed as it might have been, by the daily—one could even say, “ordinary”—lives led by some of its inhabitants, in a precise *sitio* of a specific *barangay* of a determined municipality of that particular island in a province within Region VII of the Philippine Republic. In this embedment, reminiscent of Russian dolls, I focused only on a handful of people with whom I had interacted in the course of my fieldwork. Just they and we (my wife and I) became the only characters of my ethnographic endeavor. I had selected a narrow local focus to avoid the double pitfall of reification and essentialization, very far behind which neocolonial and neoimperial pretensions never lag, but my understanding did not necessarily correspond to what the islanders understood as local.

My choice was tactical and suited to my narrative intent as well as the limits of my empirical knowledge. It offered the additional advantage of letting me confine myself to neatly delineated, limited, bordered and thus discrete units: the *sitio* Camingawan where my wife and I had settled and where my most immediate and daily interactions occurred, the *barangay* Lapyahan under the aegis of its rather meek *barangay* captain, the municipality of Lazi in the grip of its glib mayor, the province of Siquijor under the control of its entirely pro-Marcos KBL administration. But I never really challenged the integrity of the island that had acquired provincial status, thus conveniently conflating physicality and bureaucracy. The Siquihodnon whom I knew were tucked in, pinned down on the bidimensional grid of their latitude and longitude at the given moment of our encounter, and as confined within their provincial borders as they were restrained within their oceanic shores.

Or rather I did. I tucked them in, I pinned them down, I confined them. To accept such borders was to accept what they entailed of splendid insularity, of superb insulation, and of convenient isolation. Perhaps it is fair to say, however, that in those days, in academia almost anywhere an approving accent was stressing the importance of “the local.” Not only was Geertz’s *Local Knowledge* (1983) an influential book for some of us, but within the Philippines itself, among a variety of scholars, the thrust was set on “local history” and its close readings of micro-events. For instance, Resil Mojares’s superb *Theater in Society, Society in Theater* came out in 1985. Such works resonated well with any anthropological fieldworking enterprise in which the otherness of the other had lost the vagaries of its abstractness in the very concrete meetings of (and in the conversations with) savvy, meek, truculent or endearing neighbors and villagers. From that empirical standpoint, nothing could better confirm for me the localization of knowledge and the paramount importance of the local.

There were some objective factors in that direction, too. I shall mention here only one historical fact that contributed to give a particular flavor to any localized setting: the 1849 decree of Governor Narciso Claveria y Zaldua promulgating a list of last names to be given to natives so as to avoid what was occurring until then, namely the baptisms, weddings and burials of each and everyone as Joses and Marias, forever scions of older Joses and Marias and forever progenitors of little Joses and Marias. In the aftermath of such a decree that rendered the existence of last names compulsory, Siquijorians acquired names that immediately identified them as *taga-Siquijor*. Since, in addition, these names

were not chosen at random (but assigned by parish), a number of names are still identifiable today as typically Siquijorian (*e.g.* Calunod, Ligutom, Duhaylungsod, and so on). Furthermore, since post-martial law residence tends to be patri-virilocal, names also tend to be strongly attached to specific locales, which understandably reinforces a certain *esprit-de-clocher* among my informants.

And indeed, on their own initiatives, many islanders played their part too, in blowing with no small enthusiasm the trumpet of local particularisms. Not only was I told, time and time again, that “Siquijor (was) an island of gentle beauty where we form one big happy family,” but some people asserted that each town had its own distinct linguistic accent that they proposed to identify and to imitate for my benefit, although my own limited auditive talents were always lagging far behind such nuances. Free from the fear of essentialization that inhabits (or should inhabit) any anthropologist, informants did not hesitate in characterizing this *barangay* as “free spirited,” that one as “traditional,” that *sitio* as “made up of misers,” that municipality as “inhabited by excellent musicians,” thus providing me with a moral cartography which I found striking for displaying two contradictory qualities, offering at once inconsistencies yet remarkably consistent inconsistencies.

With such qualitative appreciations, one could not expect any less than a variety of opinions and prejudices. Here, however, the content of the opinions was of less interest than the way in which they were framed. This frame was indeed class-bound: the more I descended in the social hierarchy, the more restrained the local; the higher I climbed, the more extended the local became. In other words, “local” did not have the same significance for everybody in Siquijor. There were, arguably, two social classes on the island, an extensive rural proletariat made up mostly of *barangay* peasants and a modest (in size and in income) local bourgeoisie, made up mostly of town dwellers. The former were impoverished and exploited, poorly educated and they could only expect a gloomy future as their social horizon was extremely limited. They were the clients of the latter, who were altogether better off, better educated, better connected, served as the patrons of the former and enjoyed a much larger social horizon. Interisland boats of the George and Peter Lines neatly objectified this social division with two fares: the cheaper one for on-deck passage warranted little more than crammed up transportation; the more expensive one gave access *sa taas* (upstairs) to less crowded accommodations with more comfortable bedding.

For most members of the local bourgeoisie, “local” referred to what concerned the municipality, sometimes limited even to that which occurred within

the much narrower boundaries of the *municipio*, and often extended much further to the whole province-island. More rarely would “local” be extended to refer to the region, the administrative unit, in this case, Region VII that regroups the four provinces of Cebu, Bohol, Negros Oriental and Siquijor. In effect, for this to happen, I would have to allude to a third social class, the truly rich and powerful—none of them on the island—who from afar served, in turn, as patrons of the Siquijorian local bourgeoisie.

By contrast, for most *barangay* peasants, “local” may have extended only on rare occasions to the confines of their municipality; but in fact, the *municipio* or seat of the municipality already constituted for them an outside, beyond the domain of that which was “local.” For these rural dwellers, “local” most often referred to something located within their *barangay*, if not their *sitio*, or even restricted to their *balay* (house) and, for the poorest, their *payag* (hut).

For all the islanders of whichever class, however, even while the scale or the extent of the “map” varied dramatically, the laying out remained remarkably identical and faithful to commonly recognized and uncontested administrative borders between perfectly discrete units. To that extent, that which was “local” was perceived in terms that were essentially derived from a political geography which unavoidably informed and inflected my own perception.

But this was only half the story in the social construction of what was “local.” While coextensive to the *sitio*, at most to the *barangay* dwellers, coextensive to the province-island, and perhaps just to the municipality for the town bourgeois, the “local” was not reducible to a simple matter of contiguity, no matter how well and how deeply the islanders had internalized such geographical constructions, which were partly inherited from the colonial past(s) and now reinforced by the state from the outside. What prevented the “local” from remaining an issue of coextensivity, a problem of expanse, a matter of surface, was precisely that it was a constructed category that continued to be negotiated, partly received from without, partly generated from within.

To that extent, while thinking that I worked in a village and on an island might have been a step in the right direction, it remained insufficient. I needed to go further because the village in which I studied and the island I contemplated, like any other village and any other island, had leaky limits and porous shores, into which and out of which identities oozed with great abandon.

Even though I stayed most of the time within the confines of *sitio* Camingawan, with informants whose economic life was precarious enough for their preoccupations to appear as predominantly focused on their immediate surroundings, I came to realize that, for them who apparently had so little concern with their history and ancestry, as well as for the more urbanized bourgeoisie of Lazi, the “local” offered two apparently paradoxical aspects: a strongly bounded perspective clashed with a strong sense of social identity. In other words, the sense of living “right here,” expressed as “*dinhi sa barangay*” and pointing at physical residence, disagreed with a sense of living “among ourselves,” expressed as “*sa amo*” and pointing at common substance. Albeit local, substance could be spread.

As could be expected from the town bourgeoisie, its understanding of the “local” could be characterized as being “provincial,” properly as well as figuratively. But being “provincial” already implied a relationship with smaller units, constitutive of the province and of that provinciality. It also implied a larger unit, because clearly one cannot be “provincial” per se, one is always provincial in relation to a larger ensemble, the integrative quality of which one rejects and of which one is apart as well as a part. The relationship also implies a double hierarchy, one that is acceptable and integrates smaller units into the province, and one that is controversial because it pretends to integrate the province into a larger ensemble and thus threatens to disintegrate the integrity of the former into the latter.

This was indeed the case in Siquijor, where the identification with the province necessarily entailed a dialectical relationship with a peripheral outside to which it would not be reduced. In thinking of itself as essentially Siquijorian, the town bourgeoisie claimed a cultural specificity and a political identity. The cultural specificity was the reputation of witchcraft, for which Siquijor was known in the Philippines, and actually the only thing that made its reputation. Partly deserved, it was also a claim that was willingly endorsed locally as a marker of that provincial identity. As for its political identity, it had been taken care of when in 1972, after laborious efforts, Siquijor finally acquired the status of a province. Being a province was clearly understood as having become a separate, discrete entity with its own borders within the larger geopolitical context of the Philippines. It was certainly not by chance if, on occasion, town dwellers referred by mistake, defiantly or in jest, to this historical event of 1972, as the acquisition of the autonomy, if not the independence of Siquijor. In this sense, the local here cannot be understood outside of its dynamic relationship with its global counterpart, the Philippine state.

But among the bourgeoisie, the local also had a less geographic and more fluid meaning, because it involved not so much class consciousness as the feeling

of belonging to a huge family, the scattering of which was often genuinely global, with branches of the family living in another island, in Cebu or Mindanao; others are in Metro-Manila; others yet abroad in the United States, Japan or the Middle East; others yet, the least successful of the group, still living in a neighboring *barangay*. Among politically influential families, the sense of dispersion, of geographical fragmentation, generated the need to reassert a “local” identity through a form of local social engineering, hence the need for planning and the habit of organizing family reunions. The family reunion of the descendants of a given couple that had migrated from Bohol to Siquijor in the previous century was a fertile topic of conversation because, as it remained forever at a planning stage, it underlined a perfection in identity and unity that eschewed the imperfections of actual social gatherings. Nonetheless, reunions of people having all the same surname or sharing the same ancestors was aimed at reinforcing solidarity between participants, who otherwise might have little in common. The idea behind such gatherings was to reassemble the scattered identity and thus to reassert the legitimacy of the politically active families. Behind reunions there was an ulterior motivation. The more, the stronger. Sheer numbers meant political power. All happened as if a quantitative invocation could bestow the qualitative strength that differentiated a politically dominant family from any other potential competitor.

What was local in these reunions—planned or otherwise—was not geographical per se, except precisely at the moment of reunion, if and when it occurred, but focused on identity assertions. The reunion seemed to signify and to operate a metaphorical extension of the social self, as designated by the expression *kaugalingun*. Such a phrase, depending on its context, may have identity connotations or physical connotations, as it can mean either “oneself,” “one’s own,” or “one’s home.” It is well worth noting here that based on the same root *ugaling*, the derivative *kaugalingnan* can be translated as “political independence.” This sends us back to the forever-dynamic tensions and contradictions that the “local” implies for the local bourgeoisie, first between their residence in the geographical contiguity of their province-island and their membership in the scattered members of fractured family groupings, and second between a “*dinhi karon sa amo*” (an “our here and now”) and a “global,” an outside, that is also partly socially constructed and negotiated.

Coming back to the *barangay* peasants, similar, albeit perhaps, more exacerbated tensions obtained. On the one hand, the lower my informants on the

social ladder are, the stronger their emphasis upon a sense of local confinement that could be so narrow as to be limited to the physical residence, even at its most modest, the thatched, stilted *payag*. On a continuum from global to local, the level of the household, excluding that of the person, constituted a *terminus ad quem* as well as a *terminus a quo* since households within the *sitio* functioned not only as the unit of residence par excellence but as the smallest units of production, as well as the smallest units of consumption.

I had tried to establish the who's who of the *barangay*, which I later called Lapyahan, starting systematically from a simple question, meant to understand household composition in that setting. I thought the question "Who lives here?" or "Who belongs here?" meaning "Who else lives with you in this house?" was straightforward and in consequence transparent. It proved to be more confusing than I had anticipated. To be sure, sometimes I obtained the answer to the question I thought I raised, namely a list of the household residents. Sometimes, however, the informants' answers were *kulang* (not complete), as they abstained from mentioning anyone who had stepped out of the house at the time of the interview, thus giving to the "local" a temporal dimension that I had not anticipated.

With most informants, the local was confined to the space that contained its *sakup*, a phrase that cannot be easily translated and requires some interpretive attention because the Cebuano linguistic form offers a rich array of semantic possibilities. As a noun accented on the second syllable, it refers to something that is included or comprised, and in particular to the inside of the house. As a noun accented on the first syllable, it refers to a member of a group, whether it concerns anything abstract or a concrete thing, or living objects, or people. Hence "*sakup pa sa Lazi ang kining barangay dinhi*," i.e. "this very barangay belongs to Lazi," or "is part of the municipality of Lazi."

This was not, however, just a descriptive assertion, a neutral membership, for it always implied an element of inclusion and of hierarchization, whereby the smaller, inferior member is under the domination of a larger, superior group. Unlimited possibilities were thus opened up for ranking discrete units within a very neat series, a marvel of bureaucratic embeddedness. The Philippines is divided into so many regions; the regions into provinces; the provinces into municipalities; the municipalities into *barangays* that are said to be, census after census, "the smallest political subdivision(s) in the country"; the *barangay* into *sitios*; the *sitios* into *balay*; and the houses into those who belong to them.

When it came to people, he or she who belonged was always automatically thought of as subordinated to the group to which he or she belonged. The



subjection of the member to the group was so strong that the word, in effect, could also refer to the “household helper,” whenever such social arrangement was present. In an impoverished rural *barangay* setting, where the presence of “helpers” was less likely, there were still *binuhi* (or “lived-in boarders”) whose status and kinship relationship to the household head varied greatly but whose task was clearly to “help” an aging grandparent, or a more or less distant collateral, in such a way that it became at times difficult to identify how a *binuhi*’s responsibilities differed from that which would have fallen upon an unrelated “helper.” At any rate, the helpers as well as the boarders were enumerated by other residents of the house, taken as a unit of common residence. They belonged here, but so did the pig that lived below the house attached to the stilts; so did the fighting cock that waited for its dominical final encounter. What struck me most here was the continuum that was proposed. To a large extent, the house was thus a hierarchized unit of residence with its core of people, and all the way down to its belongings.

The house thus represented a space, the inside of which was socially oriented, and when one of its denizens used the personal pronoun (for the plural, exclusive, first person) *kami*, he or she might have referred to the whole as contained in that unit of residence. And yet, some informants also hesitated here, as they might or might not include people who were or should have been residents of the house but for one reason or the other were not. The ambiguity was extreme: here, a son who had settled in Mindanao and had not been seen in months; there, a husband who had left years ago as a *sakada* to Hawaii and from whom nothing had been heard since. Here, there is a daughter who had left “temporarily” for Manila, and on occasion abroad, in quest of a better living and sometimes of a mate, but she still “belonged” here where she had not set foot in ages because, or so I was told, she was still a *dalaga* (unmarried woman).

And it was through such an intrusion that, as far as I could understand, the “local” had already become global in perspective or rather the “local” had become globalized, since it included a geographical “local” that had been stretched considerably with all these unreturned “travelers” and OCWs (overseas contract workers) who sent back home their remittances with, more or less, regularity and who had left without breaking away from home. Further hesitation on the part of the informants was likely to occur if they thought less about the materiality of the house itself, about the roof under which they slept, than of their *panimalay* (household), the fluidity of which was extreme. It reached a peak to underline

that someone was here yet was not here, resided here for sure but actually lived outside, “*tua didto sa laing lalawigan, sa Sugbu, sa Mindanao, sa Manila, sa Hapon, sa Saudi*” (over there in another province, in Cebu, in Mindanao, in Manila, in Japan, in Saudi) or “States-side.” To say the least, different informants had a different understanding of the “local.” And thus, often, my query drew into the picture a number of persons whom I had never encountered before, and whose invocation I did not expect, as if there were a supplement of persons who, *in absentia*, still occupied the *balay*.

On the other hand, in terms of social identity, the *barangay* peasants did not restrict themselves to the mere presence of their relatives, actual residents of their *balay* and of their *sitio* in their understanding of what was local for them; rather, they were forced to appeal to other constructions than the town-dwelling bourgeoisie.

Beyond the mere presence of the actual residents of the *sitio*, other presences progressively were revealed to me, albeit paradoxically in their absence that usually came about as a supplement of presence. Contrary to the bourgeoisie which could always appeal to socially higher and politically more powerful networks, the humbler, poorer *barangay* residents took a different tack. They knew all too well how tenuous or ineffective their link to their town patrons were or had become. And they did not—not could they—extend their local identity in the direction of actual patrons or of socially successful or powerful *kapartido* (*i.e.* blood relatives or people sharing the same surname with whom relationship remained vague or tenuous). Instead, taking solace for their powerlessness in the force of sheer quantity, they claimed a maximum horizontal extension for membership in their local unit of residence and, in so doing, tended to inflate the size of their house and, beyond, of their *sitio*. Be that as it may, despite such class differences, what the *barangay* dwellers considered as local was already completely informed by global phenomena beyond their control. The horizontality of peasant network resulted directly from the outmigration from the *sitio* or from the *barangay* to other islands, which was itself determined by a global political economy that had devastated the market of copra, rendered fishing as more than precarious subsistence, seriously limited the potential resources of the Siquijorian peasants, and forced a considerable number of them to outmigrate as cheap labor adrift on a plethoric job market. The *barangay* peasants understood all too well in the local setting of each household that their local survival depended upon their numbers. In at least that respect, they were perfectly pragmatic, and probably more so than the town bourgeoisie, which attempted to muster more power through illusory reunions.

But the *barangay* peasants' realism also had serious limitations. It was largely compensated by idealistic claims that pretended to conflate "local" with "global." In order to place under direct local control what escaped it the most, in one swell ideological, religious sweep, the *barangay* peasants also turned to an extension of the "local" that appealed to a maximum rupture of any proximate confinement and to a higher, ultimate, order of existence, while allowing them not to let go of anyone.

This did not appear to me immediately. That there was seepage from the containment of the *balay*, and ultimately of the island, was obvious, but nothing struck me more than what appeared to me as the appropriation of the dead loved ones who were claimed by each household and forced to hold their place in the network of rights and obligations. Whether buried with the poor *sa buntod* (cemetery) or with the better off *sa baybayon* (along the shore), all belonged in Heaven, perhaps, and could be referred to as *ang mga minatay sa kalangitan* (the dead people in heaven). And yet, death was no excuse. The severance of the social links with the living remained intolerable and was remedied by prayers at the family *altar* in each house, so as to activate the continuum and interaction that existed between the living and the *kalag* (souls) of the dead. To that extent, the "local" transited through the *altar*, at which members of the household prayed for practical reasons: to communicate with the souls of the dead, to help them climb out of Purgatory to Heaven, to invoke some intervention from patron saints so as to be pulled out of poverty and eventually to be led to eternal salvation. Uncertain as to their place in a vertical dimension, the living helped the dead to enable them, in return, to help the living and both needed divine protection and intervention.

Whether among the peasantry of the *barangay* or the bourgeoisie of the town, whether in a realistic mode or through ideological manipulations, whether as a political construct or as a religious fantasy, and independently of the scales of the constructions, the "local" and the "global," respectively and mutually, are not only given but also constructed, and thus constantly negotiated.

Only a few years ago, the anthropological task seemed simpler. It is always the case, in hindsight, generation after generation. Perhaps at one point, half a century ago or so, I could have written, without hesitation or qualm, a book, acceptable to the profession, entitled *People of the Central Visayas*. But when I arrived in the Philippines for the first time in the early 1980s, I had learned, in

particular from Geertz' strongly anti-positivistic stance, that, in our pursuit of "local knowledge," we were neither studying villages nor islands; no, we were only conducting fieldwork in villages or on islands. With Wolf's powerful emphasis on political economy, I also learned that it had become impossible to ignore the larger picture of a global history that informed what occurred in the most minute setting. In the Philippines itself, at the end of the millenium, I realize the frailty of our anthropological totalizations: there is no time, but duration; there are no shores, but passages; there are no insular isolates, but cultural hyphenations.

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