

Ateneo de Manila University

**Archium Ateneo**

---

History Department Faculty Publications

History Department

---

2016

## Editors' Conclusion: Disasters in History and the History of Disasters Some Key Issues

Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr

*Ateneo de Manila University*, [fvaguilar@ateneo.edu](mailto:fvaguilar@ateneo.edu)

Michael D. Pante

*Ateneo de Manila University*, [mpante@ateneo.edu](mailto:mpante@ateneo.edu)

Angelli F. Tugado

Follow this and additional works at: <https://archium.ateneo.edu/history-faculty-pubs>



Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#)

---

### Custom Citation

AGUILAR, F., PANTE, M., & TUGADO, A. (2016). Disasters in History and the History of Disasters Some Key Issues. *Philippine Studies: Historical & Ethnographic Viewpoints*, 64(3/4), 641-656.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History Department at Archium Ateneo. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Department Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Archium Ateneo. For more information, please contact [oadrcw.ls@ateneo.edu](mailto:oadrcw.ls@ateneo.edu).

# Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

---

## Editors' Conclusion:

### Disasters in History and the History of Disaster: Some Key Issues

Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr., Michael D. Pante, and Angelli F. Tugado

*Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*  
vol. 64, nos. 3–4 (2016): 641–56

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

---

*Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only.

One year after its publication in this journal, the final pdf of this article may be uploaded in the author's institutional repository, provided that this copyright page is retained.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at [philstudies.soss@ateneo.edu](mailto:philstudies.soss@ateneo.edu).

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

# Editors' Conclusion

FILOMENO V. AGUILAR JR.,  
MICHAEL D. PANTE, AND ANGELLI F. TUGADO

## Disasters in History and the History of Disasters Some Key Issues

This concluding article identifies some of the salient themes that run across the articles in this special double issue on "Disasters in History." The common themes include (a) disasters as catalysts of different types of change in society, the state, and science; (b) the relationship between disasters and social inequality; (c) the attribution to nature of the ability as an actor in history, which raises questions about how to conceptualize nature's agency; (d) disasters as constituting a specific type of modern discourse; and (e) the limitations to the geographical frame of the national discourse on disasters.

**KEYWORDS: DISASTERS • HISTORIOGRAPHY • SOCIAL ANALYSIS • COSMOLOGY • MODERNITY**

Disasters occur in history and are historical events, but the writing of their histories is never a straightforward matter. Like other events, disasters have a complex history, and the task of writing them requires access to sources, which come in the form of geological records and in the human documentation of these events. By training, historians rely on the latter sources, which began to improve in terms of quantity and reliability in the nineteenth century. The invention of instruments particularly in the twentieth century has enabled scientific precision in the recording of hazards and disastrous events. Despite the production of better records in recent times, narrating disasters and their histories is a challenging endeavor.

In this double issue it has not been possible to discuss all historical disasters of all types. Nevertheless, the articles make important contributions in various ways. Some shed light on specific episodes and problems, while others highlight broad patterns, elucidate the context, and provide perspectives for understanding disasters and the varied responses of different entities. In this conclusion we identify some common themes woven across the articles in this special double issue and the questions that these articles provoke. Rather than aiming to be exhaustive, our discussion seeks to underscore what we deem to be the most salient points.

### Disasters as Catalysts

The articles in this special issue demonstrate that disasters are not one-off, discrete events, but are part of a historical process. Although some hazards such as typhoons are recurrent while risks such as volcanic eruptions manifest infrequently, the “root causes” of disasters span a long period of time preceding the event, an observation of Anthony Oliver-Smith (1994) that James Warren (2016) echoes. Proximal factors, however, need to be distinguished from long-term and very broad historical processes, as in fact Warren (2016) does.

The onset of a hazard does not necessarily result in a disaster, an event that is contingent upon factors such as the accuracy of prediction, the appropriateness and comprehensibility of advisories given to the public, and the types of actions taken by people most likely to be exposed and affected by the hazard, as Filomeno Aguilar (2016a) illustrates in relation to volcanic eruptions. Once a disaster has struck, it can become a catalyst for change—albeit the catalytic action needs closer specification. Although disasters can be followed by inaction, the disasters discussed by the contributors in this

issue are shown to lead to a chain of events that are often unintended or unexpected, affecting both human society and the natural environment. The ramifications of a disaster can be observed in the short as well as in the very long term.

Most dramatically, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami served as a catalyst in ending the insurgency in Aceh, one of three emergencies tackled in the article of Loh Kah Seng (2016). This disaster proved to be a decisive factor in the relations between the central Indonesian state and Aceh separatists, a point that Loh raises and Gaillard et al. (2009) echo. While Pinatubo’s eruption in June 1991 was not the deciding factor in the termination of US military bases in the Philippines—a decision made by the Philippine Senate in September 1991—it might have facilitated US acceptance of withdrawal from their military bases in the Philippines. In this case, the disaster played a role in influencing diplomatic negotiations, which yielded significant dividends for anti-US bases Filipino politicians (*ibid.*).

The earthquake in the Central Visayas on 15 October 2013 leveled centuries-old churches, but restoration work on some of the partially damaged edifices may have the effect of strengthening their quake resistance, as Reynaldo Lita (2016) points out. In fact, earthquakes that struck during the Spanish colonial era, particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, prompted changes in architectural styles and practices and in state building regulations, as Francis Gealogo (2016) recalls. Many of these building regulations are still in force at present.

The profound impact of disasters is manifested not only in physical structures but also in intangible social structures, although these changes are less perceptible than those sustained by edifices. For instance, Hiromu Shimizu (2001) demonstrates that Pinatubo’s eruption had the unintended effect of strengthening ethnic consciousness among the Aeta, who were dislocated from their traditional habitat and had to contend with the Philippine state and society as well as international entities as they confronted the challenges of resettlement.

Historical tremors stimulated colonial science as exemplified by the establishment of the Observatorio Meteorológico de Manila a couple of years after the devastating 1863 earthquake. In the Manila Observatory Jesuit scientists applied their passion for meteorology and the invention of instruments, as Kerby Alvarez (2016) narrates. Manila Observatory was also the site for the beginnings of historical seismology, best illustrated by the

catalog of earthquakes compiled by Fr. Miguel Saderra Masó in 1895 and expanded in 1910, analyzed by Gealogo (2016) in his article.

Disasters also become the justification for state intervention, which may prove beneficial for the common good or may buttress colonial designs and propel individual political ambitions. During the Spanish period, the activities of the Manila Observatory in gathering seismological data and forecasting typhoons came hand-in-hand with the desire of the colonial state to consolidate control over its subject population, as Alvarez (2016) contends. When the Americans replaced the Spaniards, they regarded the establishment of a citywide sewerage and drainage system in Manila as proof of their enlightened way of ruling the colony (Pante 2016).

Science in the service of the state continued to be seen in disasters that happened in the postcolonial period. On the one hand, the eruption of Hibok-Hibok in 1951 prompted about half a year later the establishment of a state entity devoted to volcanology, an institutionalization of geological expertise that can be deemed a positive state action, as the subsequent history of responding to volcanic eruptions and avoiding large casualties attests (Aguilar 2016a). On the other hand, flooding in Manila and adjoining places became the basis for the high modernist intervention of the Marcoses, who created the Metropolitan Manila Commission (MMC), which served as a vehicle to propel Imelda Marcos to a critical government post (as MMC governor), as Michael Pante (2016) shows. In this instance, a state can use a disaster to advance a political agenda by capitalizing on a disaster, with minimal benefits for those most affected by floods, i.e., the informal settlers living along esteros (estuaries). By couching disaster-response as an expert-driven, precise, and impartial scientific and technocratic endeavor, the Marcos dictatorship validated its inhumane anti-slum drive as a necessary consequence of its flood-control efforts that would lead supposedly to the common good. More surreal than the dictatorship's claim to impartiality was Marcos's claim that he conceived of declaring martial law amid a literal flood, when he received an inundation of intelligence information of a conspiracy against him (*ibid.*, 568).

In the hands of an authoritarian state, science can be deployed dictatorially. This possibility is the premise of the articles of Pante (2016) and Loh (2016), and may also underpin the articles of Kristian Saguin (2016) and Agustin Rodriguez (2016). Pante suggests the overdependence on state-sponsored technology to combat floods legitimized the complete

disregard of estero communities that stood in the way of the vision of a flood-free metropolis. Loh juxtaposes the democratic ideals of community-based disaster risk reduction and management (CBDRRM), notwithstanding its own pitfalls, vis-à-vis the undemocratic tendencies of technocratic and expert-led disaster responses.

## Disasters and Social Inequality

Disasters do not affect everyone equally as the marginalized and vulnerable end up being the most severely affected; the ramifications of disasters are also inflected by social inequalities and spatial disparities. Warren (2016) advances this point forcefully, but we also see this assertion in Saguin's (2016) case of small fisherfolk in Laguna de Bay who are unable to compete with the large fish cage owners. What is worse, in some cases disasters provide the occasion for further wealth accumulation by the rich, as in what Jerik Cruz, Hansley Juliano, and Enrico La Viña (2015) regard as cases of disaster-related land-grabbing. Disaster-mitigation efforts and disaster responses affect social classes differently as well. The poor are easily blamed for causing floods by blocking waterways, justifying their eviction, but large factories that pollute rivers and structures built right smack on these waterways, thus completely obliterating the water passage, remain above reproach and accountability.

Disasters, however, can cause a temporary inversion of social class dynamics, a mini-wealth redistribution of sorts, as happens when typhoons cause hundreds of fish to escape pens and cages, and end up in the hands of ordinary folk living in the lake and bringing down fish prices (Saguin 2016). Even Cruz et al. (2015) report that disasters "may actually open opportunities for rural social movements to make significant advances in overcoming dispossession efforts by entrenched elites in the name of 'development.'" Of course, natural disasters are not "the great equalizer" for these incidents enable only short-term gains for the marginalized and are too infrequent and relatively geographically contained to cause a dent on the social structure.

Nonetheless, the role of the marginalized in disaster response and management remains a critical issue. Given their circumstances, the poor define disasters differently from the way experts and policy makers do. Rodriguez (2016) takes a step further by giving disaster expertise and the technocratic approach to disaster response a Western identity, which he encapsulates as Western rationality. He juxtaposes it vis-à-vis indigenous

rationality, which is further marginalized by the continuing dominance of Western rationality in the practice of disaster management.

Despite their limitations, the poor devise their own warning systems that help them take protective action. Residents of Barangay Banaba in the Marikina Valley have drawn from the long history of flooding in their community to come up with ways to respond to this perennial happening (Loh 2014). Indeed, like everyone else, the marginalized learn from disasters. An unexpected flooding can teach residents living in vulnerable locations that they can no longer take floods for granted and so must adjust their responses to this particular hazard (Rodriguez 2016, 488–89). They begin to accommodate the warnings of experts, an adjustment that enhances people's responses. In order to bridge two modes of rationality, Rodriguez (2016), along with Loh (2016), makes a case for popular participation in disaster risk reduction and management, one founded on genuine discourse. But Loh (2016) alerts us that communities are unequal and can be fractured, social realities that CBDRRM need to consider so that people's participation is not instrumentalized but rather mobilized for genuine democratic dialogue.

The current trend of making disaster-mitigation and disaster-response programs participatory should also acknowledge the tension between learning from the people and prescribing solutions to them. At least in one instance, in the case of the Aeta and the PHIVOLCS, this tension turned out to be creative, productive, and critical for preparing for a volcanic eruption that would otherwise not have been anticipated (Aguilar 2016a). At other times, community participation does not lead to genuine participation, as Loh (2016) points out and as can be seen in the practices of some Philippine NGOs (Allen 2006). However, community-based disaster management has validity, Loh (2016) argues, because technocratic expertise cannot simply dictate upon disaster-stricken communities; otherwise, even from a solely technical perspective, interventions by experts risk compounding the problem. Disaster experts are enjoined to account knowingly for social differences and inequalities in responding to disasters because of the real possibility that externally supported responses could accentuate those very same inequalities.

### **Nature as Actor**

In the present era when the anthropocene age has been proposed as a way of understanding the current geological epoch, quite paradoxically nature is

now also seen as an actor in history, an objective and objectifiable entity that is at the same time internal to ecological and human processes, as Saguin (2016), Warren (2016), and others suggest. Nature as historical actor is manifest in typhoons, earthquakes, and other phenomena. Comprehending nature as historical actor raises the question of how we are to understand and conceptualize the agency of nature. Do we differentiate nature's agency based on the type of hazard, or do we assume a single but complex nature? How is nature's agency different from human agency? Do we impute will and purpose to nature, and how are we to know them? These are questions the field of disaster studies needs to confront if the proposition about nature as historical actor is to be maintained.

For the moment our observation is that we conceptualize nature's agency in two ways: anthropomorphically and ontologically. It is common to anthropomorphize nature, such as in giving typhoons human names and in describing a typhoon's "fury" or a volcano's "restlessness." Somehow our common way of speaking attributes emotion and even will to these elements of nature. In placing human attributes on the workings of nature and thus knowing that somehow nature acts familiarly, we find ways to control it, manage its destructiveness, prepare for it, and as we say, "weather it." But how are we to understand its agency ontologically, that is, nature by and in itself, if it were possible to do so?

Although the various articles in this special issue dwell on different types of hazards—which Greg Bankoff (2016) categorizes into those of air, land, and sea; while Warren (2016) distinguishes perennial from sudden-onset events—the differentiation that has emerged in most if not all articles is that between hazard and disaster. Often used interchangeably, hazards refer more to nature's "behavior," while disasters result from the interaction between the hazard and human vulnerability (by being in harm's way and being susceptible to damage) and the capacity to respond to an emergency situation.

Yet, as the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1961, 131) tells us, nature is the elemental, the "content without form" that is infinitely other than human beings. When air (wind) and sea (water) combine to wreak havoc on human habitats and wash away all the things we have come to possess and enjoy, no matter how hard we try to understand it through culture and control it through science, no matter how hard we prepare for it, weather it, the "elemental" cannot be completely grasped, tamed, and avoided. Particularly when we see nature's extremes, we are enveloped by its wrath rather than the

other way around. In such experiences we see nature as completely Other, as that which continuously escapes our grasp, as untamable, leaving our future insecure. In countries affected by extreme weather, the Philippines most especially because, as Bankoff (2016), Warren (2016), and others aver, it is one of the world's most disaster-prone countries, our efforts at calculating its cycles, observing its manifestations through instrumentation, calculating risks, and mitigating its effects are always surpassed by nature's unpredictability, nontamability, especially in the face of climate change. However, while there is acceptance of the Otherness of nature, there is no complete resignation in the sense of passivity and stagnation, as science, though never foolproof, attempts to predict, even second-guess, nature's behavior and ordinary people study cues in their natural environment. At the same time, the discourse and ways of thinking about disasters that seek to predict and domesticate nature may inadvertently heighten its Otherness, especially when an unprecedented phenomenon occurs.

Our constructs about the agency of nature should also be studied in relation to cosmological beliefs that take the enchantment of nature as a given and therefore assume the will as residing in the spirits that inhabit nature (Rodriguez 2016). In this perspective nature may not even be objectifiable, and an object–subject distinction would be untenable. However, in some instances depicted in this issue we observe the interface between cosmological beliefs and modern scientific knowledge, two universes of knowledge founded on disparate assumptions about reality that nonetheless produced a relatively genuine dialogue. We see this interface in the case of Mount Pinatubo's eruption in which the Aeta's knowledge of the mountain helped volcanologists, although at the same time modern science benefited from what the Aeta knew and believed about the mountain (Aguilar 2016a).

Because of our ontological experience of nature's hazards, it is not surprising that at some point in our distant and not-so-distant past, as Alvarez (2016) mentions, our forebears have connected extreme weather to acts of God or to some being totally beyond human, other than human. In this instance, cosmology and religious belief systems provide a framework for meaning, not necessarily a platform for action. Prayers and ritual performances also do not prevent people from resorting to protective measures. On the whole, cosmological beliefs are often deployed after the fact to make sense of what has happened.

Notwithstanding a certain level of familiarity among Filipinos with the country's geographic and geological circumstances, this same acquaintance, plus the practical knowledge passed on generationally, has allowed certain social groups to somehow have a direct intuition and sensitivity to nature's workings. This process has been evident among those who live near riverbanks and floodways and perhaps the fisherfolk of Laguna de Bay (Rodriguez 2016; Loh 2013; Saguin 2016). There are exceptions, however, such as those who lived on Volcano Island who were decimated by Taal's eruption in 1911 (Aguilar 2016a).

At the same time, this living with nature begets the understanding—one, however, that Filipinos still need to embrace wholeheartedly and systematically—of one's responsibility to care for nature, knowing how nature can “retaliate” (again, a human attribute) when pushed to a corner. Thus the elemental, as Levinas suggests, demands our responsibility and deserves our care—although such action may have an instrumental aspect of appropriating nature for human survival. The articles also show how such responsibility in caring for nature cannot be done individually but rather in communities working in collaboration with state and even international agencies—which, however, as Pante (2016) and Saguin (2016) point out, ought not to be driven by high modernism and political motives.

## Disaster as Discourse

The articles in this special issue collectively alert us to an important point that is often neglected for being self-evident: the perception and interpretation of a natural event as a disaster occur in a specific historical context. “Disaster” constitutes a discursive field with its specialized lexicon that emerged under certain historical conditions. It probably emerged in the twentieth century, particularly in its second half. The discourse was well entrenched by the 1970s as indexed by the launch of the journal *Disasters* in 1977 under the management of the London-based Overseas Development Institute and the commencement of the *Journal of Natural Disaster Science* in 1979 in Japan. In its repeated use and proliferation in official titles of programs and organizations, “disaster” has acquired specific connotations that, despite their dictionary equivalence, elude terms like calamity or misfortune. Intuitively we have a sense of when something is a disaster, brought to our senses by television reporting that transmit images of death and destruction that evoke in us a sense of profound loss.

As Warren (2016, 458) puts it, a disaster “creates such severe physical damage to a community, region, or nation to the point that virtually all major public and private facilities can no longer provide essential social and economic services unless either replaced or repaired.” Implicit in this definition is not only the possibility of repair or replacement, but also the assumption that the damage caused by an event could have been avoided or minimized through “mitigation” and “management.” As Loh (2014, 208) puts it, disaster expertise is founded on the “optimism, based on scientific rationality, that the future is not preordained but capable of improvement.” Thus, integral to the discourse in disaster is the belief in the human ability to conquer the future. In this worldview, unless an event that causes massive death and destruction is seen as amenable to mitigation, such an event would not be seen as a disaster. Mitigation in turn is founded on the belief that science and technology have the capability to blunt the worst effects of hazardous events and come up with a human order more acceptable to our sense of humanity. Not surprisingly, at present it has become customary to pair “disaster” with “mitigation,” with the same thought captured in the ubiquitous “DRR” (disaster risk reduction) initialism. These words suggest a specific sphere of discourse, inflected by terms used by experts who call themselves “disaster experts,” whose expertise lie in “disaster science.” We submit that only when both consciousness and the science and technology of mitigation or DRR began to be developed was an event thinkable as a disaster. Disaster is a thoroughly modern concept, perhaps belonging to late modernity.

As Aguilar (2016b) demonstrates, the *ilustrados* in Europe in the late nineteenth century viewed nature from an objectified and disenchanting lens, but they did not focus on disasters because the “real calamity”—not disaster—for them was Spanish colonial rule about which something could be done. Analogously, Warren (2016, 463) considers the “large-scale development of commercial export crops” as “the other remarkable ‘storm’ that transformed the Philippine landscape and its people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” But while the latter formulation deploys “storm” metaphorically, the *ilustrados* did not necessarily conjure a natural event in pinpointing colonial rule as the “real calamity”—or if they did then nature did not match up to the “real calamity.” It may also be possible that, given their context, the *ilustrados* had not formed the “modern” sensibility of disasters and disaster mitigation, just as there is the intriguing possibility that even during the belle époque modern societies did not construe

disasters the way we do now. One aspect of nature of which the *ilustrados* were acutely aware but which has been occluded in the current disaster discourse was the regenerative and creative dimension of natural calamities (Aguilar 2016b). The temperament of our present age ascribes optimism to human ability but hesitates to invest optimism in nature itself.

On the subject of human intervention, we need to refine the distinction between science as observation and science as mitigation. Merely recording earthquakes is scientific observation, but devising instruments to predict an earthquake (and eventually volcanic eruptions) may be seen as formally belonging to the field of mitigation. However, this distinction raises interesting questions about the Manila Observatory (MO). Was there a substantial difference between MO Jesuits and pre-MO friars who collected seismological data, which became the basis for the cataloging work that MO Jesuits undertook (cf. Gealogo 2016)? This ostensible contrast brings to mind a scene in chapter 60 of *Noli me tangere* in which José Rizal (1996a, 385) demonstrates the Spanish friars’ “unscientific” character: in this chapter friars derided how Jesuit seismologists “trace a few smudges on paper when there is an earthquake.” Were the friars other than the Jesuits absolutely unscientific that Rizal’s characterization of them as superstitious—using holy water, exorcisms, and benedictions to fight rinderpest and holding a procession to ward away locusts (Rizal 1996b, 394, 397)—was justified? In any case, the relationship of the Manila Observatory to other Spanish friars and to colonial society in general—apart from those examined by Alvarez (2016)—remains an interesting question.

The discourse of disasters in the Philippines is yet to be studied systematically. But some preliminary observations can be made in relation to state and NGO entities. We see the formal use of the term “disaster” in bureaucratic nomenclature, particularly the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) that was established in 1978 by Presidential Decree (PD) 1566 (Marcos 1978). The decree recognized “all types of disasters whether natural or man-made.” But it regarded disasters as paramountly a security issue, as indicated by the designation of the Secretary of National Defense as chair of the NDCC. Although PD 1566 recognized “a cogent requirement for pre-disaster planning, community disaster preparedness and positive, precise disaster control action for rescue evacuation, relief and rehabilitation to insure the survival of every Filipino in the New Society” (ibid.), its primary concern was the response to emergency situations.

Despite using the phrase “community disaster preparedness” in the title of the decree, Marcos gave no substantial powers and responsibilities to communities, thereby making the NDCC another instrument of high modernism in what was already irrefutably the age of disaster discourse.

The contemporary language of disaster risk reduction and management is embodied in Republic Act (RA) 10121, the “Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010,” signed into law on 27 May 2010—some thirty-two years after the Marcos decree of 1978. Despite the passage of time and the use of the DRR initialism, the Secretary of National Defense continues to chair the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), which reconstituted the NDCC. Disasters remain primarily a security issue rather than as a social welfare issue or a science and technology issue.

Nonetheless, RA 10121 signals something socially significant. In the past the middle classes could ignore disasters as long as they were not directly affected. However, after Ondoy (2009), aggravated by Yolanda (2013) and the fatal failure of the warning system, when large segments of the middle classes suffered along with the poor, there was a concerted effort on the part of the middle classes to think about disasters and their mitigation, giving rise to this law. Whether RA 10121 will make a substantial difference in disaster preparedness, response, and mitigation remains to be seen. On a reflexive note, we are cognizant that this double issue and the conference that gave rise to it admittedly are middle-class effusions of this post-Yolanda dispensation.

Operating outside the ambit of the state, radical NGOs, like the Citizens’ Disaster Response Center (CDRC), which was formed in 1984, view socioeconomic inequality as the underlying problem, which is uncovered (although at times also occluded) and accentuated each time a disaster strikes. Not surprisingly, the CDRC’s (2014) vision goes beyond the usual community participation discourse of NGOs as it calls for an “equitable sharing of the nation’s wealth.” In terms of perspective, this view resonates with the ilustrados’ focus on colonial rule as the “real calamity.” Moreover, as Greg Bankoff and Dorothea Hilhorst (2009) have pointed out, radical NGOs and the state may share the vocabulary of “disaster management,” including “stakeholder inclusion,” but where the state sees disasters as a security issue the two entities may be divided by mutual suspicion and distrust and are far apart in the actual approaches that they

take. Impelled by politics, the disaster discourse has generated its own internal differentiation.

## Geography and Disasters

Even as a discourse on disasters has been ascendant in the Philippines in the past few decades, the current discourse is challenged by what geographical frame it ought to take. A discrepancy between the space of disasters and the geography of political units always rears its head. The geography of disasters requires seeing beyond the limits of the nation-state, prompting Bankoff (2016) to emphasize transnational history, but historiography and popular discourse are largely confined to the boundaries of the nation-state.

The national disaster discourse struggles to take in a more cosmopolitan and universalistic view. Yet, there was a time when a strictly territorialized conception of the climate and the weather did not reign, as in the late nineteenth century among the ilustrados who romanticized tropicality in their anticolonial struggle (Aguilar 2016b) and in the relations between Hong Kong and the Manila Observatory (Alvarez 2016). Would a greater societal awareness of the air, land, and sea hazards that the Philippines shares in common with many other countries, as elucidated by Bankoff (2016), result in a perspective that is more expansive than the nationalized limits of the “Philippine Area of Responsibility” used in weather forecasting?

The call for a transnational historiography resonates with Loh’s (2016) article, which enjoins us to take a comparative perspective based on different types of emergencies across nation-states in Southeast Asia. Current environmental problems signaled by the haze that regularly sweeps across several countries in the region certainly require a transnational perspective to understand the imbrication of crossnational interests that lie at the root of the problem.

Even within the nation-state the space of disasters and political geography do not necessarily coincide. In postwar Manila, government officials had to contend with Manila’s political delineations vis-à-vis the scope of floods that did not respect political boundaries. And even if Marcos tried to address this point by creating “Metro Manila,” recent devastating floods (e.g., Ondoy in 2009, Habagat 2012 and 2013) point to the futility of political geography trying to catch up with nature. Moreover, as Warren (2016) emphasizes, even within the space of the same nation-

state geographic disparities mark some areas as more prone than other areas to some types of disasters.

For people in unaffected areas of the country to empathize with those in areas struck by a disaster requires national consciousness, an imagined national community (Anderson 1991). To empathize with people in disaster-struck areas outside the nation-state requires universal or cosmopolitan values, the notion of a global community. As most visibly seen in recent disastrous events, particularly Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) in 2013, the Philippines has been a recipient of this universalism. If only to requite such goodwill, Filipinos need to see beyond the disasters that strike Filipinos and the Philippines and be concerned genuinely with the disasters inflicted by nature and by humans on our fellowmen and fellowwomen in other parts of the planet.

## Note

*The authors acknowledge with gratitude the very helpful comments of Caroline Sy Hau and James Warren on an earlier version of this concluding article. Aguilar's discussion with Takamichi Serizawa on the customary Japanese notion of "nature" (shizen) is also gratefully acknowledged.*

## References

- Aguilar, Filomeno. 2016a. Disasters as contingent events: Volcanic eruptions, state advisories, and public participation in the twentieth-century Philippines. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 64(3–4): 595–626.
- . 2016b. Romancing tropicality: *Ilustrado* portraits of the climate in the late nineteenth century. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 64(3–4): 419–56.
- Allen, Katrina M. 2006. Community-based disaster preparedness and climate adaptation: Local capacity-building in the Philippines. *Disasters* 30(1): 81–101.
- Alvarez, Kerby. 2016. Instrumentation and institutionalization: Colonial science and the Observatorio Meteorológico de Manila, 1865–1899. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 64(3–4): 385–416.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*. Rev. ed. London and New York: Verso.
- Bankoff, Greg. 2016. Hazardousness of place: A new comparative approach to the Filipino past. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 64(3–4): 335–57.
- Bankoff, Greg and Dorothea Hilhorst. 2009. The politics of risk in the Philippines: Comparing state and NGO perceptions of disaster management. *Disasters* 33:686–704.
- Citizens' Disaster Response Center (CDRC). 2014. About us. Online, <http://www.cdrc-phil.com/about/>, accessed 14 Sept. 2016.
- Cruz, Jerik, Hansley Juliano, and Enrico La Viña. 2015. A feast for crows? Probing disaster-related land-grabs in the Philippines. Paper presented in the conference "Contested Access to Land in the Philippines and Indonesia: How can the Rural Poor (Re)gain Control?," Asian Center, University of the Philippines-Diliman, 16–17 Feb. Online, <http://calpi.up.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/4A-JulianoCruzLaVina.pdf>, accessed 19 Sept. 2016.
- Gaillard, J. C., Ilan Kelman, and Ma. Florina Orillos. 2009. US–Philippine military relations after the Mt Pinatubo Eruption in 1991: A disaster diplomacy perspective. *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 8(2): 301–30.
- Geologo, Francis. 2016. Historical seismology and the documentation of postdisaster conditions: The 1863 and 1880 Luzon earthquakes. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 64(3–4): 359–84.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1961. *Totality and infinity: An essay on exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Lita, Reynaldo. 2016. Catholic churches in the Visayas and the earthquake of 15 October 2013. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 64(3–4): 625–40.
- Loh Kah Seng. 2014. Typhoon Ondoy and the translation of disaster expertise in Barangay Banaba, Marikina Valley. *Philippines Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 62(2): 205–31.
- . 2016. Emergency situations, participation, and community-based disaster responses in Southeast Asia: Gray areas and causes for optimism. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 64(3–4): 499–526.
- Marcos, Ferdinand E. 1978. Presidential Decree no. 1566, s. 1978: Strengthening the Philippine disaster control, capability and establishing the national program on community disaster preparedness, 11 June. Malacañang Records Office. Online, <http://www.gov.ph/1978/06/11/presidential-decree-no-1566-s-1978/>, accessed 19 Sept. 2016.
- Oliver-Smith, Anthony. 1994. Peru's five-hundred-year earthquake: Vulnerability in historical context. In *Disasters, development and environment*, ed. Ann Varley, 3–48. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.
- Pante, Michael D. 2016. The politics of flood control and the making of Metro Manila. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 64(3–4): 555–92.
- Rizal, José. 1996a. *Noli me tangere*, ed. Raul L. Locsin, trans. Soledad Lacson-Locsin. Makati: Bookmark.
- . 1996b. *Sobre la indolencia de los filipinos / On the indolence of Filipinos*. In *La Solidaridad*, vol. 2: 1890, trans. Guadalupe Fores-Ganzon, 322–27, 340–45, 362–69, 388–401, 416–21. Pasig City: Fundación Santiago.
- Rodríguez, Agustin Martin. 2016. Discoursing disasters: Vulnerability and gaps in rationalities. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 64(3–4): 473–98.
- Saguin, Kristian Karlo. 2016. States of hazard: Aquaculture and narratives of typhoons and floods in Laguna de Bay. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 64(3–4): 529–56.
- Shimizu, Hiromu. 2001. *The orphans of Pinatubo*. Manila: Solidaridad Publishing.
- Warren, James Francis. 2016. Typhoons and the inequalities of Philippine society and history. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 64(3–4): 455–72.

**Filomeno Aguilar, Michael D. Pante, and Angelli F. Tugado**

are, respectively, the Chief Editor, Associate Editor, and Manuscript Editor and Office Manager of *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*. Aguilar and Pante are affiliated with the Department of History, School of Social Sciences, Ateneo de Manila University. Tugado teaches occasionally at the Department of Philosophy, School of Humanities, Ateneo de Manila University. <fvaguilar@ateneo.edu>, <mpante@ateneo.edu>, <atugado@ateneo.edu>