

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON THE TASADAY CONTROVERSY

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The 1986 International Conference on the Tasaday Controversy and other Urgent Anthropological Issues was held on August 15-17, 1985 at the Philippine Social Science Center, Diliman, Quezon City. This was organized by the Department of Anthropology of the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines, the *Ugnayang Pang-Aghamtao, Inc.* (UGAT), and the National Organization of Anthropologists in the Philippines. This conference sought to resolve the long-standing controversy on the Tasaday and other cases that are both of national and international concern.

Attended by about 200 participants of varied disciplines, occupations and nationalities, the three-day conference presented the highlights of the anthropological debates. The special participation of the original researchers: those who claim authenticity of the Tasaday; their counterparts who doubt the authenticity of the Tasaday; discussants from the anthropologists, archaeologists, journalists, linguists, ethnologists, historians, theologians, public officials, and the different tribal groups and relatives of the so-called Tasadays contributed to the frank and candid discussion of the issues during the said anthropological enterprise.

The conference opened in the morning of the 15th of August with the welcome address delivered by Ms. Margarita de los Reyes Cojuangco, Chairperson of the Task Force on National Minorities. Professor Jerome B. Bailen of the Department of Anthropology, UP Diliman, gave the opening remarks as conference chairman. Atty. Fausto Lingating, Deputy Minister of the Office of Muslim Affairs and Cultural Minorities, gave the keynote address in defense of the cultural minorities and their right to self-determination among other rights.

#### Session I

Arsenio Manuel, Professor of Anthropology, UP Diliman, read his paper entitled *On the Peopling of Mindanao: an Exploratory Theory*. Marcelino Maceda, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences of Central Mindanao University, discussed the exploratory theory from the linguistic approach.

#### Session II

*The History of the Tasaday Controversy*, a documentary narrative, was given by Domingo Nun, Professor of History at Notre Dame University of Cotabato City and president of the Historical Society of South Cotabato.

## Session III

The first proponents to present arguments for the Tasadays were Carlos Fernandez, cultural anthropologist and John Nance, journalist, who joined Elizalde<sup>1</sup> in his PANAMIN project on the Tasadays. Douglas E. Yen, ethnologist, supported their claims.

Carlos Fernandez decried that in the Tasaday case there is more anthropology from the journalists rather than from the real anthropologists. He said that the Tasaday's description as stone age people is now discredited. He also admitted that recent researches may disprove 70% of his original work yet he believes that the phenomena of change of the Tasaday is understood in the total picture of society as historically changing, not bonded but permeable. Describing the Tasaday as hunters engaged in horticulture, he classifies them as representatives of the hunting and gathering society. More data, however, need to be gathered according to Fernandez. He added that to understand the Tasaday, it is necessary to understand their neighbors, other groups, and aggregates.

Ernesto Constantino, linguist, presented some interpretations of the word, *Tasaday*: it refers to people. T. Llamson, S. J. of the Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University, made an etymological study rendering the Malay *saday* as abandoned, thus abandoned people. Zeus Salazar, ethnologist-historian, UP Diliman, interprets *saday* as *sa + aday* or *daya* (upstream). *Ta* means crest, thus *tasaday* means mountain. Fernandez supported this.

## Session IV

Critical views on claims of the authenticity of the Tasaday presented by Christian Adler, human ethnologist and physicist from the University of Munich, exposed how the so-called Tasaday "allowed themselves to be victims of a joke" propagated by Elizalde in 1971. Adler who made a visit to the Tasaday area in 1985 disguised as a rattan dealer, said that the Tasaday story is the story of the Obu who became prisoners in their own territory with the help of the T'boli and Obu leaders who silenced them. Calling this "a crime to humanity and a scandal of the 20th century," he pointed at the Fox-Elizalde partnership as the schemers of the Tasaday story. He theorized that Robert Fox, the American anthropologist who worked with Elizalde "recreated the Tabun men (of Palawan) in the Tasadays."

## Session V

Added arguments for the authenticity of the Tasaday were presented by Jesus Peralta, curator of the Anthropology Division of the Philippine National Museum. Vividly recounting his first expedition to the Tasaday area in 1971 with Fox, he said he first met the Tasaday in a clearing where huts were constructed. He took note of the tools that he saw: a flake stone used as a high angle scraper and described as a crystalline quartz, chalcedony or opal; a stone hammer; a stone for making fire, or "*batong tiktik*" and some metal tools introduced by Dafal, the Blit hunter. Dafal, otherwise named Fafalu in the records,

comes from Blit. He joined the Tasadays as the 25th member. As recounted by researchers, he was wearing leaves and hunting in the forest and living the Tasaday way. In his second expedition with Nance and Fernandez, Peralta saw the possibility of doing archaeology as his main objective. That was his last visit, however, for he never had the chance to return as much as he wanted to.

Peralta theorized that between 1971-76 or in a span of 15 years there could have been changes among the Tasadays due to their contact with outsiders and the outside world. In reacting to the hoax theory, he said that the National Museum's archaeological data on the Tasadays have remained unchanged. He said that they are not living in one main cave. There are at least three nuclear units and there are indications of a fourth nuclear unit. He agrees with Richard E. Elkins of the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Llamson that the Tasaday is a sub-group of the Manobo. Elements of cultivation, hunting, gathering and foraging varied among each sub-group. Agriculture of the Tasadays which is swidden or 'slash and burn' was taught by Dafal to Bilangan, one of the Tasadays. Dafal himself engages in agriculture outside of the Tasaday territory which is a rain-forest. Bows and arrows come from Blit since bamboo is not available in the Tasaday area.

The theory of their isolation, however, received much reaction since the so-called Tasadays are sporting earrings similar to the Ubos and Blit. Maceda noticed that there is no inbreeding among the Tasadays even as Peralta charted their genealogy of six generations past.

Oswald Iten, Swiss economic anthropologist-journalist who made a trip to the Tasaday area in March 1986 disproved the authenticity of the Tasaday when he recounted how he met Bilangan and his three sons dressed up like lowlanders and how he found out Bilangan's father to be T'boli. Walking for 14 hours from Surallah Airport to the Tasaday caves with the help of a map, he found out that the Tasaday area is actually two hours' walk from Blit, thereby disproving the theory of the Tasaday isolation. His unannounced week-long visit was greeted by a "stage show" like a "tourist dress strategy" from the Tasadays. Their increase from 24 to 61 individuals in 15 years is a phenomenon which Iten called "super-record in population growth".

He said that *National Geographic Magazine* was informed in 1985 of his planned visit to the Tasadays but before he could leave for the area, Nance was on his mission to publish his material in *Asiaweek*. He called this an instance when institutions, media and others have to defend themselves.

These are the conclusions of Iten:

- 1) There are no cave-dwellers and stone-age men.
- 2) The Tasaday is a splinter-group of the Blit.
- 3) The caves serve not as a dwelling place, but as a religious place.
- 4) Elizalde masterminded the Tasaday hoax with his close associates as his assistants.
- 5) The Tasadays were motivated by benefits, not forced.
- 6) The defense of the Tasadays is a cover-up.

Zeus A. Salazar, presented his arguments criticizing the authenticity of the Tasaday. In reacting to Peralta's views, he underscored three points:

- 1) When Fernandez edited a small pamphlet on the Tasaday, Llamson's article was reproduced as is in the *Philippine Journal Linguistics* as was Elkin's work. Salazar's comment however, was suppressed.

- 2) From the original theory that the Tasadays lived 2,000 years ago, Llamson noted that they were from 500-700 years ago. Salazar however objected to protochronology as applied to linguistics but there was no debate yet between him and Peralta.
- 3) Salazar's theory regarding the age of the Tasadays agrees with Constantino's data derived from Dafal. Salazar lamented that he had to wait 15 years to counter the proponents' arguments or just to have a scholarly exchange.

Salazar commented that the arrangement and interpretation of external data gathered by the proponents of the Tasaday have inconsistencies. The external data are weak because their interpretations rest heavily on Dafal who claimed not to know much Tasaday language. He communicates with them in sign language. He is said to know nothing of the caves, too. Dafal was least successful in introducing material elements in the area he was expert in, like making *natik* and traps. But how did the people learn *natik* making? The probable answer is that the Tasaday learned more Manobo compared to learning Dafal's Tasaday. The statement that the Tasadays are cave-dwelling and stone-using people is not consistent with the data. Lowlanders go to the caves when problems arise to seek the assistance of the spirits of their ancestors, a phenomenon among Malayo-Polynesian people.

On the internal or anthropological data such as language, physical needs and traditions, Salazar indicated that the findings point to a later dating of the Tasaday. The language of the Tasaday is Manobo<sup>2</sup>, a Malayo-Polynesian language. Malayo-Polynesians are neolithic, not palaeolithic. Words in their vocabulary on the other hand, indicate a later age: *diwata* from Sanskrit; *balyam* related to *babaylen* or *babarilin*, *busaw*, or bad spirit as used by other Philippine tribes; *muna* is Spanish; and *faez* is a stone tool and not a club. *Bolo* is *faez bato*. In B'laan, *faez* is a sword with a copper handle, an heirloom. This word belongs to the Iron Age. *D'fang* means roof or *atip*; *lawi* means lean-to. The word *tukud* or *tukudan* suggests a house, while *musag* or *ugsod* means props for cooking rice.

On the physical needs, Salazar noted that Nance on his very first visit gave the Tasadays rice, and this did not give them any problems, showing that they are familiar with it. It was also noted that there was no incidence of goiter among the Tasadays, another indication that they are not deficient in some minerals that the lowlands offer. They knew the use of the broom which showed their acquaintance with houses. Their practice of polygamy does not distinguish them from other Mindanao groups. Their use of tattoos is closely related with agriculture and headhunting. The cutting of the infant's umbilical cord with bamboo is a Malay practice. Their practice of covering their loins with orchid leaves is closely similar to the Malayan use of loin cloth.

It was noted that the Tasaday has a concept of property-ownership, and of

<sup>1</sup> Manuel "Manda" Elizalde, millionaire-businessman turned politician, who founded PANAMIN (originally Private Association for National Minorities then changed to Presidential Assistance on Cultural Minorities).

<sup>2</sup> The methods employed by the laboratories to analyze the samples were requested for this report. No animal laboratory facilities are available in Mindanao for diagnostic work; hence, the techniques used on the samples tested were those developed for humans.

good brother and bad brother, concepts which belong to the Islamic and Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Walter Unger and Jay Ullal, journalists from *Stern* magazine, a German publication, recounted their experience during a visit to the Tasaday area, just two weeks after Iten's visit. It took them more than a day's walk from Blit to the Tasaday area. This time they had a guide. By the time they arrived in the area they were greeted by the Tasadays in the caves, all dressed up in leaves. But underneath they wore ordinary clothing. On the eve of their last day, there was some stir in the forest and then they found themselves surrounded by armed men who made them hostages. These two were the last foreign journalists to visit the area.

Gov. Ismael Sueno, Governor of the province of South Cotabato in Mindanao, appealed to the body of anthropologists and foreign institutions not to waste money on researches that experiment on people but to direct their resources to useful ends for the welfare of the people of the community. He mentioned the necessity for foreigners who come into the research area to pay courtesy calls on the local government. He also recalled that as an old resident of South Cotabato and having lived close to the Tasaday area as a young man, he never heard of the Tasaday people until very lately.

#### Session VI

Florence Henson, archaeologist of the Philippine National Museum presented other *Urgent Issues in Philippine Anthropology* related to the Tasaday case: the Tao't Bato, Migration Theory, Dingle incident, etc. This paper exposed Manda Elizalde's attempt of a hoax on Tao't Bato. Comments by discussants Leothiny Clavel, professor of Anthropology of UP, Diliman and Fernando N. Zialcita, professor of Anthropology of Ateneo de Manila University, contributed to the unmasking of other hoaxes. Zialcita said that anthropology demands ethics; while Clavel, citing Elizalde's scholarly visits to the Ata in Romblon as a pretext only for examining the area to determine deposits of gold while removing the marbles, said that the study of Elizalde could lead to the truth about the Tasaday.

#### Session VII

Gerald Berreman, Professor of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley, read his paper, *Ethics and Commitment in Anthropological Research*. Citing his involvement in issues of ethics and responsibility and in the framing of the Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association, Berreman refuted the notion that anthropology should be value-free, adding that "all social scientists practice politics, either of truth or of obscurantism." He shared the 1971 Principles of Professional Responsibility or the Code of Ethics adapted by the anthropologists of America (in their order of importance)

- 1) Responsibility to the people being studied
- 2) Responsibility to the public, thereby prohibiting secrecy
- 3) Responsibility to the discipline

- 4) Responsibility to the students.
- 5) Responsibility to the funding agencies.
- 6) Responsibility to the governments

He also recounted the ethical pitfalls when anthropologists are used by governments for counterinsurgency and other political interests thereby threatening the ethics of the whole anthropological enterprise.

Discussants on the topic of Ethics and Commitment in Anthropological Research were Wilfredo Dulay, CICM, Professor of Pastoral Theology, CICM Novitiate, Quezon City; Michael Tan, Professor of Anthropology, UP Diliman; and Louis Y. Kikuchi, Professor of Anthropology, Waseda University, Tokyo. Dulay commented that in southern Mexico where he stayed for three years, the Indian life was ruptured by anthropologists. He further said that in the history of indigenous Third World peoples, the first anthropologists were at the service of the colonizers. Tan underscored the need to reassess the status of anthropology in the Philippines. He gave a positive note on the accountability of anthropologists to their peers as being emphasized now by younger anthropologists. Kikuchi contributed to the discussion saying that trust is needed "even in polarity" since anthropology is for the people. He decried the focus of too much personal attacks among anthropologists.

#### Session VIII

John H. Bodley, Professor of Anthropology, Washington State University at Pullman, read his paper entitled *Indigenous Peoples as Victims of Progress*. Bodley said that as an approach, the policy of self-determination is more ideal; but, the more dominant approach today is the integration policy of the state. Indigenous peoples are called tribes, a name given by the State for administrative policies. Progress is forced by the State. There is an urgent call therefore for the State and its policies to change.

Joseph Serech-sen, Professor of Applied Theology, CICM Theologiate, Guatemala, and a member of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples since 1975, recounted how the Indian people who are today found in Meso America, Upper Mexico to Paraguay, became victims of progress. He differentiated the traditional indigenous peoples' mode of government from that of the State today; in the former all the powers — political, economic, and religious — are embodied in a single unit or body, a group of elders. They do not need the right connections and political backing to be called leaders. The dominant society, however, sees them as unorganized. The State has divided them along the jurisdiction of land, law and politics. An example of this is the one million Kitchie Indian people in Guatemala, one people who are divided into three provinces. It was also added that for indigenous peoples the land's value is its use, not its speculative value.

Joanna Cariño, Chairperson of the Cordillera Consultative Committee, said that the test of how democratic nation states are is the response they give to the demands of indigenous peoples. The situation calls for an international institution that protects and defends indigenous people's rights.

#### Session IX

Owen J. Lynch, Jr., visiting professor of Law, UP Diliman, recounted the history of the ethnic minority of the Philippines in his paper, *Research, Public Policy and Rights of Minority People*.

Atty. Fausto Lingating, Deputy Minister, Office of Muslim Affairs and Cultural Minorities, said that tribal customary laws and rights are recognized and yet there has been no implementation. Citing his law practice of 17 years with 96 of his cases concerning his own ethnic group, the Subanon, Lingating advocated a Philippine Constitution that respects customary laws of minorities.

Ponciano L. Bennagen, UGAT President and member of the 1986 Philippine Constitutional Commission, gave a brief report on his proposal to the Constitutional Commission that the State respect customary laws in regard to ancestral land or right of indigenous communities to choose their own path to self-determination. Citing the provision on exploitation of natural resources under autonomy as against the Regalian Doctrine, he stressed that the political autonomy of particular regions (such as the Cordillera and Muslim regions) has to be strengthened as a base for autonomous government to respond to their own needs.

#### Session X

Voices from the minority peoples were heard on the last day of the conference: from the Manobo of Mindanao, the Kankano of Cordillera and Ayatakah of the Ifugao.

The Manobo representative from Lumad Mindanao reviewed the history of encroachment of PANAMIN in South Cotabato. At the height of the fight between the Manobos and their Datu, Ma Falen, and the Visayan settlers, Elizalde came into the picture. Thereafter, Ma Falen was supported by PANAMIN. Similarly, other warring tribal leaders were supported by PANAMIN.

The Alliance of Lumad Mindanao Council of Leaders came up with their conclusion on the Tasaday:

1. The Tasaday mountain is not a dwelling place, but a pilgrimage area for the Tudak Manobo and Ubo.
2. The so-called Tasaday is a clan but not separate from Tudak Manobo.
3. With the growth of Visayan settlers' population, this group receded to the hinterlands. They travel 50 kms. away from their villages to hunt.
4. Kulaman Valley is the place of abode of the Tudak Manobo. In its mountain ridge grows the Kamandag tree, treasured by the tribes for its sap which they use for their bow and arrow.

The following are appeals and recommendations from Lumad Mindanao Council of Leaders:

1. Tap tribal people who are concerned with the needs of the tribes.
2. Studies in the area should be done with proper consultation with the

*lumad*<sup>3</sup> of the area.

3. Results of studies should be provided to the tribal people, not hidden from them.
4. There is a need for building a tribal group's museum.
5. Artifacts taken out of the area should be returned.
6. Elizalde should come back for the restitution of what he has taken from the tribes.
7. Let the 22 missing scholars of PANAMIN return to their parents. These scholars are young tribal maidens who were taken by Elizalde with him when he left the Philippines.
8. Schools for lumad have to be opened.
9. Appeal to anthropologists and researchers not to enter the cultural area as agents of the CIA.

From the Cordillera People, a spokesperson described their situation as follows: To know the culture of the Cordillera of the Philippines one has to go to the United States or Europe since artifacts have been taken away from the Cordillera and transported to foreign museums by the foreign anthropologists, tourists, and recently, the military. There is the insensitivity of foreigners in treating people as sources of information only; research results are not fed back to the people. They demand that researches should be given to the local government and to the community.

The Cordillera situation hit the international scene in mid 1970's in the Chico River Dam Project and the Cellophil Controversy which affected the Tingigians. The creation of a Marcos Park for an international golf course dislocated families who used the same area as their rice and pasture land. The border between Cagayan Valley and Kalinga-Apayao is the most heavily militarized. There are nine big logging concessionaires in Kalinga-Apayao. There is an obvious partnership between the military and big business, as when businessmen's helicopters are used for strafing operations by the military:

These are the recommendations of the Cordillera People's Alliance (CPA):

- a) Proper consultation with the people in the CPA office for briefing before research is undertaken.
- b) Return research results to university and community. Support struggles of indigenous peoples for right to ancestral lands.

The Ifugao representative presented Ifugao as the first province in the Cordillera to be militarized in the early days of Martial Law, with the area between Nueva Vizcaya and Ifugao as the most heavily militarized. In the face of military abuses, evacuations, threats and killings, the Ifugao Commission on Human Rights was established in 1974.

In Banawe, there is the problem with tourism. The widening of roads have destroyed rice terraces and people are not yet paid for their land. The concrete roads are meant to help farmers, but it is the middlemen and above all, the Philippine Tourism Authority that profit most, not the farmers of Banawe.

In Kiangnan where the Yamashita Shrine stands, there is a rush to treasure-hunting by outsiders. This has resulted to the destruction of the rice terraces. The Ifugao spokesman concluded that as indigenous peoples, they have the right to own treasures.

<sup>3</sup>Lumad — descriptive name for Tribal Filipinos, especially in Mindanao.

Ray Hilot, Executive Director of the Episcopal Commission for Tribal Filipinos, posed the following questions on development: What kind of development is needed? To whose point of view is this development? Related to development is interest. The development of tribal areas by the lowlanders destroyed the indigenous community as a people and as a race. It has been proven that the knowledge of scientists can be used not to help but to destroy indigenous peoples. Hilot ended with the following recommendations:

1. Proper consultation and coordination with people involved.
2. Proper channelling of results of researches — to museum and people.
3. Appeal to all to return all stolen artifacts.
4. Respect the people's struggle for self-determination.

The last of the tribal representation came from South Cotabato. Among them were the relatives of the so-called Tasaday to give testimony to the Tasaday story. Alfredo Tañedo, Jr., otherwise known as George, from Blit, testified that the Tasaday area was divided into logging concessions but that there was no report of Tasaday people.

According to another representative, the story of the Tasaday began when Elizalde came to Blit. Upon his arrival, Dafal, the Blit hunter who was with Elizalde called for a meeting for the people to meet Elizalde whom Dafal called "Our Lord who has come to help us" (as translated). When Elizalde left after a four-day stay, Dafal and Frudi Tuan called a meeting to explain to the people how they could get attention and help. They decided to wear *bahag*<sup>4</sup> so that other people would know that they are poor. When the datu consented to the idea, Datu Dudim allowed his daughter Doloy and her husband, Yong with their children to form the group called Tasadays. Saay, the brother of Yong, came along. Yong got his brother-in-law, Tinda. Igna gave her brother Balayan who was then single. Sindi who was also single was married to Balayan. Datu Magafed chose his father-in-law, Kultaw, to join the group. Together with Kultaw was his son, Dafal.

The training of the BSDU (Barrio Self-Defense Unit) was then organized with two trainees recruited from T'boli, after which the representative became Commander Da Bun. When Elizalde stayed for a while in the area he asked for a wife and a Blit woman was given to him. The T'bolis were asked to join. There were no Tasadays.

Three representatives who spoke in T'boli related their relationships with the Tasadays. Blesen, a niece of Lefonok and Bilangan said that Saay, the Tasaday, is the first cousin of her mother, and that Saay was brought to Maitum by her parents.

Mariano Mondragon of Kiamba, a veteran officer of World War II, Kiamba's No. 1 Councilor in 1947-1951 and its First Town Mayor in 1951-1955 and one time Deputy Governor of Cultural Minorities in Datu Matalam, North Cotabato, testified that he never heard of the Tasaday tribe until Elizalde came. As an officer in the Armed Forces of the Philippines during World War II and later as Councilor, Mayor, and as Chief of Police of Surallah, South Cotabato, he roamed the surrounding areas of the mountain ridge called Tasaday. Having married a Manobo lass, a daughter of Datu Dudim, he frequented the area of the Tasaday. He learned that a Manobo with his wife and two children had gone up to settle in the area and they were joined by other Manobo families under Datu Dudim, Datu Ogata and Datu Magafed. He said that it is a common practice among the Manobos that those who have committed some crime abandon their tribe and settle somewhere else to avoid punishment. He added that the 24 natives pictured by the PANAMIN to be Tasadays are Manobos. He further testified that

four of his Tagabili or T'boli boys were asked to strip and pose for exorbitant fees, and the PANAMIN had a training school for the making of a Tasaday which was cordoned and well-guarded by armed soldiers of PANAMIN.

The conference ended with the summary of issues raised: The Tasaday Controversy is connected with the whole phenomena of a dictatorship. The conference therefore was brought about by this anthropological controversy and other issues which have been the concern of the Philippine Social Science Center for the last five years. Professional ethics was underscored. The anthropologists and journalists have a great responsibility to confront the exact character of the anthropological enterprise in order to make the tribals, not just objects, but subjects of studies. Anthropologists and media were asked to consult with indigenous peoples. Respect of customary laws was urged with the suggestion that these customary laws be studied and codified. The last statement came from the tribal groups: "We indigenous peoples have the right to determine our status and pursue socio-economic and political development in terms we ourselves define."