

Title of Entry: Symphony of dry winds in a time without rain

Category: Essay

Division: English

WE SAW IT COMING. We knew it would come, but had hoped it would not. We left my research site of Jandayan Island in the municipality of Getafe of Bohol province for Batasan Island, a sand bar in the town of Tubigon, my other research site, which is also in Bohol. We left Jandayan much earlier than scheduled to avoid crossing its path. But it did come.

There were signs that it would come. The waves were uncomfortably rough, bouncing our boat off their crests. The *amihan* wind (northeast monsoon) of that mid-May morning of 2005 had been disagreeably hostile. Patches of dark clouds had been floating in the air since the break of dawn. Successive drapes of rain had shaded portions of the mountain ranges and the horizon of the mainland. And now, a huge, dirty-white curtain of rain had loomed before us. It was moving closer to our path, traversing the sea much faster than we had thought. Nante – one of my part-time assistants in his 20s who comes from Batasan Island, and who had been tutored by experience to acknowledge the command of the wind – had to steer the boat towards a cove of mangrove forests on Jandayan’s coast to seek cover, but the hostile *amihan* had still caught us. We were within reach of the mangrove forest when the pounding of rain was upon us. The furious rainsquall enveloped us, concealing everything around us. The boat’s engine had conked out, which made negotiating the rough seas much more difficult. Nante, Cilo (my full-time assistant) and I had to rely on our strength to paddle our way through to the forest.

This sudden change in *amihan*'s temper was something expected as it is characteristically erratic during the remaining days of its season. But its fury never comes unannounced. One needs to feel the signs. To disregard the signs is a reckless invitation to harm. We had been observing the signs and surroundings since we had left the island, only five minutes before: the dryness or dampness of the breeze, the presence or absence of the wind's threatening whistle, the lightness or heaviness of the skies, the movement and color of the clouds, the softness or harshness of the waves, the play of light on the horizon and on the mountain ranges, the shape of the coastline for possible cover, our boat's distance to the shores. But recognizing the signs seemed not enough. To estimate the speed at which these signs conflate is something else again, and a miscalculation of this highly variable conflation may spell disaster.

It had been an extremely hot, dry season. The people of Jandayan must be rejoicing with this sudden downpour. But they knew that this was not enough to fill up the many *tabay* (groundwater deep wells) on the island that had run dry during the unusually long summer. The dry season, according to islanders, has been getting longer and hotter the past years. A few families who own some of these *tabay* export much water to their neighboring islands. If both weather changes and business continued this pattern, all their *tabay* would run dry, indicating the gradual loss of one of the island's major resources – groundwater.

Unlike the rains of *habagat* (southwest monsoon), the rains of *amihan* had always been as intermittent as the homing of crows that used to seek refuge in Balay sa Uwak (or 'home of the crows'), an islet of Jandayan where once thrived dense mangrove forests until islanders had deforested not only the site but the entire coasts of the island, and sold mangrove timber to the regional center in Cebu. Others used mangrove timber to supply firewood for the island's household-based salt-making industries that boomed before and a few years after World War II.

They had replanted portions of their wetlands, but their effort seemed not convincing enough to summon crows back to where they once flocked. Or it could be that the crows simply dwindled in number.

Like the flocks of crows that had fled elsewhere, many inhabitants of the island had gone off in times past to escape uncertainty's grasp, and, upon their return to the village after years of seeking refuge elsewhere, would be struck, indeed astounded, by the loss of much of their *katunggan* (mangrove forests), now given way to hectares of fishponds. These latter were owned by people whose names sounded unfamiliar, not in conformity with the common surnames of islanders that have been prefixed with Torre – Torres, Torrefiel, Torrejos, Torremocha, Torreon, Torregosa – insignias of being from and of their place. They had, indeed, learned to embrace these labels of identity, long ago superimposed on their native names by Spanish invaders and missionaries to identify the turf of the colonizers and the colonized, delineate the boundaries of the colonizers' subjects, spy on the suspicious movement of the subjugated *indio*, and to punish or, if need be, guillotine subjects who dared trespass the maps and confines of their downtrodden existence.

Many women of the village had headed off to urban centers, like Cebu and the national capital of Manila, to work as household helpers, while the men went down south, to Mindanao – declared by the government as the land of promise after World War II – to work as laborers in commercial logging concessions. Like their ancestors, described in a turn-of-the-20th-century document as expert cutters of mangroves who supplied the firewood and domestic requirements of households in Bohol and Cebu, young men of the village between the 1940s and 1980s were an exodus in search of work and a small quotient of certainty in life in the new villages and towns of Mindanao in southern Philippines, mainly in the towns of Agusan and Davao, which blossomed

with the growth of commercial logging in the country. This industry, as described in several studies, begot political empires, bankrolled presidential campaigns, guaranteed the rise and fall of local and national politicians, and nurtured the war between government troops and communist insurgents in the region. The intensification of the war by the government against the communist-led New People's Army in northern Mindanao and Muslim secessionist groups in central and southern Mindanao in the 1970s forced many men of Jandayan to head back home, only to join co-islanders in clearing the mangrove forests of their island. In the late 1980s, when there was no more forest to log in Mindanao, logging concessions folded up one after another. Some of the remaining men of Jandayan trooped back home to their island, while others went to the mountains of Diwalwal in Compostela to partake of the bounty of the booming gold mining industry in southern Philippines, but the political empires of northern Mindanao continued to squeeze through the cracks of the august halls of Congress in Manila.

HOW COMFORTING IT WAS TO BE in the protective embrace of the mangroves. We secured our boat to the stiff trunk of one of the trees. There was a much safer place to seek shelter, had we followed the tidal channel that runs deep into the mangrove wetland, but where we sought cover was good enough to escape the violence of the wind and the rain. We were still within the island's territorial jurisdiction, off the village of Jandayan Sur. We knew we were near the site of the island's lighthouse that, for decades, had guided fishers in their dark, perilous journeys at sea.

I looked at the rainsquall before me. It was like an immense but delicate fabric of silk, its fine fiber of piercing raindrops billowing noisily, gracelessly in the wind, dangerously screening off the view of the horizon.

I wondered where in this mangrove forest the mythical *agta* or tree ogre hides when it rains. The *agta* – tall, brown, hairy, loin-clothed bearded male creature – is known to play pranks on visitors, disorienting travelers on their trips, making them lose their way in the woods. Islanders believe, as most Filipinos do, as I occasionally do, that mangrove forests, all kinds of forests, are home to the *agta* and other unseen inhabitants who are protective of their territory.

Once having secured our boat, I shouted “*tabi, tabi po* (excuse us, elders)” as a way of making our presence known to the unseen dwellers of the mangrove forest. It was our way of asking permission to occupy a portion of their abode temporarily, to apologize for the disturbance that we may have caused, and to say that we meant no harm in crossing the line. I hoped that the blustery wind brought our request to the recesses of the forests where they may have been watching us all along, waiting for us to show our respect, and ready to swoop upon us, to seize their helpless prey on a moment’s suggestion of disrespect.

But I also asked myself where the *agta* and his comrades went when islanders cleared the mangrove forests of Jandayan.

“Look at what had happened to our island when we lost our mangroves,” said 63-year-old Tay Sisoy of Jandayan Norte. “Yes, we lost our *agta*, which we feared anyhow. But we also lost our wetlands to non-islanders who were granted leases by the government for their fishponds.”

They never really lost their *agta*, I said to myself. It always makes its presence felt all around the island.

Islanders had named one portion of Jandayan Norte’s tidal flat *Dalan sa Agta* or Road of the Mangrove Ogre, a 100-meter flat surface that looks like a cemented road on the shore. It is submerged at high tide, but exposed at low tide, and mangrove forests thrive near the site. No one from the island could remember how the *agta* came into the story of the place. They all grew up

with the name *Dalan sa Agta* already in place. All that islanders could remember was the story passed on to them by their ancestors about the presence on one end of Dalan's flat surface of a huge *pagatpat* mangrove tree so old that its trunk was hollow, where many believed the *agta* lived.

One day, according to their ancestors' stories as narrated to me by 79-year-old Tay Juan, sometime in the past – when exactly Tay Juan said their ancestors could not remember – a strong typhoon visited the island. On the night of the typhoon, there reverberated on the island a loud, deep sound, something like a woeful wail, a mournful groan. Their ancestors believed the horrendous sound came from *Dalan sa Agta*. They believed it was the moan of the *agta*.

The following day, when the skies had cleared, when the strong winds had left, they saw the huge *pagatpat* – the abode of the *agta* – lying prostrate on the tidal flat, exhausted, dead, its age unable to reckon with the rage of the wind. At first, no one dared touch the tree lest they incur the wrath of the *agta*, but in the days that followed, islanders slowly gathered the courage to cut its trunk and branches, and brought home pieces of the *agta*'s abode, which they used for the repair of their houses.

Many from the island, including the elderly, dismissed this story by their ancestors about the wailing *agta* as ridiculous, but some of them said they remember having seen, during their childhood, an old, huge *pagatpat* mangrove tree that stood on one end of *Dalan sa Agta*, and that sometime in the late 1940s, a strong typhoon knocked this old tree down. They were not sure, however, if this was the same mangrove tree in the story of their ancestors.

HE ALMOST TURNED INTO AN AGTA. That was how Carnuto described himself when he lost his 15,000 mangrove trees. Acquiescent and always fearful of those high up in the island's economic and political ladder, he felt defenseless when a fishpond owner accused him of

trespassing on his territory. The fishpond owner threatened to bring the issue to municipal officials if he would not clear the mangroves that he had planted next to the fishpond. Carnuto did not put up a fight. He knew he had no right over the site, but neither did the fishpond owner. It was public land. But he did not want to get into trouble; he had no nerve for trouble. Among mangrove owners in Jandayan, Carnuto was the least likely to endure conflict. He and his children cleared all the mangroves he had nurtured for seven to ten years. He could not understand why the fishpond owner took seven, ten years to warn him about his trees.

Mangrove owners believed that an injustice had been committed against Carnuto. “It was like banishing him from his own land,” they said. But they kept their opinion to themselves, and no one from among them stood up to defend what they perceived was a transgression of a mangrove planter’s right.

The village council did not interfere in the incident. Neither did Carnuto seek the help of village authorities. “I still have mangrove trees, anyway, in other sites,” remarked Carnuto, his way of consoling himself.

“But if that had happened to me,” said Rey, a man in his 20s who is also a mangrove owner, “I would have buried them [the fishpond operators] in my own mangrove forest.” Indeed, many among them believe in their rights as mangrove planters, rights not recognized by the government. So passionate was their belief in those rights that they would kill or die for them, except for a few like Carnuto, who would rather stay quiet in his den.

Rey, a young man in Jandayan Norte who also owns hectares of mangrove trees, once invited me to take a tour of the mangrove forests of Banacon, which municipal officials boast as the largest human-made mangrove forest in Southeast Asia. Banacon is one of the islands near Jandayan Island and located on the Calituban Reef of the unique Danajon Bank. My research

assistants prepared the food for the trip. We borrowed the motorized pumpboat of the barangay council and asked Tay Carias, one of the guards of Jandayan Norte's marine protected area, to be our boatman. We figured out during the trip that Tay Carias, a hook-and-line fisher for decades, was just starting to get himself acquainted with the use of a motorized boat. In all his years of fishing, he had been using only his *sakayan*, a non-motorized outrigger boat. Like many fishers of Jandayan Norte, Tay Carias never had the resources to buy an engine for his boat.

We were greeted by a dilapidated billboard put up by the government's environment department on one of the tidal channels leading to the interior of Banacon's dense mangrove forests, but there was nothing to read on the signboard. The paint had peeled off, and whatever notice was painted on it had been blown away by harsh winds that had constantly visited the island, or more likely, joked Tay Carias, had been scraped off by some naughty residents of Banacon who had never believed in the announcement on the board, which Tay Carias, who could hardly read, said was about prohibitions inside the forest as explained to him by islanders. It was an empty signboard, as vacant as the interior of some secluded portions of the forest, empty of mangroves, cleared by islanders. The government had prohibited the cutting of mangroves, islanders could not recall when.

Not far from the signboard was the local office of the government's environment department.

In the interior of the forest, bundled mangrove timber lined some portions of the tidal passage ways that looked like sea channels intersecting and crisscrossing each other, defining the geometry of plots of mangrove trees.

From a distance, Banacon's mangrove forest looked immense. On the forest's bosom, it felt intimidating. Within its recesses, it was hollow.

We had our lunch in one of the open sites of the forest, facing the outer reef, the Caubyan Reef of Danajon Bank. Tay Carias, the ever-dutiful Tay Carias, placed a bottle of *tubá* (coco palm toddy), a scoop of rice and pieces of pork *adobo* on one of the boulders jutting out of the sea, and asked us to keep a moment of silence. He mumbled a short prayer. “For the *agta* and the hidden spirits of the forest and the sea,” he said to me while we were having our lunch.

I remembered Nay Ibing of Batasan Island who mumbled a short prayer while casting bits of food into the sea. It was the feast of San Juan in 2003. We were on their boat, like other families who were on their respective boats anchored on the shores of Batasan. “It was,” she said, “my way of offering something to the spirits and the elements of the sea, lest they cast their spell on us if we forget our obligation to them.” “And whenever we encounter rough conditions during our trips,” added Cilo’s wife, Maribel, “we always throw coins into the sea to pay our due to all *those who are not like us.*”

What is due those *who are not like us* they called *abang sa dagat* or sea rent. “Even before we had learned to pay our taxes to the government, our ancestors had been giving religiously the original inhabitants of the sea and the mangrove forests what was due them,” said Tay Carias. This obligation, he said, their ancestors had taught them, and was something that he would dutifully fulfill, an obligation of which the younger generation of the island should always be reminded.

Before leaving Banacon, Rey teased Tay Carias, “Lucky is the fisher or the mangrove cutter who would find the *tubá* on that rock!”

“Bad-mannered fisher, disrespectful mangrove cutter!” replied Tay Carias.

Everyone in the island knew how some people had sometimes stolen *abang* meant for the spirits and the elements. Or how their *abang sa dagat* had been given new life, altered, transformed by some islanders, government officials and visitors to buttress their claims to mangrove forests,

tidal flats, fishing grounds, shoals, patches of reefs, and wetlands turned into fishponds; and revenue therefrom.

That was how it was from after World War II until the fall of the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, and on through the early 1990s when some local entrepreneurs secured portions of the island's tidal flats for their *bunsod* or fish corrals. They called these sites *sitio-sitio* or sea estate. Fish corral owners paid their *abang* or rent to the local government, restricted fishing near their corrals, and reaped all the benefits from the arrangement. Some fishers, on the other hand, surreptitiously cast *tubli*, a natural poison from a leguminous plant whose roots, when pound and mixed with water, become toxin that suffocates and stuns fish, or *koskos* (cyanide) in some of the fish corrals, or openly blasted fishing grounds near some of the corrals.

It was, I suppose, the fishers' way of taking back their share, in exchange of the older forms of *abang* they had offered to the sea. The *abang* had become a tournament of investments and surprises and expectations until, one day, an insidious dread crept onto the island. The sea had run out of fish, low tidal waters had exposed the bleached heads of corals, silt from the mainland had muddied the island's shoreline.

A BOAT SUDDENLY APPEARED from the furious gusts of the rainsquall. We saw a man strenuously paddling his boat toward us, making a determined effort to seek shelter, his body bent heavily and strained under the weight of the wind. But he went past where we were, and, in an instant, vanished into the thickness of the tempest, deep into the mangrove forest.

Was that image real, or was it an illusion? Was the *agta* playing pranks on that solitary fisher, or on us who sought shelter in the woods?

“When we were kids, while playing near mangroves, or walking through the mangrove forest,” said Rey while we were having our lunch in the forest of Banacon, “we would scamper in different directions whenever we heard a low and deep human-sounding sigh coming from the woods. The *agta*, the *agta*, we would shout. And once we had regrouped, while gathering back courage and comfort in each other’s presence, we would look out for the *agta*. No *agta* would come out of the woods. I don’t think there is truth about the *agta*.”

“Don’t speak negatively about the *agta*,” warned Tay Carias, “our prayers would be for naught.”

“Those sounds we hear in the woods are the wind’s,” added Nilo, “Kids and adults imagine a lot, you know. Any unfamiliar sound they hear they would readily attribute to the unknown.”

Indeed, the mangrove forest filters the wind from the open sea, and transforms it into a different timbre, pitch, and contour. The wind morphs into a roar, a howl, a bellow, a grunt, a boom, a rumble, a shriek, or a groan. It whines, hoots, moans, screams, whistles, whimpers, whispers, rustles, sighs, murmurs, rasps, and wheezes. It may present a complex cacophony of indiscernible sounds, or yet again a symphony, a requiem, an oratorio, a hymn, a chant, a madrigal, and a ballad about everything that has to do with the island. It poses riddles and conundrums of amusing or mocking aural signs. It can fall into dead silence, a completely unfathomable, mysterious, even comforting silence that infiltrates the island. The wind speaks in many tongues. That is how I understand their view about the wind.

The village healer also speaks in different tongues. My son, whom I brought along for my fieldwork during his summer vacation in 2005, had been running a high fever for almost a week, and I was advised by some Jandayan islanders to consult a local healer to find the cause of his illness. The healer, an elderly woman, after asking my son to spin three times the *bilao* (a flat and

round-shaped bamboo-knitted tray) she was holding, advised us to offer a bottle of *tubá* and half a dozen boiled eggs to the spot of the mangrove forest in Batasan where my son, according to the healer, had most likely annoyed the *agta*.

Many Jandayan and Batasan islanders, however, dismissed the healer's words. We did not follow the advice of the healer when we returned to Batasan.

In Batasan, when I was down with fever and diarrhea for three days, an elderly woman rubbed my stomach with coconut oil, plastered my body with all sorts of leaves, and blew a whoosh of air on my head to stabilize, she said, the imbalance of air inflicted upon me by someone from the village, by *someone not like us*.

"You might have said or done something that had annoyed *him* or *her*," the healer explained.

The diagnosis by these healers of my son's illness, of my discomfort, of villagers' sicknesses, of the geography of our body is woven into the biography of their villages: a blast fisher who had lost an arm had been punished by the elements for disrespecting the sea; an exhausted sea was a chastisement by preternatural beings for the harmful behavior of human beings toward their surroundings; long droughts, which had visited Jandayan several times in the past – causing the death of corn and rice fields, the drying up of fishponds and groundwater wells, and the consequent abandonment by islanders of some of the fields, ponds and wells on the island – were a warning about something unbalanced in the world. Many tongues are spoken, with myriad meanings.

Many islanders have more pragmatic explanations for these incidents: a blast fisher would surely lose his arm, even his life, if he fails to throw the blasting device on time; a sea is exhausted because fishers have learned to use all sorts of methods to catch fish; long droughts occur because

these are ‘natural phenomena’ of the earth. The many islands and villages in Bohol and other parts of the country that I have visited are a geography of multiple languages, sounds and images.

THE RAINQUALL WAS OVER in twenty minutes, a hurried visit, the departure as abrupt as the arrival. The brief storm of *amihan* winds and heavy rain had segued to a more comfortable but still powerful wind.

Nante started fixing the boat’s engine. Cilo checked the propeller at the bottom of the boat, and figured out that one of its blades had cracked. We knew that there was something wrong with the propeller. During this trip, Nante and Cilo had noticed something unusual in the sound produced by the spinning blades as they shredded the sea.

Jandayan Island is the only island among the nine islands covered by the municipality of Getafe that has been endowed with groundwater, most of which is found in two of the island’s barangays, Handumon and Jandayan Norte. Jandayan Sur, owing perhaps to its location, directly facing the town center of Getafe on the mainland, serves as the island’s commercial center and the most populous among the three. During the dry season, when rainwater in some households’ rainwater reservoirs run dry, these islands depend on Jandayan for their domestic water supply. During the El Niño of 1998, Jandayan supplied the domestic water needs of Getafe’s town center. Yet neighboring islanders, coastal dwellers on the mainland, and some townspeople held Jandayan’s water haulers in low regard, often requiring them to clean the islanders’ water containers, a task that water haulers believed was no longer their responsibility. Perhaps, as one water hauler said, they had always been so meek, so accommodating, that their neighbors had misconstrued them as submissive.

Perhaps, it was such meekness on the part of Jandayan islanders, their stooped stance, their silence, that had encouraged others to take advantage of them. They kept quiet about the loss of a slice of their island to silica mining in the 1960s. They kept quiet about the loss, in the 1970s, of their *romblon* plants to traders who supplied the raw materials needed by Bohol's and Cebu's mat and bag weaving industries in response to the growing domestic and international demand for hand-woven crafts. They kept quiet about the modest pay their women were getting for threading nassa shells to form leis, necklaces and bracelets, or from gluing cowries to form ornamental designs, which traders brought to tourist destinations of the country or exported to other countries. They kept quiet about the loss of some of their mangrove forests to fishpond operations, about the terrorism of the *agta*, about the fate of their *abang*. They kept quiet about so many things, and all they uttered was a sigh, all they did was heave a deep sigh that had set the leaves of mangrove trees to rustling.

Aspersions had been cast even upon their island's name and their very character by some who had come to their shores and by others who had heard all sorts of stories about their place. Jandayan Island got its name from the word *janday*, to sit with one foot raised on a seat in order for the chin to rest on the knee, while the other foot sways leisurely. Many had taken this to mean laziness.

“Whoever interpreted our island's name that way must be crazy!” said Tay Sisoy. “We have never been a lazy people.”

Islanders recited a litany of defenses against this abuse wrought by some outsiders on their island's name. To sit leisurely, to while away their time, to have time for a chat with friends, that is not laziness. To banter, to laugh, to share stories, things that many had already taken for granted, that is not laziness. That is their way of connecting with one another. They play card games in

the afternoon and take the opportunity to talk about other people's lives. Sometimes they win, many times they lose, but who cares? They gossip, which some anthropologists argue, is a narrative about commonly held norms, a kind of narrative that is continuously worked on, a text that provides a map of the community's social environment and normative standards, a narrative, again according to anthropologists, that is marked by a continuous cycle of community self-reference.

To take an afternoon nap, that is not laziness. Many of those who take naps are fishers who had spent the night in the sea, or had gone to sea before the crack of dawn and returned home before noon, tired and often disappointed with their catch for the day – a kilo of fish, sometimes two kilos, but often less than a kilo – barely enough to meet a family's daily needs. A man wandering in the mangrove forest is not walking aimlessly; he is inspecting his forest, inspecting almost every branch or twig for signs of violations, or examining footprints in the muddy swamp, or looking for any sign that would indicate that people have passed through his forest. To walk every day in one's mangrove forest, that is not laziness, that is an obligation. Their life in the island may seem, for others, to be at a standstill, on a long pause, but that is their rhythm, that is how they nourish their life. That is how they live in this community. That is how they live a community.

IN LESS THAN AN HOUR, Nante was able to fix the boat's engine, and Cilo had replaced the broken propeller with a new one. The gloom around us had vanished. Everything seemed perfect for a safe trip, except for the still strong winds that slapped the surface of the sea. The waves were still powerful but more spaced out than they had been minutes ago. Rainwater was

dripping from the leaves of mangroves, like tears puncturing the waters, creating small ripples that ensnared other ripples to form a creased and interconnected web.

The village council of Jandayan Norte declared in 2003 a marine reserve in a portion of one of their fishing grounds, which they call Jagnaya. The village chief knew that he would be met with opposition from some small-scale fishers of the village who had for so long depended on this site for their subsistence.

It was the same in Batasan, but an educational campaign sustained over a year made Batasan fishers realize the need for such a plan. Unlike in Batasan where numerous fishing grounds could be found on the island's huge reef flat and where giving up one site for a sanctuary would not be a great sacrifice, Jandayan Norte hook-and-line and trap fishers were relying mainly on Jagnaya and the nearby fishing ground of Kaaning, plus two important fishing grounds attached to two other villages of the island – Jandayan Sur and Handumon – which had also closed off portions of their fishing grounds to establish their respective marine reserves. Jandayan fishers knew that they had to do something about their seas, but they also knew that they had to do something about where to get their family's next meal.

“Morag gikulban kuno sila 'g kon ba (I overturned their pots of rice),” was how the village chief of Jandayan Norte had described himself as being depicted by some of his constituents. All knew, nevertheless, that something had to be done to save their seas.

Jandayan Island, this land of hard-biting mosquitoes and idle rice and corn fields and some abandoned fishponds, this land dusty during the dry season and muddy during the rainy season, seemed like a zone of battle. Not a week would pass without hearing blast fishing somewhere near and around the island. One guard of the marine sanctuary of Jandayan Norte and his family had to leave the village because of threats on his life by illegal fishers whom he had apprehended in

the past. In 2004, the village council of Jandayan Norte laid thorny *gango* shrubs (sappanwood) in their sanctuary to discourage fishers from entering the no-fishing zone; *gango* shrubs entangle fishing nets, which are difficult to extricate. In 2006, Jandayan Norte officials apprehended a village official of the neighboring village, Handumon, for allegedly fishing inside Jandayan Norte's marine sanctuary; the official had been apprehended once before for the same offense. On one of our dives, we found a fish trap inside the Jandayan Norte marine sanctuary, and no one, as expected, admitted to owning the device or pointed to anyone who they knew owned the device. Village officials have banned the collection of dead corals, which some fishers use as walls to encircle their *amatong* (fish shelters), and they are reprimanded if caught in violation of the ordinance. But one high-ranking village official continued to collect dead corals for the foundation of his *payag*, a hut made of light materials and used for temporary shelter, which he had constructed on the shores of the island, for which he was never publicly reprimanded, though he was the object of adverse gossip by islanders, in hushed conversations.

When the environment department declared Jandayan Island a 'mangrove forest swamp reserve' in the early 1990s, which made it a candidate for inclusion in the government's National Integrated Protected Areas System, and when environment officials landed on their shores to conduct a census of the island and its resources, they knew something unsettling was about to happen. Another wave of uncertainty settled on the island. Jandayan islanders interpreted the government's classification of their island space as a likening of themselves to wild beasts roaming in the country's remaining 'wilderness' areas.

They knew that much needed to be done. In spite of differences in view and opinion about what their islands are, about who they themselves were and are, where they had been and where they were going, or which way the island would move, islanders knew that they needed to listen

to the ubiquitous whisper of the wind that constantly, persistently sings the sonorous notes of the times. They knew that the wind, always unyielding to the stubbornness of the many, would send signals to rouse the people from their slumber. They knew, as their forebears had known, that not to heed the warnings of the wind could spell disaster.

I chalked up in my mind an image of a constant barrage of strong winds shaking their islands, lifting the islands from the earth or the sea, perhaps sending them to fleet across the skyscape. I also imagined the sun drenching the islands with a scorching heat that would dehydrate the land, exhaust the sea, dry up their groundwater or suck the moisture from heavy cloud, wilt the mangroves, and leave fish and corals gasping for breath on the parched seabed.

But the wind, I believe, also trembles at the sound of its own lament.

IT WAS THE PERFECT COLOR TEMPERATURE for landscape photography that any artist would want to capture: the mellow golden light of the sun that had crept in after the squall, the soft green background glistening with drops of rain collected by the leaves of mangrove trees, the restrained color of the horizon swaying between gloom and glow. But I decided not to take photos of this landscape. There are moments that are best captured through the aperture and lens of the mind and stored in the film of memory. And that was one of those moments. Immersion in the feeling evoked by that moment was enough.

We were now past the port of the town of Getafe, but from this distance, I could still see the huge cargo ship that regularly docked in Getafe. It would stay there for two or three days, and would leave for Cebu with truckloads of gravel, sand and soil from Bohol's interior towns.

On our departure from Jandayan, we had passed by the newly constructed guardhouse of Jandayan Norte's marine protected area, which stands on a reef crest facing the sea channel that

separates the island from the inner reef of Danajon Bank, until we were arrested by the rage of the rainsquall and sought cover in Jandayan Sur's mangroves.

When the fury had died down, we left the shelter of the mangroves. I knew that somewhere in those mangroves, the *agta* watched us silently pass.

It was still windy. Our boat was riding the roll of the waves, undulating with the untrammelled gait of a sea that knows no master. But no, the sea knows its master. Its master is the wind, says a writer whose name I cannot recall. We were riding with the *amihan*, which made our travel much faster and smoother, but no less safe. The wind was also making waves across hills of coconut and mango trees, carrying to the mainland interior the scent of the dying summer and the threat of the siege of the season of typhoons.

Our boat raised sun-drenched Batasan Island about four hours after leaving Jandayan. The island's beachhead greeted us, its sands dancing, imperceptibly, to the winds of the monsoon.

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