



SOPHIA UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Global Studies

Symposium and Workshop Series 2024-2025

Valuing ‘vulnerable’ voices in global studies research: Researchers’ dilemmas and responses for engaging marginalized epistemologies and scholarship

December 13, 2024, 13:00~17:30
Building 2, Room 1702

Completion Report

The symposium was held on December 13, 2024, in a hybrid format, with participants joining via Zoom and in person at Sophia University, Building 2, Room 1702. Its primary objective was to reimagine global studies through an innovative lens: one that advocates for theoretical, analytical, methodological, and pedagogical frameworks that prioritize marginalized epistemologies and scholarship. By doing so, it positions research as a transformative force for social justice, centering the lived experiences and narratives of society’s less affluent and powerful members.

The event commenced with a welcome address by the Dean of the Graduate School of Global Studies, Professor Sven Saaler. His remarks highlighted the symposium’s alignment with the theme and goals of Sophia University’s Diversity Week, now in its eighth year. Diversity Week brings together students, faculty, and staff to promote events and advocacies that foster an inclusive and harmonious society. The Dean also underscored the symposium’s timeliness and relevance, as it tackles challenging, often conflict-laden topics that demand deeper dialogue and reflection. He commended the student-led initiative for its bold and thought-provoking approach to advancing critical scholarship in the field of global studies.

Professor Mary Racelis, a Research Scientist at Ateneo de Manila University’s Institute of Philippine Culture, delivered an enlightening keynote lecture titled “Vulnerable Groups Assert Their Agency: Can Engaged Social Researchers be Enablers?” In her address, she emphasized the critical need to revitalize and reorient research practices to address the inherent power imbalances between researchers and marginalized communities. Drawing on Nancy Scheper-Hughes’ concept of *companheira*, she reminded researchers of their responsibility to position themselves within human events as responsive, reflexive, and morally committed individuals who take sides and make ethical judgments.

Professor Racelis further illustrated how this principle can be operationalized in the research process, sharing her own experiences and examples from well-documented studies in the Global South. These examples highlighted approaches that challenge exploitative methodologies and instead prioritize affirming dignity, engaging participants, and respecting marginalized communities. She underscored the importance of conducting research that not only documents human experiences but also partners with those affected to create meaningful pathways toward justice and empowerment. She concluded her lecture with a powerful and thought-provoking question for the audience and student presenters: “To what extent is your research conducted in an engaged mode—one that truly partners with people facing challenges to help move toward a more just and equitable world?”

The next segment of the symposium highlighted four innovative global research projects spearheaded by graduate students and early-career scholars. These studies delved into the interactions and experiences of marginalized identities across diverse geographical contexts. Each presenter was allotted twenty minutes to share their research findings, followed by a comment and question from an assigned commentator. The

esteemed commentators included James Farrer, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology at Sophia University; Makiko Deguchi, Ph.D., Professor of Cultural Psychology at Sophia University and faculty advisor for the symposium; and Fumiko Takahashi, Ph.D., Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, The University of Tokyo. Their insights enriched the discussions, fostering critical dialogue and deeper engagement with the presented work.

The first student presenter, Joshua Arsenio V. Espiritu III, from the MA in Global Studies program at Sophia University, presented his research on the microaggressions encountered by Filipino drag performers as they navigate diverse socio-cultural landscapes across Japan, Singapore, and the Philippines. Grounded in Charmaz's grounded theory and enriched by the Filipino Indigenous concept of *loob* (relational interiority) alongside global research paradigms, the study combines in-depth interviews and ethnographic immersions to explore performers' lived experiences. Espiritu situates these narratives within broader global-local frameworks, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between Western queer discourses and localized queer realities. The research engaged drag artists ($n=12$) who perform in various settings within the Philippines and internationally. He also argued for a shift in microaggression scholarship, advocating for an approach that transcends traditional identity markers to critically examine how identities assemble and reassemble within specific contexts. In his presentation, he introduced two key concepts: "exposure points," which identify intersections of identity that amplify vulnerability to microaggressions, and "deflection points," which capture the strategic realignment of identities and creative practices performers use to mitigate and navigate these encounters.

The second presentation was delivered by Kuntida Sriwichian, a PhD student at the Graduate School of Global Studies, Sophia University. Her research explores the critical role of family support in assisting working mothers with childcare responsibilities in Thailand. The study emerged from her preliminary fieldwork conducted in Thailand during July and August 2024 as part of her pre-field research phase. Sriwichian's initial findings reveal that working mothers in Thailand continue to rely heavily on familial networks for childcare support, particularly after returning from maternity leave. This reliance often persists until their children reach an age where they can attend school independently. Her research sheds light on the interplay between work, family structures, and caregiving responsibilities, offering important insights into the socio-cultural dynamics shaping childcare in the Thai context.

The third presentation was delivered by Giselle L. Miolo, Ph.D., a JSPS Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Tokyo and the United Nations University. Her presentation focused on the Lumad Bakwit (Evacuee) School (LBS) in the Philippines, which was established in response to school closures caused by development aggression and human-driven conflicts, such as para-militarization, during President Duterte's administration (2016–2022). Miolo introduced the concept of Indigenous displaced education, which describes the distinct educational practices developed in response to displacement. Drawing on ethnographic research, including participant observation and interviews, her study examined how LBS sustained its operations amidst conflict and displacement. The findings underscored LBS's role in advancing human rights literacy through a curriculum that integrates elements of human security, including privacy, freedom of expression, gender rights, and legal access. Her research advocates for broadening the discourse on Indigenous Rights Education (IRE) to include gender and human security perspectives. By doing so, it offers a more comprehensive approach to human rights education in Indigenous contexts, moving beyond the traditional focus on ecological and place-based curricula. This study highlights the transformative potential of education in addressing systemic challenges faced by displaced Indigenous communities.

The fourth presentation was delivered by Joan Paula A. Deveraturda, a PhD student at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University. Her research, titled "Localising International Human Rights Norms: Navigating the Policymaking Towards Protection Against Online Sexual Abuse and

Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) in the Philippines, 1990–2022”, examines the challenges and strategies involved in addressing OSAEC in the Philippines. Despite being a signatory to numerous international covenants and commitments championing children’s rights, the Philippines remains a global hotspot for OSAEC. The country faces significant challenges in combating the rising number of cases, exacerbated by high poverty rates and widespread internet access. Deveraturda’s research critically analyzes the policymaking strategies employed by the Philippine government, exploring the role of the state as a rule target and the involvement of non-state actors, such as NGOs and private sector entities, in localizing international child protection norms. Her study also delves into the broader Philippine experience of navigating the gap between international commitments and domestic compliance in safeguarding children from online harms.

The symposium concluded with an open forum, where questions were fielded from the commentators, in-person attendees, and Zoom participants. Professor Mary Racelis returned to the stage to deliver her final comments, once again challenging both the audience and student presenters to engage with the profound human complexities inherent in the research process. She urged them to continuously reflect on their work and strive to transform academic discourse into actionable and impactful research, emphasizing the importance of bridging scholarly inquiry with real-world change.

Acknowledgments

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We are equally grateful to post-doctoral fellows Samuel Amorim and Beatrice Melo, Ph.D., for their insightful contributions to the conceptualization and execution of the symposium. A heartfelt thank you goes to Michelle Sta. Romana for her exceptional skills in facilitating and moderating the entire event. Lastly, we appreciate the support and assistance provided by Miguel Niccolo Rallonza and Klaus Wilhelm Nettmann on the day of the symposium, whose efforts helped ensure its seamless execution.