

Acceptance speech of Dr. Joshua Uyheng

This project was born out of one key proposition: that the "global" nature of the pandemic should not be taken for granted as an epidemiological fact, but also interrogated as a political tool. The language our leaders use shapes the way we see the world and how the world brings to bear on our daily lives. In our paper, we examined how political language was used in different contexts to construct "crisis geographies" of the pandemic: versions of a diseased and suffering world that leaders used to amass power, pacify or muffle their publics, and negotiate international relations within a geopolitical order in flux. In the Philippines, specifically, we showed how these constructions of globality were deployed to downplay the severity of our local situation by highlighting catastrophes elsewhere, tighten authoritarian power by indicating the controls needed in wealthier nations, and enable opportunistic diplomatic arrangements by foregrounding our severe lack of public health resources. In highlighting this crucial layer of pandemic leadership, we hope these findings map out valuable lines of civic engagement and vigilance during and beyond crises within our fragile democracy, and the volatile world it is embedded in.

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Our warmest congratulations to all the honorees.