



Lynne Milgram /

Baguio City Public Market stores, Baguio City, Benguet, Philippines. Photo: Milgram 2015

(headshot) Lynne Milgram conducts research with a wholesale cauliflower vendor in the La Trinidad Vegetable Trading Post, La Trinidad, Benguet, Philippines. Photo: Villanueva 2015



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“If women in the upland northern Philippines do not have the skills, the education or the personal networks to find work in the ‘formal’ sector, what are their options?”

Liberal Arts & Sciences professor and cultural anthropologist Dr. Lynne Milgram returns often to this question that inspired her career.

At Philippine craft co-operatives, in the street, at public markets, in the classroom — Milgram has been looking for answers since 1994, when the study of ‘informal’ economies first took her to the Global South. Her research interests grew out of her curatorial experience with Southeast Asian textiles, where she began to look at the social framework of art production. “I realized that you cannot look at the object without looking at social, economic and political contexts,” she explains, citing her move from handicraft production to microfinance development to the global trade in second-hand clothing between the Philippines and Hong Kong. All along the way she encountered Philippine entrepreneurs: “women selling as street vendors and in the shops; women taking microfinance loans; and women engaged in transnational trade.”

With the fierce sense of humanity that she’s come to be known by, Milgram continues today to work in the Philippines on the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)-funded project “Contested Livelihoods in the Philippines and Vietnam.” She describes the past 30 years in the Global South as a time in which “local, regional, and national governments have overwhelmingly embraced neoliberal policies that increasingly constrain the livelihood choices of urban residents.” Of particular interest to Milgram are the fresh food provisioning systems where “government and development visions privilege modern retail outlets while discouraging or destroying what they consider ‘traditional remnants’ of entrepreneurial trade; namely, public markets, informal stalls and street vendors.” Within this milieu, Milgram examines the historical and contemporary shifts; how traders use resistance tactics to sustain their livelihoods; and the driving forces that fashion these food systems’ constant reshaping and perseverance in two Philippine public markets.

Milgram credits her longitudinal study of Philippine women’s stories for her depth of understanding about the livelihoods women create when they aren’t ‘formally’ engaged, and also how they leverage opportunities. “Women’s advocacy suggests how I can make policy recommendations,” she says, of one of the reciprocal aspects of her engagement. “I wouldn’t have my research career without people helping me and I try to give back in every way that I can.” Milgram’s social science courses introduce such themes as crafts, livelihood and identity, gender, development and globalization, and material culture and consumer society.



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