Habermas and Argumentation in the Philippine Context

Maria Lovelyn Corpuz Paclibar

The article critically analyzes the perception on the incompatibility of the Filipino self-understanding as kapwa with Habermas's notion of argumentative discourse that champions autonomy and individuality. It argues that this apparent incompatibility is more due to the absence of an imagination of non-Western forms of rationalization processes and reflexivity, than to the commonly held claim of the incommensurability of lifeworlds. The key to this imagination is to locate potential rationalization processes from within modes of communication that reinforce kapwa solidarity. In the end, the article shows that kwentuhan, which is the mode of communication that is integrated with kapwa solidarity, contains enabling components for reflexivity, and thereby makes individuals more open and receptive to the process of argumentation as a rational and inclusive procedure for resolving conflicts.

Introduction

At the center of Jürgen Habermas's discourse theory is an elaboration of argumentation as "an exemplary local embodiment" of the most inclusive discourse.[1] Argumentation, as the most reflexive form of giving and taking reasons among communicative participants, operates on "unavoidably assumed" components: first, that the participants understand themselves as autonomous (the authors of their own positions); second, that the process is directed towards an unforced agreement. These comprise

[1] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law And Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 16.

the presupposition of equality or symmetry among individuals.[2] While other communication modes of exchanging reasons also rest on the presupposition of equality, Habermas insists that it is in argumentative mode of communication that these become more explicit. Rational argumentation operates as a process of resolving conflicts where participants are temporarily abstracted from the particular solidarities of family, neighborhood, city or state. [3]Argumentation constitutes the dialectical link for his notions of justice and solidarity,[4] and serves as the main component of his deliberative theory of democracy.[5]

Some aspects of argumentation, however, are believed to have developed from Western contexts and thus bring doubt to its applicability in communitarian lifeworlds in Asia and other regions. Habermas earlier responded to such doubts by referring to his theory of societal evolution, and its homologies with the development of ego-identities.[6] In this response, Habermas explains that social integration in all societies follow an internal

---

[2] Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action,* trans. Christian Lenhardt, et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990a), 154.

[3] Ibid., 244.

[4] Jürgen Habermas, "Justice And Solidarity: On The Discussion Concerning Stage 6," in *The Moral Domain: Essays in the Ongoing Discussion Between Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, eds. Thomas Wren et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990b), 224-254 ; A more elaborate discussion on the dialectical relation between justice and solidarity through discourse or argumentation can be found in his later essay, "A Genealogical Analysis of the Cognitive Content of Morality," in *The Inclusion of The Other: Studies in Political Theory,* ed. Ciaran Cronin et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 29-46.

[5] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms,* 110, 460.

[6] Jürgen Habermas, "Toward a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism" in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1979), 95-129. Habermas focuses here on general patterns of rationalization in societies. In another essay within the same volume, "Moral Development and Ego-identity," 69-94, and in later essays, he elaborates on general patterns of rationalization from the perspective of the development of lifeworld members into autonomous individuals. See "Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action," in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 116-194, and in "Individuation through Socialization: On George Herbert Mead's Theory of Subjectivity," in *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays,* trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 149-204.

logic of rationalization, which becomes manifest in historically varied ways, but nonetheless follows the same pattern of moving towards more reflexive levels of integration. Habermas thus argues against the claimed incompatibility between the Western paradigm of individualism and the non-Western communitarians, by showing that their apparent irreconcilability is merely a case of two different lifeworlds looking at each other from different stages of one singular dimension of rationalization processes.[7] Recently, Habermas's position took on a subtle shift. Rather than setting out to level down their differences, he now acknowledges that the West, being the origin of the development of capitalism and thereby the first to learn of its perils, is more receptive to the idea of human rights based on equality and autonomy because of its cultural history. The non-West's learning, meanwhile was "accelerated and violent," precisely due to the imposition of Western economic organization of capitalism on its shores.[8] Habermas thus acknowledges that the idea of human rights, which champions autonomy and individuality, coincided with the development of Western capitalism. He nonetheless argues that because the capitalist organization of economy has become ever more global, there is a general imperative on everyone to adapt accordingly.

I would like to highlight this subtle shift in Habermas's position and the implications it bears regarding the compatibility of argumentation with all cultural lifeworlds, as it rests on the assumption of the autonomy of its individual participants. This question touches on the peculiarity of the place of argumentation in the Philippine setting, being one of the "more Western" developing countries in Asia because of its colonial history. As with many postcolonial societies, Philippine society had to walk through a fragmented understanding of modernization where institutions of politics and economy have been imposed from without, while the traditional lifeworlds tread through patchy and dead-end roads in their attempts to achieve more reflexive self-understanding.

---

[7] Jürgen Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas*, ed. Peter Dews (London: Verso, 1986), 169.

[8] Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays,* trans. Max Pensky (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001), 126.

From the outset, the present continuous clash between modern systems and the people's clinging to traditional norms and their collective identities signals the Filipinos' rejection of rationalization and modernization processes as a whole. In this essay, I offer a perspective for understanding this apparent "refusal" towards rationalization. I argue here that the rejection should be more attributed to the absence of an imagination of rationalization processes other than its configuration in the West, than to the incommensurability of the Western and non-Western lifeworlds. I argue here that Habermas's model of inclusive conflict resolution through argumentation can be made compatible with Filipino sensibilities only if the central components of reflexivity and autonomy are developed from within their own characteristic linguistic processes. I assume here with Habermas that the development into autonomous individuals is not insurmountable, however gradual it may be. This paper is thus a work in the fringes of an attempt to sketch out possible forms of adaptation of the Western rational form of argumentation into the Philippine context. In section one, I will discuss the constellation of modes of communication that resembles and contrasts with Habermas's notion of argumentation, and why in the present context, it is difficult for Habermas's notion of argumentation to take root in Philippine soil. In section two, I will elaborate on Habermas's possible responses to this alleged incompatibility. Finally, I will show in section three how the local modes of everyday communication in the Philippines can bring about moments of reflexivity and thereby enable individuals to engage in "argumentation" which champions reflexivity and inclusiveness without the high price of compromising the thick sense of solidarity in which their identities rest.

ARGUMENTATION IN THE PHILIPPINE LANGUAGE: NAGTATALO, NAG-AAWAY, NAG-UUSAP

It is difficult to find an exact translation of Habermas's conception of argumentation in the Philippine national language (Filipino). Rather than a single term, the closest equivalent would be a constellation of modes of communication related to

argumentation. In what follows, I provide a descriptive account of each of the following modes of communication as used in the everyday Philippine context: *nagtatalo* (A1), *nag-aaway* (A2), *nag-uusap* (A3).[9]

Argumentation in the Philippine context is commonly translated in Filipino as *nagtatalo*, which literally means the state of rational verbal competition over something. It is a lively exchange of reasons. Defined as such, A1 bears a resemblance with Habermas's conception of argumentation— as a competition, a "practice of giving and taking reasons, a "game" with rules."[10] The rules of *nagtatalo* are generally assumed as follows: 1) it is a friendly competition, as such the relationships of symmetry in friendship is presupposed; 2) the subject of argumentation can be about anything—sports, ideas, news, politics—that does not directly touch on one's personal issues, claims or needs. Thus, a characteristic of *nagtatalo* as argumentation is the aspect of detachment among interlocutors. Such a detachment is evident in their ability to banter and tease each other while arguing, a salient move to ward off the tension that a competition can bring.

Nagtatalo should be understood as encompassed within the broader mode of communication of *kwentuhan*. *Kwentuhan* is often translated as "conversation,"[11] but literally means "story-telling" or the exchange of stories. Sometimes when having a conversation, Filipinos would simply describe themselves as "*nag-kukwentuhan.*" This common mode of communication has such a binding power that it permeates the everyday life of the ordinary Filipino.[12]

---

[9] Other terms used are more of appropriations from colonial languages. *Nagdidiskusyon* is an appropriation from the Spanish discusíon, which is normally used in formal occasions. Also used is *nagde-debate* which is obviously the Filipino appropriation of the English term debate.

[10] Jürgen Habermas, "Concluding Comments on Empirical Approaches to Deliberative Politics," *Acta Politica* 40, no. 3 (2005): 385.

[11] *Kwentuhan* "can both mean conversation and story-telling" or conversation that "can include a lot of story-telling." See Ma. Marilou Ibita, "A Conversation with the Story of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Engaging the Scripture Text and the Filipino Christians' Context," in *1 and 2 Corinthians,* ed. Y S Kim. (MN: Fortress Press).

[12] Ibid.

Kwentuhan is one of the most effective means of social bonding in the Philippines. It is within this setting where we can say argumentation as A1 is set in a relatively comfortable situation. The place of A1 within the context of *kwentuhan* gives sense to the expression, "*Hindi kami nag-aaway. Nagtatalo lang.*" (We are not fighting. We are just arguing). There is the thick social bond of community that underlies *kwentuhan*, so that as soon as argumentation is taken out of this context, it is no longer considered as *nagtatalo*, but as *nag-aaway* (A2).

Nag-aaway literally means "fighting," either exclusively through the exchange of abusive words or the use of violence, or both. Argumentation as A2 resembles Habermas's notion of argumentation as it is also a mode of raising real claims based on interests, and involves criticizing the validity claims of others. Once argumentation involves real claims, the exchange becomes more serious and cuts through a more personal level. There is a strong tendency towards violence present in A2. Since the conflict that arises in A2 marks a severing from the interpersonal bond of *kwentuhan*, the resolution of the conflict would need the solidarity-forging power of a mediator. Under the presence of the mediator, the communicative mode among parties becomes the calm exchange called *nag-uusap* (A3).

A3 is translated as "conversation" but takes on a more serious tone, in contrast with the congenial and lively tone that characterizes *kwentuhan*. A3 is especially used in situations involving processes of coming to agreement — "*Pag-usapan natin 'to*" (Let's talk about this or Let's agree on this). The resemblance of A3 with Habermas's argumentation is found in this feature of coming to an agreement. Among the three, it is the second and third notions of argumentation which are most politically relevant. Taken together, A2 and A3 comprise the political process of conflict resolution.

The most noted feature of Filipino conflict resolution is the need for the authority of mediation. This is not to say that the Habermasian notion of argumentation as a formal procedure of consensus formation has not yet been institutionalized in Philippine society. It is, in principle, the mode of communication used by institutions for procedures of justification such as those in

the legislative branch of the government. Nonetheless, the use of mediation "as a means of avoiding state legal institutions" in Philippine society remains widespread.[13] For a more focused analysis on this, I turn to the documented account of a widely applied (informal) justice system among the rural poor: the Barangay Justice System (BJS). I highlight here the reasons offered by the analysts for the rural poor's preference for BJS over formal institutions in resolving their disputes.[14]

In the landscape of Philippine politics, the barangay was designated as the lowest unit of state control by then President Ferdinand Marcos during the martial law regime in the 1970s. This was partly done in order to "rationalize and to bring under state control" the folk or indigenous system of conflict resolution.[15] The "procedure" used in the BJS varies and has developed through time. What has remained unchanged, which is also why it is gaining popular assent today, is its wide accessibility to the masses and its promise for a quick remedy for divisions within the community.[16] Although the BJS has been placed in contradistinction with the formal system of procedures in the judiciary court, it nonetheless has an element of order in it. This is evident in the way the procedure unfolds, which begins with the complainant and respondent being called to a hearing that usually culminates in an "amicable settlement" among parties through the authority of the mediator. The procedure concludes with a "ritual" of reconciliation. [17]

From the perspective of the state, the institutionalization of the BJS was a mechanism for rationalizing political power by

---

[13] Sidney Silliman, "A Political Analysis of the Philippines' Katarungang Pambarangay System of Informal Justice through Mediation," *Law and Society Review* 19 (1985): 279-301.

[14] Ibid. See also Kit G. Machado, "Politics and Dispute-Processing in the Rural Philippines," *Pacific Affairs* 52 (1979), 294-314; and Jennifer C. Franco, "Peripheral Justice? Rethinking Justice Sector Reform in the Philippines," *World Development* 36 (2008): 1858-1873.

[15] Sidney Silliman, "A Political Analysis," 284.

[16] Machado, "Politics and Dispute-Processing," 301.

[17] Silliman, "A Political Analysis," 292.

"reducing the significance of local elites" and channeling power to local leaders legitimized by state law.[18] From the perspective of the masses, however, the legitimacy of the state's institutionalization of power through the BJS was viewed differently. Silliman observed that the villagers were supportive of BJS because it was perceived as a continuation of the shared traditional norm which upheld "key values and beliefs" of their collective identity. For the villagers in the Visayas region, for instance, the BJS was treated as *husay* which meant "hearing" or a "settling of accounts," which as an adjective that also means "orderly," "without confusion," or "well arranged with everything put in its place." *Husay* is also associated with *hilot*, which means "healing." The perception of the BJS as a procedure of "healing" thus implies that the villagers view conflict as a form of injury or wound to the collective order that needed healing.

In contrast to the BJS, the higher and more formal justice systems were regarded as ineffective in handling broken social relationships. For instance, the rural poor in the Tagalog region, according to Machado, perceive the formal legal system as that which "exacerbates conflict and increases the likelihood of violence."[19] With this general perception, it was likely that the people turned to the BJS more than to the higher courts for settling disputes. Machado significantly notes that this trend among the rural poor includes criminal cases, which, by law, should be directly handled by the higher courts. According to Machado's analysis,

> The transplanted Western legal assumption that the public is an aggrieved party when certain acts, defined as criminal, are committed is not widely shared by Filipinos. Such acts tend to be viewed as private matters between the parties and their families. In rural communities where Filipinos have many-faceted, long-enduring relationships with their neighbors, many of whom may be relatives; there is a presumption in favor of compromise and reconciliation rather than further disruption of a personal and community relationships by active

[18] Ibid., 286.

[19] Machado, "Politics and Dispute-Processing," 301.

> prosecution of criminal complaint. Many Filipinos, lacking economic security, are usually more concerned about recovering damages than about vindicating an abstract public claim against a wrongdoer. [20]

I would like to highlight here what Machado points out as the schism within the formal justice system of the Philippines, which is created by the "transplanted" assumption of individual rights and from the colonial West (Spain and U.S) that runs in tension with the traditional/ indigenous core values of prioritizing interpersonal relations in the Philippines. Silliman shares this claim when he shows the conflicting attitudes towards the BJS between the institutional level and the grassroots level. The commonality in Machado's and Silliman's analyses can be attributed to their dependence on the analysis of the American sociologist Frank Lynch. Lynch is known to have placed the core of Filipino identity on the high value given to "smooth interpersonal relations" (SIR). SIR, according to Lynch, explains the behavioral pattern of avoidance among Filipinos when it comes to confrontational interactions. This supports Machado and Silliman's observation of their subjects who mostly disfavored formal court procedures as these were detrimental to SIR.

Lynch's SIR approach to explaining Filipino social behavior was, however, criticized by local scholars for its "positivist and functionalist preoccupation."[21] It was criticized as "colonial" in perspective[22] because it reinforces a mistaken impression that the social behavioral pattern of Filipinos "leaves no room for atypical challenges to the social order.[23] Filipino behavior explained this way presents SIR less as a value and more as a "syndrome" of

---

[20] Ibid., 300.

[21] Victor T. King, *Sociology of South-East Asia: Transformations in a Developing Region*. 3. (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008): 28.

[22] Niels Mulder, "The Crux Is the Skin: Reflections on Southeast Asian Personhood," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 30 (2011): 100.

[23] Reynaldo Clemeña Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979), 12.

passivity that also translates into complicity.[24] Mendoza and Perkinson argue that the Western framework used for this long-held observation subjects it to unfair normative evaluations. It paints the Filipino's consistent concern for social relations and group harmony as a "trivial pursuit" which is "counterproductive."

An alternative to the analysis of SIR can be found in the initiative of Virigilio Enriquez and the nationalist research program of Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino psychology).[25] According to Enriquez, a better approach to understanding Filipino behavior is to look into the resources of the Filipino (Tagalog) language. In this approach, *kapwa*, as a concept for social relations is posited as an alternative core value to SIR. Whereas the latter projects a superficial and functionalist view of social relations, the former implies how the value of social relations is embedded in one's very own self-understanding:

> *Kapwa* literally means "fellow-being" or "both," as in "*Kapwa silang mabait*" (They are both good). As the "superordinate concept" of social understanding, *kapwa* is captured, but exceeds, the sense of the English "other."
>
> "In English the word "others" is actually used in the opposition to the "self," and implies the recognition of the self as a separate identity. In contrast, *kapwa* is recognition of a shared identity."[26]

To understand this better, one must comprehend the designated Filipino notion of the self — *loob*, "where the true worth of a person lies."[27] *Loob*, literally is a spatial concept that means "inside." The Filipino who refers to his/her inner self as "*kalooban*" is referring to a metaphysical space. Yet the spatial connotation is

---

[24] Lily S. Mendoza, et al., "Filipino 'Kapwa' in Global Dialogue: A Different Politics of Being-With the 'Other,'" *Intercultural Communication Studies* 12 (2003): 186

[25] Virgilio G. Enriquez, "Kapwa: A Core Concept in Filipino Social Psychology," *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review* 42 (1978): 100-108.

[26] Ibid., 102.

[27] Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution*, 20.

also misleading, for it denotes delineated boundaries of the inner self, as if to convey a clear sense of individuality. Filipino psychologist Jaime Bulatao, explains *loob* by way of comparison with the Northern Americans' sense of individuality. He claims that Filipinos are like "so many fried eggs in a pan whose experience of the self consists of a 'core' (the yolk) but with the outer core (the egg white) blurring into/with the outer core of other eggs in a coterminous fashion." By contrast, Americans are like "hard-boiled eggs whose individual shells protect their autonomy and who then exercise the option to either open themselves (or part of themselves) to others or not at all."[28] It is not very clear what the 'core of the self' means here and how it is distinguished from other selves. What is important for our purpose is the general agreement among the sociologists and psychologists at that time on the Filipino sense of self which was heavily entangled with collective identity.

The unclear delineation of the Filipino sense of individuality makes the concept *kapwa* more comprehensible as a notion that accommodates both the self and the other. When one refers to another as her *kapwa*, it implies "an awareness of shared identity." According to Enriquez, "Once *ako* (ego) starts thinking of him/herself as different from *kapwa*, the self, in effect denies the status of *kapwa* to the other." For Enriquez and the proponents of Sikolohiyang Pilipino, *kapwa* is the defining concept of the Filipino self-understanding.[29] It is also regarded as the person's utmost expression of being human (*tao*). Enriquez explains this in the negative sense:

> One argument for the greater importance of *kapwa* in Filipino thought and behavior is the shock or disbelief that the Filipino registers when confronted with one who is supposedly *walang kapwa* (*-tao*) [no sense of *kapwa*]. If one is *walang pakisama* [having no

[28] Mendoza, "Filipino 'Kapwa,' 288.

[29] Ibid., See also Katrin De Guia, *Kapwa: The Self in the Other: Worldviews and Lifestyles of Filipino Culture-bearers* (Quezon City: Anvil Pub., 2005).; Rogelia Pe-Pua, et al., "Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino psychology): A legacy of Virgilio G. Enriquez," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 3 (2000): 49-71; and Rainier A. Ibana "Grafting Philosophy to the Tagalog Prefix Ka," *Kritika Kultura* 12 (2009): 27-60.

> ability to get along], others might still say, "He would eventually learn" or "Let him be; that's his prerogative." If one is *walang hiya* [no shame], others say, "His parents should teach him a thing or two." If one is *walang utang na loob* [no debt of gratitude] others might advise, "Avoid him." But if one is *walang kapwa tao* [no sense of *kapwa*], people say, "He must have reached rock bottom. *Napakasama na niya*. He is the worst.[30]

If we follow the logic of *kapwa* and *loob*, one can extract a more comprehensive account for the Filipinos' view of social conflict and their constant need for mediation processes. To a certain extent, informal procedures of conflict regulation such as the BJS preserve the continuity of *kapwa* relation and the integrity of the *loob*. The same is true for the three common views on argumentation: *nagtatalo, nag-aaway*, and *nag-uusap*. A conflict is generally perceived as an abstraction from *kapwa* relations, but since the ego or *loob* is thickly connected to *kapwa* relations, the abstraction is perceived as injurious to one's person. This is why for many Filipinos a *kapwa* approach to social relations makes them more responsive, while the reverse makes them feel alienated. An example for this is their personalistic form of politics. If we accept this alternative explanation, then we are more prepared to understand that the lack of predisposition towards formal procedures of argumentation bears a more fundamental issue—the issue regarding one's very own sense of self.

HABERMAS ON ASIAN COMMUNITARIANS AND THE DEFENSE OF INDIVIDUAL HUMAN RIGHTS

My above excursion into the underlying social psychology on the Filipino norm on conflict resolution should not be misconstrued as reinforcing what has been noted as an oversimplified dichotomy between "Western individualism" and

[30] Enriquez, "Kapwa: A Core Concept," 11.

"Asian communitarianism."[31] To many Western thinkers and their critics, this dichotomy turns issues regarding individual human rights as irresolvable due to the incommensurability of cultural horizons. Habermas is one to strongly argue against this by first pointing out that there is no real dilemma between them. Drawing from his individuation through socialization thesis, he asserts that individualism and communitarianism can be viewed in a dialectical tension.[32] This thesis, which he draws from George Herbert Mead, explains the ontogenesis of ego-identities through progressive stages of socialization. The most advanced among these stages consist of socialization processes through the use of critical and reflexive communicative exchanges, namely, argumentation. Individuals socialized or steeped in argumentative settings develop post conventional ego identities.[33] The dialectical relationship between communitarianism and individualism, based on this thesis, can be portrayed as the different stages in which the tension between individual interests and the collective interests of the community is worked out towards equilibrium. For instance, in the conventional stage of socialization, the collective interest prevails over the individual's desires and intentions; whereas in the post conventional stage, the individual is caught in a dialectical struggle with the collective. This struggle, however, can be a productive one as long as tensions are worked out through linguistic processes such as rational argumentation. Put in roughly simplistic terms, Habermas's individuation through socialization thesis argues that the more individuals engage in discursive processes of resolving disagreements, the more they develop their ego-identities. At the same time, communities become ever more inclusive and progressive in the post conventional stage of individuation as individuals become more critical of the limits of their traditional mentalities and open towards other ways of thinking.

---

[31] Fernando N. Zialcita, "The Meanings of Community," *Philippine Studies* 44 (1996): 33-34.

[32] Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays,* trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 126.

[33] Ibid., 188-193.

The individuation through socialization thesis, in relation to Asian communitarianism in its extreme form, puts forward the claim that a pure collective sense of self without individual ego-identities is untenable for as long as the socialization processes in which members of the community are developed consist in the use of linguistic processes. The same can be said of Western individualism in its extreme form. As Habermas noted, there can be no such thing as possessive individualism because the sources of one's ego-identity are intricately linked with socialization processes.[34] This is not to deny, however, that there are gradations in the individuation process such that some societies have higher levels of individualism than with others. For Habermas the difference can be attributed to the advance in levels of communication in some societies. For Habermas, the more reflexive communication in a society becomes, the more the society is able to produce autonomous ego-identities.[35] At the same time, the more individuals grow into innovative pacemakers, the more possible it is for their society to advance through the work of creative political struggles.[36] Viewed in linguistic terms, high levels of reflexivity in socialization processes are seen to be embodied in argumentation processes.

If Habermas were to relate this thesis to the Filipino notion of *loob*, he would say that individuation of this diffused subjectivity is in progress for as long as it maintains a dialectical tension with *kapwa*. Thus a crucial step for its advance in development is a moment of self-problematization, specifically in the form of an identity crisis that would release the ego's spontaneity towards creativity.[37] Conflicts that arise among community members can be viewed as productive disruption in this sense. They can be considered as momentary displacements of individuals from their

---

[34] Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*,126.

[35] Habermas, *Moral Consciousness*, 160-170.

[36] See also Habermas "*Postmetaphysical Thinking*", *The Theory Of Communicative Action, Vol. 2: Lifeworld And System. A Critique Of Functionalist Reason,* trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1989): 168. See also Postmetaphysical Thinking, 180.

[37] See Habermas, *Moral Consciousness*... Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking,* 179-180. See also *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 158-159.

entanglements in the *kapwa* relations, which would in turn provide openings for reflexivity and critical thinking. Hence, Habermas would then remark that to view conflicts in communities as gaps that need to be filled in by the mediator (healer) would be to miss out on the opportunity for growth among the individuals and in the collective whole. Nonetheless, the impetus for growth and reflexivity should develop from within the community, and cannot be forced from outside. It is from this idea of immanence where Habermas concludes that the modernization processes in the post-colonial or non-Western communities have been violently accelerated.

But the problem with Habermas's individuation through socialization thesis is that it does not elaborate enough on these historical differences. Ilan Kapoor points out that Habermas's account of modernization, which includes the development of reflexive societies and autonomous ego-identities "so neatly coincided with Western historical development."[38]

Hence, the question arises on how we are to account for the socialization of individuals immersed in a society whose establishment of modern institutions did not coincide with its rationalization process. This question comes from the perspective of the Habermasian reading of modernization as a process "in which social systems, generated from out a traditional lifeworld, become increasingly complex, while the lifeworld becomes increasingly rationalized." Such dual process must be understood as "an intricately intertwined transformation.[39] Clearly, this kind of modernization is not what happened in the colonial history of the Philippines. The systems did not grow out of the rationalization of their traditional lifeworlds but were colonially imposed. At the same time, lifeworld members had to cope with a rationalization process impelled by an educational system that was not well

[38] Kapoor, Ilan, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism? The Relevance of the Habermas-Mouffe Debate for Third World Politics," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 27 (2002): 477.

[39] Max Pensky, The Ends of Solidarity: Discourse Theory in Ethics and Politics (New York: SUNY, 2008), 18; emphasis included.

integrated with their everyday lives. From the educated elite's point of view, however, this stunted rationalization process is often attributed to poor access to universal education.[40] Such a statement, however, obscures the point that even education was used as a mechanism for colonization.[41] The question is not whether Filipinos have been educated, but whether or not they have been educated so that their society can come to examine itself.

How then can the Filipino society imagine rationalization processes as developing from within their own lifeworld? The project of the historian Reynaldo Ileto points to this direction: an elaboration of conceptual tools that would help in understanding the historical development of Philippine society from below. Ileto's achievement was to bring about an understanding of the revolt of the masses beyond the dichotomy made between the Enlightened revolution led by the intelligentsia and the so-called small reactive revolution of the masses.[42] This project in some respects coincided with the research program of Sikolohiyang Pilipino,[43] which we discussed in the previous section. It is against the backdrop of these initiatives where I shall sketch in the last section some areas where reflexivity can develop out of everyday communicative processes. Before I proceed, however, I would like to take up a compelling problem that challenges rationalization processes as illustrated in the following example.

Another dimension of Philippine politics is revealed in a more recent analysis of the BJS. According to Jennifer Franco, the BJS remains to be widely used for processing disputes to this day, but is largely used for cases among the poor. There is no recorded case; however, that involves conflicts between the poor and the "influential," such as that of a landowner and a tenant. These cases are rather filed in the higher courts, where the poor are sidelined and harassed because of the amount of influence their opponents

---

[40] Randy David, "Sarah and the Sheriff," *Philippine Daily Inquirer,* July 3, 2011, accessed July 5, 2011, http://opinion.inquirer.net/7203/sara-and-thesheriff.

[41] Roland Sintos Coloma, "Empire and Education: Filipino schooling under United States Rule, 1900-1910" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2004).

[42] Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution...*, 9-14.

[43] De Guia, *Kapwa: The Self in the Other,* 19-20.

exert on the court officials. Furthermore, Franco noted that some mediators in the BJS are known to side with the powerful when it comes to endorsing or rejecting cases to be brought to the higher court.[44]

What is shown in this example is a clash between traditional norms of social integration and the formal processes of integration through the force of positive law. The former presupposes non-autonomous individuals turning to mediators whose authority are legitimated by tradition. The latter presupposes autonomous individuals who view themselves as equal before the law, and turn to the integrative force of the law for the resolution of conflicts. The clash between two forms of social integration illustrates a point Habermas raises in his engagement with Asian communitarian leaders who perceive the legitimation of laws through human rights as incompatible with their political ethos. According to Habermas, these leaders' rejection somewhat raises the suspicion against them who have mostly stayed in power through non-democratic means. The problem with their rejection of the calls for legitimation based on human rights is that it runs incompatible with their acceptance of the benefits of modern capitalism. Habermas argues that these leaders cannot, on the one hand, participate in this ever more global economic system, and, on the other hand, reject its presuppositions of autonomy and equality. After all, capitalism and its universalistic orientation of freedom and equality, was the impetus that has led to the development of positive law. Hence, to welcome the system of capitalism in one's traditional lifeworld is to implicitly accept its presuppositions of upholding individual freedom and equality.

Habermas, thus, argues that the notion of individual human rights contained within the logic of capitalist systems must be viewed in a functionalist sense as opposed to its metaphysical interpretation that heavily draws on Western culture. He points out that the institutionalization of human rights through positive laws in the West was a mechanism for responding to the inevitable harmful consequences of capitalism. Hence, it was a necessary

[44] Jennifer C. Franco, "Peripheral Justice? Rethinking Justice Sector Reform in the Philippines." *World Development* 36 (2008): 1858-1873.

counterpart of the modern economic system. Habermas admits, however, that autonomy and equality, properties that constitute the institutionalization of human rights, arose out of processes of reflexivity in the West. Furthermore, he acknowledges that reflexive distance from tradition is indeed an "advantage" of occidental rationalism.[45] Finally, he is well aware that the establishment of capitalism and a systematized politics in the non-Western developing countries has indeed been unjustly imposed.[46]

Considering all these, it becomes understandable that modernization and rationalization processes in postcolonial societies like the Philippines tread on a more complicated path. Yet, as Habermas would argue, Philippine society cannot ride on the benefits of the capitalist system and simultaneously reject its presuppositions. Habermas would then propose that the alternative to stubborn rejection would be the "adaptation" of traditional forms of social integration towards capitalism's "hard-to-resist' imperatives.

He offers here a guiding insight for grappling with the schism between the imposed western system of economics and political administration, on the one hand, and the lifeworld contexts of the Philippines, on the other hand. In the example I have last noted, we have seen that the schism between the formal system of conflict resolution and the traditional mode of social integration is more or less encouraged in order to perpetuate the interests of the powerful in impending the rational development of the poor. Based on Habermas's functionalistic understanding of human rights, one can counter this tendency by freeing up the rationalization processes that are latent within the traditional lifeworlds. Adaptation can only begin when traditional norms are self-examined through the displacement and astonishment brought about by what is foreign and "new". But how is this possible without completely drying up the sources of *kapwa*-solidarity on which the identities of lifeworld members stand? The key is to locate rationalization processes within the very mode of

[45] Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, 119.
[46] Ibid., 126.

communication that maintains and nurtures this sense of solidarity.

NARRATIVE DISCOURSE AS ENABLING ARGUMENTATIVE DISCOURSE

In my analysis of the constellation of three modes of communication pertaining to argumentation, I have shown that the first mode, *nagtatalo* (A1) is the closest to Habermas's idea of an argumentation process—it has the structure of a competition or a game of reasons, and it presupposes equality or symmetry among participants. This is opposed to *nag-aaway* (A2), which as we have said can be a violent struggle of power. The competition in A1often does not pertain to a real conflict, and the process of reaching understanding is not a real concern. These two components, as we have shown, only appear in A2. Meanwhile A2, as we have also shown, is distinguished from Habermas's argumentation through the absence of a presupposition of mutual recognition of autonomy among participants. As such the power struggle can only come to a stalemate through a mediating authority. The shift from "game" mode to real power struggle is explained by the abstraction from the context of *kwentuhan*, a shift that signals an abstraction from thicker forms of solidarity.

If the separation from the binding context of *kwentuhan* leads to the development of a more abstract sense of solidarity, then A2 can take on the referred to features of idealizations of argumentation among "members of a community of world citizens" bound by human rights. What would then make argumentation in the Philippine context approximate Habermas's idealization? As in all forms of argumentation, there must be an institutionalization of the idealizations presupposed within the very structure of argumentation. What Habermas means here is that there are idealizations we unavoidably make whenever we engage in argumentation. One of these idealizations is the reciprocal recognition of symmetry among participants. The institutionalization of this presupposition is already expressed in the idea of human rights backed by positive law. This institutionalization, however, need not be perceived as something

that is externally imposed on the lifeworld of Philippine society. Just as we understand other forms of abstraction, the institutionalization of the recognition of individual freedom and equality can be viewed as the extension of the presuppositions of symmetry from friendships, towards a more inclusive, albeit abstract, community.

The problem therefore that underlies the apparent incompatibility between Habermas's notion of argumentation processes and the Filipino mode of conflict resolution is a solidarity issue. Argumentation processes are based on an abstract, legal sense of solidarity, whereas the Filipino mode of conflict resolution banks on the thicker forms of solidarity within traditional communities. Habermas argues that a thicker sense of solidarity is "neither possible nor necessary" in the level of global legal community. [47] If we relate this to his discourse theory, he would say that the thicker bonds among participants in argumentation could hardly be maintained in the process, and need not be (what? Or, are not needed?). If we are to prevent real conflicts to turn into violent ones (A2), then one will just have to take up the painful process of detachment from thicker forms of solidarity and count on the binding force of positive law to ensure that the resolution of conflicts are made against the framework of equal treatment and reciprocal recognition of human rights.

Doubtless that this process would be unavoidably difficult, it is important to imagine ways in which the momentary abstraction from the *kapwa* sense of solidarity can be made bearable for the traditional Filipino. As we recall, it is not only the thick interpersonal relations which are at stake in the resolution of conflict through argumentation, but also the lifeworld member's sense of self. Hence, we must ask, in what ways can a participant in a traditional lifeworld come to terms with her capacity to author her "yes" or "no" positions in argumentation?

One approach would be to complement argumentative discourse with another mode of communication that is close to Filipino sensibilities — the narrative mode of discourse or *kwentuhan*. I have not yet underscored enough how *kwentuhan*

[47] Ibid., 107; See also Pensky, *The Ends of Solidarity,* 76.

defines the everyday life of the Filipino. One evidently sees this in the physiognomy of a Filipino neighborhood as carved to accommodate *kwentuhan*. For instance, one would find benches in front of mini-grocery shops called *sari-sari* stores where buyers can sit, greet and exchange stories with other random buyers. A common sight in old houses in the provincial areas is a porch where neighbors can sit together and trade stories during the idle time of the day, or drink together in the evening. Media technology has been appropriated for this mode of communication as well, such that the country has become well known as the "text-messaging capital of the world". Furthermore, popular radio and television networks adopt the *kwentuhan* mode of news casting because it is viewed as an effective way of drawing audiences. *Kwentuhan* is such an integral part of the Filipino social life that it would not be odd to find strangers in a long bus ride exchanging stories about their lives even before they introduce each other's names.

If *kwentuhan* defines the fabric of the social Filipino's life, it might very well be the best starting point to develop more reflexive modes of communication. Iris Marion Young's reflections on inclusive political communication, has highlighted some ways in which this can be possible. Narrative discourses, according to Young, serve as supplements to argumentation because they have the function of illustrating, describing, or justifying a point made in discussions.[48] They have the potential of "enlarging the imagination" of listeners, and thus enabling a more cooperative process of reaching agreement. Moreover, it has a less constraining advantage over argumentation because it provides more means for the untrained marginalized poor to express their claims. What deserves merit in Young's focus on narrative is how she sketches out possible directions for drawing out voices that have been muted by dominant discourses:

> How can a group that suffers a particular harm or oppression move from a situation of total silencing and exclusion with respect to this suffering to its

[48] Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 72-77.

> public expression? Storytelling is often an important bridge in such cases between the mute experience of being wronged and particular arguments about justice. Those who experience the wrong, and perhaps some others who sense it, may have no language for expressing the suffering as an injustice, but nevertheless they can tell stories that relate a sense of wrong. [49]

Young's emphasis on narrative as a mere tool for arguments, however, tends to miss out on the rational potential that narratives have in their own right. This latter view of narratives is the sense in which I want to take up the argument-enabling potential of *kwentuhan*. *Kwentuhan* enables argumentation because first, it helps build a more or less clear sense of the claims one wants to raise. Whereas argumentation presupposes that actors are clear about what they want and what they are arguing for, narrative discourse gives more space for the author to grope through, cohere, or negotiate among various, sometimes connected, at times conflicting desires. The act of bringing together is the moment of agency, where the actor finds herself authoring narratives "to reposition his or her self within an ever-changing social milieu."[50]

Second, the dialectical movement of exchanging stories can shed light on what narratives are suppressed by the existing traditional normative order. This is often made possible through the receptivity of a listening silence— a silence that cares. Eric Ratliff, a male American ethnographer on the narrative practices of Filipino exotic dancers notes how giving time for conversations and dialogue with the women has made the latter more comfortable in sharing their stories. In the process, they also shared their identities as revealed in their desires and aspirations which urged them to enter this socially frowned upon job in Philippine society. A crucial achievement of Ratliff here is the precarious balance he was able to work out in between being viewed as an intimate friend (a "*kuya*," which literally means elder brother but is used to refer to male

[49] Ibid, 72.

[50] Eric A. Ratliff, "Stages in life: Narrative Practices and Identities of Filipina Go-go Dancers," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 5 (2004): 37.

friends whom the addressors regard in a brotherly way) and an outsider among the circle of the women dancers. Yet from this inside/outside position, the women were able to stage through narratives unconventional identities suppressed by dominant political and socio-economic discourse. [51]

This illustration helps emphasize my point on the importance of viewing narrative discourses as a reflexive communicative process apart from of argumentation. Narrative discourses rests on an affective atmosphere of care and trust. Although I agree with Young in saying that narrative discourses help in articulating claims in argumentation, I have hesitations about merely placing them within procedures that rest on abstract, thin solidarity. Narratives are more told in an atmosphere of trust, whereas argumentation takes place in a competitive atmosphere.

The better approach to viewing narrative as a supplement to argumentation is in Axel Honneth's paradigm of care. In this approach, the enabling component of narratives lies "before" the argumentative procedure, as a mode of communication that prepares participants to be more receptive, empathetic, and attentive to one another in argumentation processes. The idea here is based on Honneth's point that the "genetically precedent" condition for abstract equality is care. Honneth argues that one can only find oneself able to treat another person as autonomous and equal "if one's own person has had the experience of unlimited care

[51] Ratliff narrates: "This anthropological account covers establishments located along P. Burgos Street in Makati City, Metro Manila, where I conducted research in 1995 and then again from 1998 to the present. Rather than following a particular line of inquiry, I simply observe people in this space, allowing their interactions to unfold without too much interference from my own intellectual proclivities. ...I have attempted to mitigate my intrusion by refraining from structured interviews, engaging instead in informal conversations and periodically asking for clarification or elaboration on a topic. ...Thus, the statements re-presented herein largely reflect how women have constructed my identity and performative presence according to their familiarity with my motives. I am often positioned as an informed and co-operative actor who supports dancers' narratives and performances, so women who know me in this manner are comfortable in disclosing their opinions and desires."

at some time."[52] This is similar to the insight of the Philippine historian, Reynaldo Ileto, on the close connections between wholeness and freedom in the Filipino language. Freedom means *kalayaan*. The rootword *laya* (free) is linked with *layaw* (a condition in which one is "pampered like a child). The reference to childhood as a "kind of lost Eden" implies a condition of "wholeness" in which one was then immersed. Wholeness is experienced as the result of care. Ileto highlights the connection between wholeness and freedom, *layaw* and *kalayaan*, in order to illustrate how the zeal of the revolutionaries against the Spaniards was only possible because of the memory of a "pre-Spanish condition of wholeness, bliss and contentment."[53] What deserves to be underscored here is the idea that an important precondition for reflexive and revolutionary impulse is the basic experience of care. Thus, one is only able to have a sense of one's autonomy, understand that all possible others can also be autonomous, and be sensitive to the violations of individual and collective autonomy through experiences or encounters in which one has been cared for.

What *kwentuhan* mode of communication opens up, therefore, is a space in which interlocutors experience the basic security of care that conditions trust and recognition of one another's equality. Thus the institutionalization of narrative discourse as a way of preparing individuals for participation in formal justificatory discourses is worth exploring. Habermas has said that the institutionalization of discourse or argumentation in modern societies allows for an extension of solidarity beyond limited contexts, which is a solidarity that is based on the autonomy and equality of all.[54] If the "voice of the other" is the "central moral phenomenon" of the institutionalization of discourse in modern

---

[52] Axel Honneth, "The Other Of Justice: Habermas And The Ethical Challenge Of Postmodernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, ed. Stephen K.White (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 318.

[53] Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution*, 108-109. See also Ibana, "Grafting Philosophy...," 35.

[54] Habermas, *Moral Consciousness*, 244.

societies,[55] then perhaps helping the muted other find its voice back must also have a significant part of it.

Maria Lovelyn Corpuz Paclibar
Ateneo de Manila University
Quezon City
mpclibar@ateneo.edu

[55] Stefan Rummens, "Debate: The Co-originality of Private and Public Autonomy in Deliberative Democracy," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 14 (2006): 481.