

## **Miranda Fricker's Epistemic Injustice: An Attempt at Appropriation of Philippine Social Realities**

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### **Abstract**

Miranda Fricker argues of an injustice that is distinctly epistemic though it was born out of societal discrimination, identity power, and racial prejudice. More so, Fricker attempts to establish a theoretical space, where ethics, epistemology, and socio-politics can converge. An epistemology which concerns knowledge not for knowledge's sake alone, but the kind of knowledge that can morally awaken a knowing subject and which can hopefully influence or bring forth a collective social and political change. I will further argue in this paper that aside from moral awakening, the theory of epistemic injustice also attempts to correct our moral appropriations towards social phenomena as it aims to provide an unbiased epistemic basis on issues of social identities, namely: gender, race, religion, financial, economic, and social status, rank or position in work and institutions, among other factors. Epistemic injustice is a *hybrid* social theory that presupposes social ethical responsibility and epistemic justice among individuals, as well as in social institutions. It initially arose as part of the developments in virtue epistemology, a new trend in epistemology that emphasizes the role of virtue in knowledge, which sprung from the epistemic debates in virtue epistemology of the Anglo-American analytic philosophers. Epistemic injustice finds its own development of the theory now known as vice epistemology, which have special emphasis on non-virtuous acts, namely—vices. This paper is fundamentally aimed to introduce Miranda Fricker's concept of "epistemic injustice," including its possible indications within

Philippine societal happenings. I then attempt to appropriate the phenomena of epistemic injustice as theorized by Fricker in the context of the Filipino social experience. This essay attempts to tackle the gaps between the apparent disparity in Philippine societies, particularly on issues that concerned the imperial Manila, the Bangsamoro, and other marginalized minorities, such as, transgender people, farmers, and fisher folks, as well as issues regarding the national language.

**Keywords:** Vice Epistemology, Epistemic Inequality, Social Injustice, Identity Politics, Filipino Society

*'They treated me as a suspect - not a victim.'*  
 –Duwayne Brooks

## Introduction

Miranda Fricker pioneers the “negative” approach in the study of epistemic virtue by theorizing from the opposite of virtue, i.e., from the non-virtuous – namely, vice.<sup>1</sup> Virtue epistemologists initially give attention to epistemic vice by drawing an epistemic parallel to the concept of moral vice in ethics. Further, giving emphasis on vice greatly helped in bringing a vivid picturesque of virtue by describing first what it is not, its opposite, which is the non-virtue or vice. In the case of Fricker, she began her study in bringing to light what she termed an “epistemic injustice” before coming out with what the virtue of epistemic justice means, which corrects the latter. Fricker’s

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<sup>1</sup> Miranda Fricker is currently Presidential Professor of Philosophy at the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center and Honorary Professor at the University of Sheffield in England. She was a Jacobsen Research Fellow and a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of London where she received a Doctor of Philosophy degree and was Reader in Philosophy and Head of the Philosophy Department at Birkbeck College, University of London until the year 2012. She was a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sheffield in England. In the fall of 2016, Fricker started teaching at the City University of New York (CUNY). She co-edited with Jennifer Hornsby the volume *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism* (2000). Miranda Fricker’s *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2007) was the earliest comprehensive study of an epistemic vice in the contemporary virtue epistemology, specifically, her accounts of *testimonial injustice* and *hermeneutical injustice*. The other early studies on epistemic vice are Jason Baehr’s “Epistemic Malevolence” and Heather Battaly’s “Epistemic Self-Indulgence.” See Heather Battaly, Introduction, *Virtue and Vice, Moral and Epistemic*, (UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 4, 16.

approach to virtue epistemology is slightly fused with feminism and socio-political theory by tackling subjects that involve issues of gender and racial discrimination in the intellectual or cognitive level. Fricker's brand of feminism is situated in her analysis of "identity power." In this light, gender is seen as a social aspect of one's identity.

Virtue epistemology, of which development Fricker is part, is a contemporary approach to epistemology that arises from the Anglo-American analytic tradition. It is rather an entirely new theory that I must ask the reader to set aside or unpack the traditional notions of epistemology as discussed in continental philosophy. Our traditional understanding of epistemology centers on the criteria of justifications of human knowledge. Both virtue and vice epistemology, on the other hand, relates (mal)practices of knowing to the practical outcomes of specific actions. It is a brilliant new approach to epistemology as it is able to integrate the paradigm of ethics and socio-political theory altogether to epistemology in just one notion and likewise argues on a hybrid moral-epistemic classification of virtue.

At the outset, virtue epistemologists initially anchored their theorizing from Aristotle's concept of "phronēsis," or practical wisdom. In Book 6 of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle described "practical wisdom" (phronēsis) as an intellectual virtue that is responsible for practical reasoning.<sup>2</sup> To recall, there are two types of reasons that Aristotle identifies – these are theoretical reason and practical reason. It is the theoretical reason which analyzes truths that are universal, eternal, and absolute, and things that are unchanging; while it is the practical reason which analyzes things that are changing, thus aimed upon making the best choices that involves with deliberation in accordance with the right desires.<sup>3</sup> A society that constantly changes indeed requires practical wisdom to foresee the necessary actions as the need arises. A human being with practical wisdom deliberates fully on how to lead a good life and fulfill eudemonia. It is in the practical reason wherein knowing is intertwined with the deliberation of moral actions, thus can be argued to be both ethical and epistemic in nature.

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<sup>2</sup> Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated and ed. by Roger Crisp. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 107.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 104.

In Plato's dialogues, we can already find an earlier similar notion such as "virtue is knowledge" (Meno 87c) implying that a good (moral) character is a result from knowledge.<sup>4</sup> In other words, knowledge, wisdom, or "right insight" can lead or translates to good or right actions. For this reason, Socrates is often quoted to have said that "to know the good is to do the good" or that bad actions are merely a result of the lack of knowledge. In the *Apology* (37a), Socrates was quoted "I never wronged anyone intentionally", suggesting that it is his ignorance that leads him to wrong doings.<sup>5</sup> It is from these earlier notions that virtue epistemology is born, though it has gone too far from this initial bases of the theory. Fricker's epistemic injustice is her contribution to the discourses in vice epistemology, the movement's negative counterpart, initiated by Fricker herself. Fricker's involvement and contribution in this philosophical scene signals a new direction and growth in the study of virtue and vice particularly in contemporary social epistemology: namely, virtue and vice epistemology, and attempts to bridge the gap of what was lacking in the Anglo-Analytic philosophical thought, namely, the interests in social and political theory which is a common feature of the postmodern tradition.

### Theorizing from the Negative

In her study of virtue, Fricker does not start with identifying such obvious characterization of epistemic virtues nor provide a long list of those, such as, intellectual honesty and integrity, so on and so forth. Unlike the path that her predecessors Linda Zagzebski and Michael DePaul have thread, Fricker began her theorizing by bringing to the open an already existing problem which she had found in all of society. Fricker problematizes what she called an "identity power," which she believed is a form of "social power."<sup>6</sup> These similar issues of "identity" and "power" have equally been dealt and addressed in the

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<sup>4</sup> "Then if virtue is a kind of knowledge, clearly it must be taught?" Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 3. Translated by W.R.M. Lamb. (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1967).

<sup>5</sup> "The truth is rather that I am convinced that I never intentionally wronged anyone...." Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 1*. Translated by Harold North Fowler; Introduction by W.R.M. Lamb. (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1966).

<sup>6</sup> Miranda Fricker, Introduction, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

postmodern tradition, particularly in the works of Michel Foucault. In fact, Fricker is undeniably influenced by Foucault on this aspect. Fricker argues further that such social practice of identity power will *inevitably* “produce [an] unjust epistemic disadvantage,” which needs to be re-appropriated.<sup>7</sup> Social or racial identity is indeed a powerful political tool. In the natural competition for social power, it is always a tendency that society often fall into the negative version (opposite) of the treasured values, hence vices rather than virtues, injustice rather than justice, inequality rather than equality. It is important that Fricker acknowledges the constant state of flux of all institutions and societies; that new and arising challenges and conflicts always do occur, and therefore, problems must constantly be addressed immediately as it surfaces. Eventually, social inequalities can also result to and from intellectual bias, thus an apparent epistemic inequality or injustice is felt and experienced by some members or players of a certain community. In hindsight, Habermas' theory of communicative action will find much more meaning in the light and context of Fricker's description of the “epistemic injustice.” I will elaborate this further below.

### **A Dilemma among Fricker's Influences**

Fricker finds in postmodernism particularly in the thoughts of Foucault the seeds by which society, particularly the ethical and political aspect of social life, is seen through the lens of reason and knowledge, and potentially creating the links between society, ethics, and epistemology. According to Fricker, “[a] crucial attraction of postmodernist philosophical thought was that it placed reason and knowledge firmly in the context of social power,” a feature which, to Fricker, is lacking particularly in the Anglo-Analytic epistemic debates that has placed reason in the rigor and precision of mathematics and logic.<sup>8</sup> Knowledge is equated with power, as found in Nietzsche and Foucault. However, Fricker also criticized postmodernism in this aspect for what she called a “reductionist tendency” of extreme postmodernist writings with the failure to address real issues of injustice in the epistemic aspect but rather have reduced reason and knowledge into a mere “operation of power.”<sup>9</sup> This reductionist

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<sup>7</sup> Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 2 [Emphasis mine].

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 4.

tendency, Fricker argues, is unequipped to detect some form of “identity prejudice.”<sup>10</sup> Hence, unable to draw a distinction between a rejection of someone’s testimony for good reasons and one out of prejudice, thus, failing “to explore questions of justice and power in epistemic practices.”<sup>11</sup> Fricker balances in between the “traditionalist” and the “reductionist”/postmodernist views of knowledge. The traditionalist view regards the socio-political structure, such as notions of social identities, as irrelevant in the over-all formation of knowledge, while the reductionist view regards reason as just another form of social power.<sup>12</sup> The notion “knowledge is power” is a prevailing theme in the philosophy of Foucault, such as in the concept of panoptic knowledge. Foucault believes in the inseparability of knowledge and power, since power is founded on knowledge, utilizes knowledge, and manufactures knowledge. But for Fricker, however, the problem does not depend on what is known but rather on who has the possession of such knowledge. In short, the actual problem lies in the identity of the knowing subject, at the cognitive level of the knower.

### Social Identity Politics

Fricker then identifies different types of social identities, such as gender, race, social strata, religious affiliation, and many others. For Fricker, such assumed identities, which can be forms of social power, can be detrimental to the collective production of knowledge, as knowledge formation is being politicized socially in accordance with social identity affiliation of any member of the epistemic community. As already mentioned, “identity prejudice” is what Fricker is concerned about which is responsible for the phenomenon of epistemic inequality and epistemic injustice. “I introduce the notion of *identity prejudice* as a label for prejudices against people *qua* social type...,” Fricker writes.<sup>13</sup> Social identity politics is the outcome resulting from these social and identity differences that are in the first

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Fricker, *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Miranda Fricker, “Rational Authority and Social Power: Towards a Truly Social Epistemology,” in *Social Epistemology: Essential Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Miranda, Fricker, Introduction, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

place already disadvantageous or biased in the position of the knower. What is epistemic injustice? Fricker refers to it as “most fundamentally, a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower.”<sup>14</sup>

However, there is a different notion of injustice (epistemic) as commonly and previously understood in social philosophy which basically refers to “distributive unfairness in respect of epistemic goods, such as, information and education,” and that “we picture social agents who have an interest in various goods, some of them epistemic, and question whether everyone is getting their fair share,” but this is not the kind of epistemic injustice that Fricker is mainly concerned about.<sup>15</sup> Rather than looking on the fair distribution of epistemic goods, she instead argues of an epistemic injustice which is “a distinctively epistemic kind,” and not rather because it is “largely incidental that the good in question can be characterized as an epistemic good.”<sup>16</sup> The injustice in question is distinctly epistemic in nature which eventually results into further societal and intellectual discrimination. Fricker is rather taking a new angle of the distributive notions of social justice, such as, equal opportunity and recognition, and looking at these broader concepts from a strictly and differently epistemic viewpoint through the discriminatory aspects of a person's capacity as knower and source of collective knowledge, and not just because the distributive good in question happens to be an epistemic good. In short, Fricker problematizes identity politics which can be one facet, cause or source of distributive injustice, and such distributive injustice could have resulted from a prior underlying epistemic inequality or discrimination, as knowing subjects.

## Epistemic Injustice

Fricker positively identifies two forms of epistemic injustice which she refers as *testimonial injustice* and *hermeneutical injustice*. Of course, Fricker is open to the possibility that there can be many other forms of epistemic injustice, but that remained to be configured, recognizing how vast is the theoretical and intellectual space yet to be explored. In so doing, a better awareness of both testimonial and

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<sup>14</sup> Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

hermeneutic injustice plays a huge importance and necessary role in the development of the concept. As I already mentioned, it is power with due and necessary reference to societal identity affiliations that causes prejudice, which is the primary cause of this injustice, a kind that is distinctively epistemic in nature. The underlying presumption in Fricker's theory is that there is a common, or general collective interpretive resource of knowledge or "pool of information" by which every knowing subject is entitled to contribute and partake with, as well as draw information from. The unequal opportunity with regards the contribution and benefits from this common and collective source of information results into a greater epistemic gap and social disadvantage of positions of the knowing subjects. We shall at this point proceed to the two types of epistemic injustice in Fricker's theory: namely, testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice.

### 1) Testimonial Injustice

Testimonial injustice, on one hand, according to Fricker, happens when "prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word"<sup>17</sup> such for instance when the speaker is a member of the female sex, or of the Afro-American race, "that the police do not believe you because you are black [or a woman]," says Fricker.<sup>18</sup> In particular, Fricker cites as example the actual case of Duwayne Brooks' experiences of racial prejudice from the police authorities.<sup>19</sup> Brooks' testimony to the police regarding the murder of Stephen Lawrence was not heard of by the responding policemen due to his black color and for that very reason the perpetrators were able to run away from the crime scene. The policemen simply assumed that Brooks and Lawrence were part of the rioting teens and hence not a victim of a prejudiced racial attack. Fricker adds further that testimonial injustice happens even without the hearer's intending them to happen, it could happen in the classroom when the teacher

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<sup>17</sup> Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> On April 22, 1993, Duwayne Brooks and Stephen Lawrence (Afro-teens), while waiting on a bus stop, were attacked by a group of young white men, and caught Lawrence and stub him to death, with Brooks as the sole witness of the crime, he was initially considered by policemen as part of the trouble causing his testimonies of the crime having been ignored. See *The Telegraph*, "Duwayne Brooks: I will never forget Stephen Lawrence's murder." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLnMP5NWgBI> [August 1, 2022].



regards a student's question as less important to that of another, or when a woman's opinion about politics or business is regarded as less credible to that of men. For Fricker, "testimonial injustice is caused by prejudice in the economy of credibility," just because the person who offers the information happens to be less credible to the hearer or receiver of the information, just because or due to his or her status, race, background, or identity affiliations.<sup>20</sup>

## 2) Hermeneutical Injustice

Hermeneutical injustice, on the other hand, happens when an individual subject finds difficulty to make sense of an experience which was incurred socially, a difficulty which was due to an absence or a "gap" of "collective interpretive resources."<sup>21</sup> Fricker assumes here a pool of information, concepts, and meanings or knowledge (somewhat a universal encyclopedia accessible to everyone) to which every human being is subject to contribute or share for the use of all the others who find themselves in a common similar experience or situation. Absence of contribution due to discriminatory reception also implies the lack of access by similar others to such "collective hermeneutical or interpretive resources." Fricker cites as example the cases of women who experience sexual abuse but could not make sense of the experience due to a lack of information regarding the characteristics and nature of such abuses, "that you suffer sexual harassment in a culture that still lacks that critical concept," writes Fricker.<sup>22</sup> Hermeneutical injustice is "caused by structural prejudice in the economy of collective hermeneutical resources,"<sup>23</sup> according to Fricker. For example, the use of scantily clad women in media advertisements to products that are obviously unrelated to women, e.g., game fowl feeds, are not readily pointed out as an abuse in the form of sexual degradation to the women's integrity until someone pointed that out to a minor or girl.

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<sup>20</sup> Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 1.

<sup>21</sup> "...hermeneutical injustice occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences." See Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

### Further Examples of Epistemic Injustice

Furthermore, Fricker uses varied examples and cases to elaborate her concepts of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. To explain testimonial injustice, Fricker also cites the legal case and court trial of Tom Robinson, a character in Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*.<sup>24</sup> In the story, Tom Robinson's legal counsel, Atticus Finch, "has proven beyond doubt that Robinson could not have beaten the Ewell girl [Mayella Ewell] ... since whoever gave her the beating [was] led with his left fist, whereas Tom Robinson's left arm is disabled [obviously unable to commit the crime], having been injured in a machinery accident when he was a boy."<sup>25</sup> Fricker opines that "it is obvious to the reader, and to any relatively unprejudiced person in the courtroom, that Tom Robinson is entirely innocent."<sup>26</sup> According to Fricker, "The trial proceedings enact what is in one sense a straightforward struggle between the power of evidence and the power of racial prejudice, with the all-white jury's judgement ultimately succumbing to the latter."<sup>27</sup> As an illustration of testimonial injustice by the use of gender power, Fricker also recalls a line from the screenplay of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* by Anthony Minghella which was uttered by Herbert Greenleaf "to silence Marge Sherwood": "Marge, there's a female intuition, and then there are facts,"<sup>28</sup> said Greenleaf, a line that seem to belittle or undermine a woman's opinion or credibility.

To explain hermeneutical injustice, Fricker cites an excerpt from Susan Brownmiller's memoir<sup>29</sup> of the U.S. Women's Liberation Movement around 1960s and '70s concerning the case of a certain Carmita Wood to whom "a distinguished professor seemed unable to keep his hands off her." According to Wood's account, "the eminent [married] man would jiggle his crotch when he stood near her desk... or he'd deliberately brush against her breast while reaching for some

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<sup>24</sup> See Fricker, *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Anthony Minghella, *The Talented Mr Ripley – Based on Patricia Highsmith's Novel* (London: Methuen, 2000), 130, as cited in Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time, Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: The Dial Press, 1990), as cited in Miranda Fricker, "Powerlessness and Social Interpretation", in *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology*, Vol. 3, 1-2 (United Kingdom: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 96-108.

papers." Until one night when, "he cornered her in the elevator and planted some unwanted kiss in her mouth." After the incident, Wood suffered "a host of physical symptoms" such as "chronic back and neck pains". Wood's case occurred at a time when an anti-sexual harassment law was yet non-existing. As Brownmiller recounts, "We realized that to a person, every one of us – the women on staff, Carmita, the students – had had an experience like this.... And none of us had ever told anyone before." Fricker argues that in Wood's case, both "harasser and harassee alike are cognitively handicapped by the hermeneutical lacuna – neither has a proper understanding of how he is treating her," meaning that the harasser was not properly oriented that what he is doing to her is wrong, as much as she also could not figure out the abuse done towards her. But not until the women decided to "break the silence" by calling it with a name: "Sexual harassment! Instantly we agreed," writes Brownmiller.<sup>30</sup>

### **Further Influence and Development of the Theory**

Fricker hinted on several instances in the possibility that epistemic injustice could have been institutionalized, whether consciously or unconsciously. That social institutions could have adhered to beliefs and practices that are prejudicial or unfair to other members of a given society or group. That laws, policies, rules, and regulations could have been anti-woman, anti-race, anti-profession, anti-religion, anti-employees, anti-students, anti-children, so on and so forth. For example, the disregard of the humanities and the social science courses with much preference given to the mathematical, engineering, and scientific disciplines; or the higher value attached to quantitative research over the qualitative ones, higher merit for international academic affairs compared to local ones, can be forms of institutional epistemic injustices observed in educational institutions.

There is a warm reception of Miranda Fricker's concept of "epistemic injustice" among academic and scholarly circles. Since the publication of her book, interests concerning epistemic vices arose, or what later being referred to as 'vice epistemology.'<sup>31</sup> Quassim Cassam defines vice epistemology as "the philosophical study of the nature,

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<sup>30</sup> Fricker, *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> See Quassim Cassam, "Vice Epistemology," in *The Monist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 99, 159-180.

identity, and epistemological significance of intellectual vices. Such vices include gullibility, dogmatism, prejudice, close-mindedness, ignorance, forgetfulness, and negligence.”<sup>32</sup> A rising number of literatures now started to discuss issues about malpractices of knowledge. A similar concept which also relates epistemology to issues of race is Charles Mills’ notion of “white ignorance” in his *The Racial Contract* (1997) published a decade earlier to that of Fricker’s *Epistemic Injustice* (2007).<sup>33</sup> “White ignorance” is a notion linked to racism, white supremacy, and white privilege. Accordingly, the white race nurtures a certain kind of “ignorance” that supports white domination and exploitation. It is a form of ignorance, or “unlearning” of the racial oppressions already known in the past against the black or colored and the colonial race, and that of which “unlearning” it is actively and consciously produced or sustained to maintain such domination and benefit.

However, Fricker does not consider Mills’ “white ignorance” as a form of epistemic injustice, given that it is a conscious and active massive epistemic denial in the part of the white people. For Fricker, Mills’ “white ignorance” is a prolific interpretation of the concept of “ideology,” as in Lukacs, applied in the context of race and racial power, recalling that for Lukacs, ideology refers to the total attribution of the class consciousness of the bourgeoisie, imposed on the proletariat and thus preventing them from attaining consciousness of the experienced exploitation by the bourgeoisie. Fricker, on the other hand, maintains that epistemic injustice may possibly happen at an unconscious level, with the discriminatory practice unintentionally committed, and may not be known yet by the agent or the doer of an action (a knowing agent), a kind of a blind spot, or oversight, as an epistemic subject.

Similarly, Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana also explore the concept “epistemology of ignorance” which tackle “practices of *not knowing* that are linked to and often support racism.”<sup>34</sup> Contrary to notion of ignorance as passive, Sullivan argues of an ignorance that

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<sup>32</sup> Cassam, *Vice Epistemology*, *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> See Charles Mills, *The racial contract*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>34</sup> Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (2007). Introduction, *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, 3.

actively resists and aggressive in presenting itself as knowledge with the goal to deceive or misinform.<sup>35</sup> Thus, epistemology of ignorance concerns the deliberate attempt to misled the general public of the truth (intentional misinformation/disinformation) for purposes of gaining advantage of the lies, a phenomenon comparable to “fake news.”

Jose Medina introduces the concept known as “credibility or epistemic excesses” which, he believes, is a form of epistemic injustice.<sup>36</sup> Medina views ‘epistemic injustice’ as systematic or institutional since credibility is often assessed in the context of social power, and it may be a product of institutional racism. For Medina, credibility excesses, not just credibility/epistemic deficits as in the case of Fricker’s testimonial injustice, are also forms of epistemic injustices as it tends to produce what he calls a “meta-sensitivity” – an epistemic vice where along with white privilege, it placed white privileged knowing subjects at an advantaged position by developing an insensitivity in the form of an active ignorance or “epistemic silencing” to racial discrimination, and thereby develops insensitivity toward their own insensitivity. Active ignorance, according to Medina, is a culpable state of mind which arose out of close-mindedness and arrogance. It is a form of “silencing” by *not* talking about such “known” racial oppression or aggression, injustice, or discrimination, and therefore not helping to address such issues by making it “unknown,” somehow a mild form of epistemic tolerance.<sup>37</sup>

Fricker has earlier referred to her “testimonial injustice” as due to prejudicial credibility deficit, to which Medina responded by adding his notion of “credibility excesses” and thereby altering Fricker’s notion. Medina also introduced the concept of “polyphonic contextualism” arguing that there is not only one single account or “context” of epistemic activity but many and which are useful in an epistemic evaluation. Fricker’s hermeneutical injustice tend to claim a common or collective interpretive resource. For Medina, interpretive resources are multiple, overlapping, and pluralistic hermeneutical

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>36</sup> See Jose Medina, *The epistemology of resistance: Gender and racial oppression, epistemic injustice, and resistant imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Medina, *The epistemology of resistance*, 39.

references thereby requiring one to be skeptical of his/her own judgment. Medina, nonetheless, requires the knowing subject of the responsibility of his/her own interpretive understanding.

Relatively, Kristy Dotson also came up with a notion of “testimonial quieting” echoing what Gayatri Spivak calls “epistemic violence” referring to the silencing of the marginalized unrepresented sectors,<sup>38</sup> shutting up their mouths regarding their experienced injustice making it unknown to a wider public. Religious ecologist Elizabeth Allison extends Fricker’s notion to environmental issues lambasting the scientific knowledge that is used as basis and standard for evaluation, especially one with the intention to exploit natural resources, and which undermines the indigenous knowledge and the ethnic/native understanding of the ecological experience.<sup>39</sup>

### **Appropriating Epistemic Injustice in the Philippine Social Context**

Fricker has found a name to this long been existing problem but has usually been left out due to its unusual and complicated positionality. The power of giving a name indeed helped a lot in highlighting the problem, such as, labelling it as epistemic injustice. Upon the realization that society is dynamic, indeed a Habermasian “public sphere” is much desired to bring any emergent social issues into scrutiny and open communication, such as, cultural gaps and conflicts, which of course requires a rational discourse at a higher intellectual form. The disparity in the linguistic, testimonial, and hermeneutic space hinders participants from a common understanding. The problem of epistemic injustice must be considered thoroughly and addressed accordingly to provide social recognition to all the members of a given society, especially the marginalized,

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<sup>38</sup> See Kristy Dotson, ‘Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing,’ in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2011, 236-257 and Gayatri C. Spivak, “Can the subaltern speak?” in *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.). (London: Macmillan Publishing, 1988).

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Allison, “Toward a Feminist Care Ethic for Climate Change,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 33, No. 2, Fall 2017, 152-158. See also Elizabeth Allison, “Religion Inscribed in the Landscape: Sacred Sites, Local Deities and Natural Resource Use in the Himalayas,” Chapter 22 in Stanley D. Brunn, *The Changing World Religion Map: Sacred Places, Identities, Practices and Politics* (New York & London: Springer, 2015), 439-459.

unrepresented, and the oppressed, as well as the chance for a communal autonomy and self-determination. This may again sound so utopic, but it can set a practical and realistic goal towards bringing a widespread and holistic social change, as well as to provide justice to the misrecognized and underprivileged. We need to bear in mind that the injustice being emphasized here refers to the cognitive or intellectual discrepancy in the knowledge of the members of any society, particularly as differentiated according to their social and political, and even cultural identities. The main concern is the discrepancy in knowledge as an outcome resulting from the knowers' social affiliation, qualification, or identification.

### **Political and Structural Change: Democracy of the Upside Down, Bottoms Up**

Indian political theorist, Manabendra Nath Roy, mocks the democratic exercise of the elections, and undermines the value of electoral voting. Why? He writes, "[T]o make the individual self-reliant, the masses must be freed from the feeling of being helpless cogs in the wheels of gigantic machines of modern States, which allow them no other function than to cast a vote once in several years."<sup>40</sup> Roy proposes instead "the practice of direct democracy in smaller social groups" as alternative to the electoral representative democracy and 'party-form' politics and emphasizes direct participation of the individual with his everyday concerns.<sup>41</sup> His modern version of 'philosopher-kings' is of ordinary 'free men' detached from any passion for power, "but centrally concerned with the affairs of the world," and are in opposition or contradiction with each other "for they could not be true if they link themselves to any figure of authority or party."<sup>42</sup>

It is tempting to picture out M. N. Roy's modern version of "philosopher-kings" in the light of Habermas' notion of the 'public

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<sup>40</sup> As cited in Aditya Nigam, *After Utopia: Modernism, Socialism, Postcolony* (New Delhi: Viva Books, 2010), 228.

<sup>41</sup> Nigam, *After Utopia*, 228-229.

<sup>42</sup> Nigam, *Ibid.*, 232. See also Kanta Kantaria, "M. N. Roy's Conception of New Humanism," *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 66, No. 3, July-Sept. 2005, 619-632, and Bibhuti K. Mahakul, "Radical Humanism of M. N. Roy," *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 66, No. 3, July-Sept. 2005, 607-618.

sphere.’ Jurgen Habermas believed that social or political action can be possible through the ‘public sphere’ where individuals gather to talk openly of their basic social concerns. By the method of a ‘communicative action,’ the individuals will come up into a common agreeable decision (a rational consensus) concerning on matters of the State. Habermas’ notion of ‘communicative action’ is a kind of healthy argumentation by which eager participants could learn from each other during the debate with the common purpose of the social and political betterment.<sup>43</sup> More so, Habermas’ political theory emphasized the importance of a consensus agreement. M. N. Roy, on the contrary, acknowledges the agonistic nature that is inherent in politics, even at the community level. He then termed his political concept as ‘radical humanism’.

I draw from the preceding theorists to address the hope for social and political transformation of a neoliberal society, such as the Philippines. A dialogue with the common folks of society, such as, listening to the everyday challenges of farmers and fisher folks, as well as to daily wage earners, could hopefully bring an ideal transformation of society where the marginalized and underprivileged can now be heard. The Marxian vision of a utopian society is not difficult to visualize in this grassroots level on a very simple end. It always amazes me to see the ordinary and common folks in the rural neighborhood capable to smile and living a very simple, satisfactory, and contented life, with non-lavished lifestyles, away from the lures of a consumerist society. This makes me wonder where all that madness of a highly urbanized complicated modern world sprung from. The greedy desires of the massive neoliberal politico-economic control complicate this world. I cannot imagine the time when each one of us will have to live extravagant contemporary lifestyles, then, surely this planet is not enough to supply for all our wants –false needs of society, massive demands and wide scale productivity, environmental and planetary destruction, absurdities of human life—hence, resulting to decadence, chaos, and war.

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<sup>43</sup> Craig J. Calhoun, “Introduction” in *Habermas and the public sphere*,” edited by C. J. Calhoun (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), vii-viii.



## Urban and rural

With the diversity and complexity of cultural practices in the Philippines, it is also inevitable that the differences and dynamism would result into a variety of social inequalities and issues. To detect such inequalities and injustices, it is good to look at some societal dichotomies that are based on cultural identities in Philippine social realities. The Philippines is commonly divided between urban and rural. In fact, based on the Philippine Geographic Standard Code (PGSC), one of the many requirements for an area to be classified as urban is to have “at least six (6) establishments whether commercial, manufacturing, recreational, and/or personal services,” among many other requirements, such as, population density requirement and necessary infrastructures. It even required that within that area “the occupation of its inhabitants is predominantly non-farming or fishing.”<sup>44</sup> From these criteria alone, one can already see the bias on the livelihood of farmers and fishermen. In an official poverty statistics report released in 2017 by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), farmers and fishermen, together with children, have consistently registered “with the *highest* poverty incidence in 2006, 2009, 2012, and 2015,” meanwhile, on the contrary, the consistent *lowest* poverty incidence in similar year goes to “individuals residing in urban areas” [emphasis mine].<sup>45</sup>

No doubt, the distinction urban and rural is carelessly often associated with being rich and poor, or, developed and underdeveloped as used in economic parlance. The term urban folks or city-dwellers pertains to those who are raised in the capital city of Manila, or any major city such as Cebu; and the rural folks or provincial dwellers (probinsyano/provinciano), dubbed as “promdi” by Manileños, pertains to the remote and mountainous cultures and

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<sup>44</sup> See Philippine Standard Geographic Code, “Urban/Rural classification,” *Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA)*, 2018. <https://www.psa.gov.ph/classification/psgc/?q=psgc/brgydetail/133901220> [August 1, 2022].

<sup>45</sup> See Philippine Poverty Statistics (2017). *Farmers, fishermen, and children consistently posted as the highest poverty incidence among basic sectors*. Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), June 30, 2017. <https://psa.gov.ph/poverty-press-releases> [August 1, 2022].

ethnic tribes in the Philippines.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, in the Philippine cinema, for instance, the rural is often portrayed as the mountainous regions of the provinces, often represented by the usual native folks, such as, farmers and fishermen or housemaids and being classically exhibited as backward, ignorant, and uneducated.<sup>47</sup> While the urban folks, on the other hand, are portrayed by the modern people in cityscapes, civilized, nicely mannered, Victorian, sophisticated, or educated.<sup>48</sup>

Such portrayal and distinction often result into a biased and prejudiced perception of the rural folks, even resulting to the mockery of their native dialects and accent and is made fun through insulting jokes and comments. For instance, a Boholano might also be laughed at by a Cebuano, who is a fellow Bisaya speaker, for his peculiar choice of words, distinctive intonation, and accent, particularly the use of “j” instead of “y” in some words replacing the usual Cebuano term. The Cebuano’s unfamiliarity to the Boholano dialect could possibly lead him to superficially judge the Boholano as socially inferior to him based on what is mistaken as the superiority of language (dialect) whose basis or point of reference is the native Cebuano, when in fact, Bisaya language does not necessarily mean Cebuano, and not even exclusive to Visayan residents alone as it widely extends to the great majority of the Mindanao area. If such is the case, just imagine how much more foreign could the Bisaya intonation and language are to the ears of Manileños, who are not taught of the language.

The choice of the Tagalog as basis for the Filipino as national language was eventual. According to Roberto T. Añonuevo, Director General of the Commission on the Filipino Language (Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino), the criteria then upon the choice was “pagkaunlad ng estruktura, mekanismo, at panitikan na pawang tinatanggap at ginagamit ng malaking bilang ng mga Filipino” (improvement in structure, mechanism, and literature that is accepted and used by a greater number of Filipinos) [translation, mine]. According to Añonuevo, at the time of the selection, some representatives from the Visayas and Mindanao were absent in the choosing, as Filemon Sotto who represented Cebu got ill and Hadji Butu who represented the

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<sup>46</sup> “Promdi” is a colloquial term which is short for “from the province.”

<sup>47</sup> See Clodualdo A. del Mundo, *Native resistance: Philippine cinema and colonialism 1898-1941* (Manila: De la Salle University Press, 1998), 91-128.

<sup>48</sup> See del Mundo, *Native resistance*, *Ibid.*

Moro had unexpectedly died.<sup>49</sup> The Tagalog was eventually chosen having been “found to be widely used and accepted by the greatest number of Filipinos, and that it already has a large literary tradition.”<sup>50</sup> Likewise, the Commission is also the one responsible behind categorizing the Bisaya language as Cebuano (Sebwano) when in fact the label is a misnomer.

Moreover, there is an inner fascination among Filipinos towards the urban-rural distinction with the tendency to judge people based on the structural development of the cities, the modern life by which they grandiosely came to live, or the elite universities by which they graduated, intensified by surveys showing the top universities in the country,<sup>51</sup> and thereby undermining the social status and capacity of somebody who comes from the underdeveloped rural provinces. For example, the *provinciano*, such as the Boholano or an Ilonggo, might look at himself with a conscious self-discriminatory inferiority in comparing himself to a Cebuano (or a Manilaño) attuning or anticipating to the possible biased outlook and perception of the Cebuano towards a Boholano, (though in our case here, of course, is only a matter of example, granting that a Cebuano, especially one who grew up and raised in the city, is typically a modern city dweller).

Likewise, a Maranao accent may become a subject of mockery for a non-Maranao-speaking person. This could be a proof that many have neglected by not bothering themselves to check the difference in circumstances as regards the manner in which the provincial being is situated or reared, such that, in the presence of the native folks among fishing villages and mountainous areas, a provincial-dweller would naturally be inclined to speak in the dialect or native tongue rather than the formal official medium of communication which is English (or

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<sup>49</sup> See Roberto T. Añonuevo, “Paglingon sa ugat ng Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino,” *Kasaysayan*, (Manila: Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino, 2018). Retrieved from <<http://kwf.gov.ph/kasaysayan-at-mandato/>> [August 1, 2022].

<sup>50</sup> See Voltaire Tupaz (2012). “How Filipino became the national language” in *Rappler*, December 30, 2012. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/18809-how-filipino-became-the-national-language> [August 1, 2022].

<sup>51</sup> See “PUP tops employers’ choice survey” JobStreet by SEEK. April 13, 2022. <https://www.jobstreet.com.ph/career-resources/plan-your-career/pup-tops-employers-choice-survey/>, see also “PUP grads most preferred by employers,” Manila Standard, April 19, 2018. <https://manilastandard.net/news/top-stories/263557/pup-grads-most-preferred-by-employers.html> [August 1, 2022].

even Filipino, both undermines the regional dialects), thus outside observers has the tendency to fail to weigh-in on the real content of the message of conversation but had rather focused on the language that is used, the “medium is the message” so to speak, wherein a foreign language, e.g., English, is wrongfully given higher status when compared to the native dialect. Distinct cultural traits and identities is therefore not given due attention, recognition, and social value. In Fricker’s philosophical parlance, this post-colonial dilemma can be regarded clearly as a form of testimonial injustice as they are not entirely being listened to or given due recognition. The language and dialect are important windows in the understanding of a certain culture and people.

Going back to the example, one can say that the Boholano (provinciano) is a ruralist (*taga-baryo*, *taga-bukid*), while the Cebuano is an urbanist (intently alluding to what Edward Said refers to as “orientalist”). What is meant by an “orientalist” here is not merely and exclusively in the philosophic parlance, the kind that leaves the cultural side in bracket, but rather in the sense of having real deep ties with our indigenous roots and cultural practices. It is annoying to call someone an orientalist who without having lived with the real cultures of the Orient in the peripheries. I further argue that this phenomenon which I try to describe here mirrors the postcolonial dilemma which has deep colonial roots that may lead back to the introduction of Christianity and modern politics by the Spaniards to the Philippines about 400 years ago [in the backdrop of the native inhabitants and their pre-Hispanic civilization prior to the coming of the Spaniards], and now has developed into a postcolonial nation with a neoliberal economy, and in the backdrop of the classic global distinction of the East and West. Similarly, in his work *Orientalism*, Edward Said lambasted the distorted and exaggerated cultural representation of the peoples of the “orient” initiated primarily by Westerners that emphasizes the creepiness, exoticism, and the savage nature of the Eastern cultures.<sup>52</sup>

The provincial dwellers, in this case, being a victim of social discrimination are clearly a victim of “epistemic injustice” as in the manner of Fricker, that there is a hermeneutical gap in the

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<sup>52</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 1-3.

understanding of the rural life and the people, the kind that may ultimately result to a certain psychological damage of the social ego, and social discrimination that may also destroy individual confidence and self-belief. Regarding such psychological damage, I do not discount its possibility for being a contributing factor for the violent extremist behaviors and tendencies, particularly in the down south of Mindanao. The hurt and pain can easily turn into hatred or bigotry, particularly when fueled by leftist or communist ideology, disguised as education among alternative learning schools for vulnerable children of indigenous peoples, to start them young as the cliché goes.

Ideally and fairly, I support the initial move that distinct regional languages would be taught also in both high schools and colleges, at least within their own specific regions, as much as the Filipino language is to be required as a mandatory course part of the academic curriculum and applicable to the entire nation, this is in addition to the Mother Tongue subject already existing in the elementary level. It belittles the fact that there is also a greater majority of Bisaya-speakers (as a case in point) as they comprise a larger geographical presence of ethnicity all over Visayas and Mindanao, and now even populating the Metro Manila to look for greener pastures. The dominance of the Tagalog language resulted into a whirlpool that affected other aspects of culture in the periphery. At its worst, it resulted to the discrimination of the provincial and regional languages. Even the teaching of Philippine history is largely Luzon-centered disregarding the equally important figures and events which occurred in the periphery, particularly in the Visayas and Mindanao.<sup>53</sup>

For instance, in his effort to defend his beloved Manila amidst allegations and criticisms for having been an “empire” to the rest of the country, former Makati City congressman and former Ambassador to the United Nations, influential news anchor Teodoro Locsin, Jr. wrote an essay which he titled “The Truth of the Myth of Imperial Manila” in which he opined: “without Imperial Manila, you would be eating bacteria in sari-sari stores instead of clean delicious fare in the

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<sup>53</sup> One example is the Balangiga massacre on September 28, 1901, in Eastern Samar, one of the bloodiest incidents during the Philippine-American War, an event that was already almost forgotten, but not until former president R. Duterte reminds the American troops to return the Balangiga bells that were stolen from the Filipinos.

food courts invented by SM Manila,” obviously unaware of the richness of the sanctuary of *fresh* cheaper seafood and healthy organic vegetables and fruits that are hailed from the provinces, from real agricultural farms, not just “sari-sari stores,” as compared to the frozen ones in the cities.<sup>54</sup> So, Teddy Boy Locsin, Jr. became a perfect epitome of a colonial mentality claiming metropolitan arrogance but complete ignorance of the richness of the provincial life. Though it is true that Locsin may not be suitable to be classified as to what Gramsci might have referred to as an “organic intellectual,” Teddy Boy surely exemplifies the mentality of most Filipino elite to which he himself belongs. Another similar scenario is when provincial academic institutions outranked the Manila-based universities in the world university rankings and scientific index, some personalities cry foul in disbelief by accusing the rankings as “predatory” and rigged.

To sum up my argument, there is a linguistic hegemony which eventually resulted into the hegemony of truth, as well as to the hegemony of identity. Linguistic hegemony can be characterized as forming both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. Indeed, language is an integral part of a culture, a nation, or a people. However, the declaration of the “Filipino” as a national language resulted into a seeming divide and superiority of the Tagalog. I will argue that the nationally recognized Filipino language is predominantly a Tagalog language as it is inherent in its structure the syntax and grammar of the Tagalog, with most words are borrowed from the Tagalog varying only at some point in its intonation and accent. Only a few terms from the regional languages that made it into the Filipino vocabulary, and which were not previously understood by the native Tagalog. The flexibility of the Filipino language allows the absorption of many English words (especially when there is no local counterpart for such a term) through “Filipinizing” such term by simply transcribing it into the intonation and spelling of the Tagalog.

The testimonial and hermeneutical injustice can be illustrated simply in that when a Bisaya-speaker who is not well-versed in both Tagalog and English would have a hard time to explain to the Tagalog

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<sup>54</sup> Teodoro T. Locsin. “The truth of the myth of imperial Manila” in Opinion, *ABS-CBN News*, March 04, 2016. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/blogs/opinions/05/03/16/opinion-the-truth-of-the-myth-of-imperial-manila> [August 1, 2022].

audience what he/she needs, whereas when a Tagalog speaker who cannot speak in Bisaya and happen to converse with Bisaya locals, there is no way for a Tagalog speaker to respond in Bisaya. In short, the local language in the Bisaya is undermined. It is a case of testimonial injustice on the part of the Bisaya as he is hardly understood, and hermeneutical injustice in the part of the Tagalog as he/she cannot understand the language of the locals. For sure, native Tagalog speakers may disagree with my contention by claiming that they themselves similarly feel alienated or estranged from the language now known as "Filipino" since the mental space and the emotional universe which it creates is also foreign to the Tagalog. But is it not rather, after all, really the case of all languages as it continually evolved? Granting that the Filipino is alienating to the Tagalog, then imagine how much more alienating it could be to a non-Tagalog speaker, especially to the Bisaya speakers who are often mocked at for their 'hard' inflexible tongues. This demands sense and sensibility to the cultural difference. Already in this very disadvantaged positionality of the conversation, makes dialogue—much more a consensus—remotely impossible.

But before I end this section in the essay, I wish to make it clear that I do not intend to replace the Tagalog with the Bisaya as basis for the Filipino as national language, I simply want to emphasize how the regional languages has deteriorated, neglected, or undermined, and therefore should be placed on equal value or footing. Using the parlance of Fricker, regional languages, such as Ilokano and Bisaya, has experienced an epistemic injustice, inequality, or discrimination, a case of both testimonial and hermeneutic injustice to be exact. And in recognition to section 6 of Article XIV of the 1987 Constitution which states that the Filipino as a language "shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages."<sup>55</sup> Pointing out just one language as basis is largely discriminatory, all other regional languages should be endowed with equal importance and national value. The discrimination and neglect will eventually result to an obsolete or dead language in a matter of decades.

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<sup>55</sup> Section 6 states: "The national language of the Philippines is Filipino. As it evolves, it shall be further developed and enriched based on existing Philippine and other languages." Section 6 Article XIV, *1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines*.

## Scientific over Ethnic Knowledge and Indigenous Learning Systems

The acknowledged father of Philippine indigenous and independent filmmaking, Kidlat Tahimik, who was recognized in 2018 by President Duterte as National Artist of the Visual Arts, who is also known for wearing the bahag (G-string or loin cloth), not only during performances, but also on formal occasions and gatherings, once opined that there is nothing to be ashamed or feel embarrassed upon wearing the bahag as it is a normal dignified attire for natives especially in tropical places.<sup>56</sup> He added in jest that we could have also imposed our cultural attire to Westerners by telling them that their coat and tie is so hot and inappropriate, such that it is unsuitable to the Philippine climate, considering there are varied social standards from different peoples across the globe, and emphasizing that the violent force and military might of colonizers has hammered through such an easier imposition of the Western culture to our Filipino consciousness.<sup>57</sup>

More so, in agriculture, the indigenous knowledge of native farming also tends to be discarded in the preference of modern and commercialized method through the introduction of foreign grains and chemicals, such as, pesticides and commercialized fertilizers which resulted to the neglect of the native varieties of species of rice. Furthermore, the indigenous attunement and attachment with nature, particularly, their respect and worship to the forests, mountains, and farmlands, is often unrecognized by businessmen and mining companies, disregarding how important the natural environment is to the lives of the natives. For investors, they simply regard the mountains as idle lands potential for huge investments, not as home close to the heart being unaware of its communal significance, a case of hermeneutical injustice. Such disparity of information results into the exploitation of our natives, through the continuous exploitation of their ancestral lands. For instance, the victims of the El Niño drought

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<sup>56</sup> See “#ShareBaguio: Kidlat Tahimik on why he wears a bahag,” Interview in *Rappler*. December 30, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z61gp2WLNfQ> [August 1, 2022].

<sup>57</sup> See “#ShareBaguio: Kidlat Tahimik: Hitting the cultural brakes,” Interview in *Rappler*. December 17, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I90HWpmY2cg> [August 1, 2022].



were even attempted to be suppressed by government agents, in the case of the Kidapawan massacre in 2016, is a situation that manifests a “testimonial injustice” to the experiences of the farmer, reason that their sentiments to the government was not really understood and addressed, and in fact was mistaken as a political aggression, reason that they were fired at by responding policemen.<sup>58</sup>

The fisher folks, on the other hand, work very diligently day and night placing their very selves at risk and undermining the danger of the waves and depths at sea. At the same time, they also need to invest in gasoline expenses for the consumption of their pump boats. Unfortunately, these small-time fishermen do not have their own market niche for their catch. Thus, they rely upon secondhand traders who will take care on the selling of their catch and who will pay them with a very minimal amount for their produce with a very limited option for the fishermen as the fish will rot and decompose in a matter of days, unless dried or fermented. The fishermen's gain can only recuperate their gasoline expenses and can hardly provide for the family's daily needs. The fishermen undoubtedly suffer a “testimonial injustice” as they have no outlet, except in social media, to voice out their difficulties and sentiments. They should be afforded appropriate representation to the government sector that takes care of their welfare and development. Likewise, they suffer a “hermeneutical injustice” in finding a sense of worth and dignity in their livelihood. A proper understanding and preparation for this phenomenon could possibly lead fishermen to organize their own market niche which can be cooperative in nature for them to benefit much of their efforts and produce.

## Christians and Muslims

The Christian and Muslim cultural and religious differences also often lead to misunderstanding and conflicts. The *other-ing* or *Orientalizing* of our Islam brothers and sisters often breeds discrimination against them and suspecting them as members of terrorist groups [Islamophobia]. For instance, Muslim women wearing

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<sup>58</sup> See Eimor P. Santos, E. “PH gov't under fire over violent Kidapawan dispersal” in *CNN Philippines*, April 2, 2016. <http://cnnphilippines.com/regional/2016/04/01/PH-gov't-under-fire-over-violent-Kidapawan-dispersal.html> [August 1, 2022].

their hijab are often refused by taxi drivers in Metro Manila, with drivers fearing for their safety due also to previous cases of robbed taxis in urban Muslim villages and slums. The lack of information and uneven representation in the public sphere by Filipino Muslims leads to a prejudiced perception towards their indigenous and Islam cultures accumulated and passed on through generations. The nonfamiliarity of many Filipinos to the Shari'a law and the absence of recognition of the Islamic education known as *madrassa* in our institutional structure are concrete specific examples. Such disparity or imbalance of information and knowledge can be both forms of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice that may lead to further social discrimination of Muslims. Testimonial injustice in the sense that the Muslims failed to show their gentle, peaceful, and harmless natures; and hermeneutical injustice when Muslims could not make sense of the apparent discriminatory practices shown to them by the non-Muslims. A dialogue among the affected sectors is a necessary action to be taken to solve such discrepancy.

Likewise, Christians had undoubtedly also been victims of the Islamic aggression done in the name of prophetic mission to spread the Islamic religion and faith. For instance, there is an undeniable fact that most victims in the Marawi stand-off by the Maute group were Christians who were said to have been beheaded after failure to recite an Islam prayer. What on earth in which a prayer would decide a person's fate whether he lives or die.<sup>59</sup> No doubt, this could be an instance of testimonial injustice for the Christian having been judge based on a faith unknown to him. In fact, it can be both testimonial and hermeneutic injustice in one single instance for the Christian could also feel at loss from the absurd criteria that he has to deal with.

Fellow Muslims, however, are likewise deeply affected by the war. They themselves also suffer the consequences of the terroristic act. In fact, unfortunately much worse than the injustice they fought for. According to F. Sionil Jose, "[I]t is important for the citizens of Marawi to own the responsibility for what happened to their Islamic city. They knew that the Maute had infiltrated their city, hid their arms in their homes. They permitted it, they did not inform the government

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<sup>59</sup> See Joseph Hincks, "What the siege of a Philippine city reveals about ISIS' deadly new front in Asia," *TIME USA*, <https://time.com/marawi-philippines-isis/> [August 1, 2022].

because *in truth they sympathized with the Maute* or were complicit... Thousands of lives and billions were wasted in the last fifty years. What really have the rebels achieved?"<sup>60</sup> Indeed, religious extremism or caliphate can also be another instance of both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, one that is deeply blinded by religious faith. Hermeneutical injustice when Muslim children are brainwashed to hate the soldiers, while taught to regard the Maute as their heroes.<sup>61</sup> As well as testimonial injustice for some peace-loving Muslims who were not given the chance to manifest the caring nature of their religion. There were also many of those Filipino Muslims who helped the Christians survived in the Marawi incident heroically putting their own lives at stake in the risk of being treated as traitors by extremist Muslims. The point, however, is that both parties—Filipino Muslims and Christians—must be willing to comprise their religious and cultural beliefs and historical injustices in the past to give way to a new and more inclusive and unprejudicial understanding of human society, welfare, and well-being, regardless of whether one is a Muslim or Christian, the kind that observes the basic principles of human right. It is completely irrational and contradictory to disregard human life, welfare, and dignity in the name of religious faith and personal belief.

### **Heterosexual over Homosexual, Queer, and Transgenderism**

Alongside with the women and children, the farmers and other labor groups, such as, contractual factory workers, etc., the members of the LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual, and more), on the other hand, are other sectors hungry for recognition in the Philippine society. With the highly religious, conservative, and patriarchal Catholic atmosphere of the Philippine institutions, taking heteronormativity as a standard, the LGBTQIA+ is often not only unrepresented but rather misrepresented and usually regarded as immoral and ungodly, usually discriminated to participate in the religious, political, and civic activities. Such

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<sup>60</sup> Francisco Sionil Jose. "Renewal in Marawi," *Facebook post*. September 25, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/fsionil.jose/posts/786382138201085?pnref=story> [August 1, 2022] (Italics mine).

<sup>61</sup> See Richard Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements," in *Social Epistemology: Essential Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

discriminatory orientations of knowledge and social recognition might hinder a holistic interpretation to the nature of reality, as it tends to exclude unfamiliar discourses and perceptions of social reality. Transgender act is usually regarded as sinful as it deliberately transforms nature thru artificial and scientific means. Homosexuality is widely conceived as a personal choice of the individual, and never as natural, as much as gender is also often regarded as a social construct, as Judith Butler had claimed.<sup>62</sup> With regard to the charge that homosexuality is an arbitrary choice, let us have as a matter of thought experiment to address such claim, can an individual easily adapt sexual preference at an instant? Say, can a heterosexual, so-called straight, perform a homosexual act with ease, without effort and delay, as if simply a matter of choice? This may be a very subjective and disgusting basis, pardon me, but one's own assessment and judgment of oneself could ultimately lead us to rely as a self-sufficient answer to the question. The testimonial injustice occurs when the LGBTQIA+ is not given the necessary space to be who they really are, they are not given enough space for acceptance, much more to let themselves be understood, even by their own family members and social institutions. Likewise, a hermeneutical injustice happens every time the LGBTQIA+ could not make sense of the cruel treatment given to them by judgmental people; the discriminatory practices shown to them by the inhumane world. People may have been unaware of their own biases and prejudices as they may have been institutionally formed or developed through family orientations and upbringing.

### **Implications towards Technology and Science**

Technological advancement is basically premised upon mathematical precision and scientific accuracy. Having said that, let me use as example the military drone as the perfect and highest epitome of technological innovation, or a perfect killing machine. In modern warfare, the military drone served as a watchdog and vanguard to the military troops in the battlefield beneath. It is an unmanned military vehicle; hence it also saves the life of a pilot from danger. Instead, the drone controllers that served as the pilots are miles apart from the aircraft sitting in the comforts of the military

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<sup>62</sup> See Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4, (December 1988), 519-531.

bases. In front of huge computer monitors, the controllers see their opponents and targets by operating what looked like a video game, with cameras capable to zoom in and out, and with audio sets put on listening to orders and commands by superiors, and thereby eventually hitting the attack button if necessary and as commanded by higher authorities for airstrikes. Killing the opponent has never been made easier with this technology where the trauma for having killed someone appears less real and dramatic in the mediation of computer graphics and state-of-the-art technology deluded in the appearance of a video game, where actual and younger video gamers, such as kids, are eventually trained to become this emotionally and physically detached form of combatants.<sup>63</sup>

No doubt that drone technology, as well as technology in general, also had its own share of loopholes as the reported casualties in the middle east include innocent civilians, women and children, and mistaken identities, simply taken as collateral damage, together with the actual combatants. What could be the impact of these cases with regards military responsibility towards an apparent absence of due process on its victims? What sensitivity could technology lead us to? The sanctity and dignity of the human being is undoubtedly unrecognized in this instance, in which human beings are reduced into mere objects in the computer screen, akin to what George Lukacs termed as "reification." The emphasis of an epistemic oversight (ethical-scientific gaps) is also very much helpful in evaluating the role of reason and philosophy towards any technological advancement, particularly for modern warfare. Testimonial injustice is experienced by the innocent victims of drone attacks – the collateral damage. The painful experience must have been an assault to their race, culture and ethnic identities that would continually breeds intense terrorism in the coming years, as the pain can itch the memory to seek revenge. They suffered while the drone operators may have been unaware that some other neighboring entities aside from the real target were also affected –the unnecessary casualties. The victims and their families are as well silenced in the media. Hermeneutical injustice, on the other hand, can be experienced by clueless drone operators who were blinded by the monetary gains in the service in exchange of the

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<sup>63</sup> See Derek Gregory, "From a View to a Kill: Drones and Late Modern War," *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 28 (SAGE Pub: Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, and Singapore, 2011), 198.

horrors that they have committed. They momentarily forgot that behind the computer screens and graphic images were real human beings capable to suffer. Many of these drone pilots may end up dealing with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) in their later years being haunted by the evils that they have caused to humanity having realized they had only been used by State elements.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

Miranda Fricker's philosophical contribution in her social theory known as epistemic injustice is mainly in bringing to light once again the notion of skepticism and doubt towards one's own socio-ethical judgments that could lead to rethinking and re-evaluation of our socio-ethical practices. The human tendency to produce normalizing and moralizing judgments hinders the individual to see any social phenomenon objectively and holistically thereby resulting instead to a larger social injustice brought about by the lack of comprehensive understanding and insufficient information about a certain social phenomenon. The limited nature of the human mind as well as the limited capacity of any technology should be brought into consideration in making any judgment concerning every social phenomenon, rather than succumbing to a biased, prejudiced, and premature conclusion.

It must be recognized that even human reason itself has its own loopholes, as much as nature has its own flaws. Fricker encourages instead the motion to expand our knowledge or widen our understanding with regard individuals and group of peoples, prior to our making of judgments and perceptions which tend to be conclusive and discriminating. The suspension of judgments is called for to bring out a comprehensive and holistic, non-exclusive evaluation of the social phenomenon. Fricker's epistemic injustice parallels in some ways to the social recognition theory found in Habermas and Honneth, or even Ricoeur, in the loose sense that it attempts to empower marginal societal groups, though obviously coming from a differently and distinctly epistemic viewpoint, origin or basis, rather than from a strict (but could possibly be a biased) purely normative viewpoint.

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<sup>64</sup> Wayne L. Chappelle, et. al., "Symptoms of Psychological Distress and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Unites States Air Force 'Drone' Operators," *Military Medicine*, Vol. 179 (August 2014), 63-70.

Lastly, the linkage between ethics, epistemology and social theory is found on the hybridity of the concept, that epistemic injustice resulted from an epistemic gap that ultimately demands to be filled thru social recognition, as well as through an ethical and collective social response or action. Epistemic injustice needs to be addressed squarely for the betterment of the human society.

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