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Carlito M. Gaspar



The Theory of Communicative Action. By Jurgen Habermas. Vol. 1. Reason and the Rationalization of Society; Vol. 2. Lifeworld and System. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984 and 1987.

Jurgen Habermas is recognized as one of the most important social thinkers in the world today. *The Theory of Communicative Action*, the book which explains this theory, is recognized as a milestone not only for the author but also for all philosophers, sociologists and others involved in the human sciences.

Habermas continues to hold out hope for the future of the modern world. It is in this sense that Habermas writes of modernity's unfinished project. While Marx focused on work, Habermas is concerned mainly with communication. While Marx focused on the distorting effect of the structure of capitalist society on work, Habermas was concerned with the way the structure of modern society distorted communication. While Marx sought a future world involving full and creative labor, Habermas seeks a future society characterized by free and open communication. (George Ritzer 1997, 453)

This article is an attempt to explain what this theory is all about and to find out if it has relevance to the contemporary realities of Mindanao.

The Theory of Communicative Action

In his diagnosis of society, Habermas claims that the primary threat to human beings is not economic exploitation or political dictatorships and ideologies, but rather the encroachment of the market system and bureaucratic authorities into their day-to-day social relationships resulting in the erosion of their characteristic human qualities. This unfavorable impact is also manifested in the destruction of specifically human communication structures as the workings of the market and bureaucracy expand.

Habermas eventually refers to this reality as the uncoupling of the lifeworld ("the realm of everyday communicative life") and the system (including the government bureaucracy, legal systems and the market economy). With the system's colonization of the lifeworld, there is the ensuing impoverishment in the quality of people's lives. Maintaining the nurturing ways of being a community, for example, becomes difficult. One reason is the destruction of their traditional human communicative structures or the manner in which they express themselves and communicate their ideas and options within the context of a cultural framework. In short, communication gets distorted. Another consequence of this colonization is the impact on intersubjectivity, or how individuals relate to one another, especially in terms of establishing mutual understanding with one another.

A few examples will make these points clear. In our indigenous health system there was reliance on the healing capacities of the *hilot* or traditional community healers. But the health system drastically changed with the advent of colonialism, leading to the introduction of Western-oriented medicine emphasizing the authoritative role of the doctor (one who had undergone years of scientific training) and the hospital as venue for treatment. The *hilot*—referred to with condescension as quack doctors—became disenfranchised leading to the uncoupling of one aspect of the system and lifeworld. Such an uncoupling has lead to a lot of complications which continue to persist until now, especially in the rural areas. One particular illustration of the colonization of the lifeworld is how circumcision has shifted from being a rite of passage to a practice undergone inevitably by a male adolescent for health purposes or owing to peer group pressure. The growing acceptance of euthanasia in the West is another consequence of this colonization.

The ideal is a rational society where both the system and lifeworld are allowed to rationalize in their own logical manner. If this takes place, the system's rationalization results in a society that has greater control of the environment and where the citizens enjoy material abundance. On the other hand, the lifeworld's rationalization brings forth the enrichment of life as truth, goodness and beauty flourish. Unfortunately, the lifeworld's rationalization did not flourish because of the system's domination. As a result, the people are able to enjoy the fruits of the system's rationalization as in the rise of their standard of living, but their lives are not enriched (given the persistent threat of war, nuclear annihilation, urban blight, pollution, alienation and the like).

If the rationalities of both system and lifeworld were allowed to express themselves fully without one destroying the other, human emancipation would have advanced. [However, as the lifeworld got colonized, it became impoverished resulting in communication problems.] This problem cannot be solved by destroying the system (in terms of both the economic and administrative institutions) since it can provide the material prerequisites for lifeworld to flourish. But as it turned out—with the system colonizing the

lifeworld—there arose a greater fragmentation in society. Various problems surfaced in terms of how people coordinated their action or how socialization was facilitated. Such a situation demanded the discovery of an alternative force for human emancipation.

Habermas claims that this cannot be done through rational-purpose action which is characterized by an instrumental orientation toward the material environment and how to transform it. While acknowledging the contribution of rational-purposive knowledge to the development of modern society, he believes that many social problems cannot be dealt with on the basis of rational-purposive knowledge.

Rational-purposive action arose with the consolidation of capitalism (e.g. one concrete example was that linked to the Protestant Ethic which contributed to capitalism's rise) where everything was imbued with a purpose, or with a means-end principle. Any resource or action can be considered means to an end. Everything can be seen as instruments that can be manipulated, especially in terms of earning a profit. If a thing, or even someone has no contribution to make, it /he/she has no value because it/he/she serves no purpose. Thus, everything/everyone can be considered a commodity. Consequently people interact with each other only in terms of utilitarian encounters, from a perspective which is one of commodification. People and things have to fit into this capitalist strategy decided on by the system. People are forced to participate in what has already been set up; they cannot just pursue their own goals.

In such a situation, there can be no mutual understanding among individuals; there can be no genuine communication. In the first place, individuals cannot establish genuine relationships with one another. The utilitarian transactions between and among the individuals, as well as their being strategized cannot facilitate communication. Rational-purposive action has to give way to communicative action where at least two individuals, having established interpersonal relations (whether through verbal or extraverbal means) and who are capable of speech action, interact with one another. This type of action involves symbolic activities which facilitate communication leading to intersubjectivity.

It is in this context that Habermas proposes his theory of communicative action. This theory urges both critical thought and practical action. He seeks to rediscover ways in which individuals can live together in harmony and mutual dependence ("a way of piecing together the decayed parts of modernity") but providing adequate space for individual's autonomy and taking advantage of technological advancement. He insists on the active involvement of the actors in the interaction which is governed by binding consensual norms, which in turn, are defined by their mutual expectations. One assumption is that the people should be able to express their intentions to one another in the most truthful and sincere manner. Such communication demands open and uninterrupted argumentation. It is only through argu-

mentation that people can determine whether an agreement is genuine or communicatively achieved, as well as have a basis for knowing if what is expressed in words or action is rational.

It also requires a search for the ideal speech setting. If such a setting is absent, it follows that there can be no ideal speech acts. There are a number of reasons for such an absence: there are constraints that prohibit the actors from speaking up freely, they do not share the same presuppositions and assumptions, and there is a lack of consensus on the values that help to define the collective goals. In order to promote communicative action, there is need to deliberately and forcefully set up the needed pre-conditions. This involves the following interventions: encourage individuals to transcend personal concerns, rehabilitate biases and prejudices (develop the notion of "positive" prejudice), and empower the participants to become actively involved in the process.

One is able to have a grasp of communicative action by finding out if persons are able to express their intentions to others in the most truthful and sincere manner and if the acts of intended communication indicate accurately the background consensus that exists among them concerning the communication norms. This is where ground rules need to be well established beforehand. Implicit rules that govern the articulation of worldviews, patterns of thought, and conflicts all contribute towards determining this type of action.

Whenever and wherever individuals act together one can observe three aspects of communicative action: they coordinate their actions, they act on the basis of norms and they manifest inner human realities. When actions are coordinated, people's behavior is judged on the basis of their contribution to the success or failure of the endeavor as judged according to prevailing norms. Such norms depend on what they have agreed on or what could be reached in the course of the action.

There are a number of other considerations if communicative action is to take place. There is the question of language that determines community or individual consciousness. The popular notion is that we use language to express what we want to communicate. But there is the other theory that individuals are not free to use language because it is language that "uses" the individual. Since the individual is part of the system (as language is a system), his individuality is constrained by this system. Even as his "individual genius" may provide a capacity for reinterpretation, there are prior systems of meanings embedded in the community. If the individual insists on his own reappropriation this could lead to individualism and blocks the common search for what is meaningful.

There are also taken-for-granted presuppositions that can enter into the processes of communication. One good example is where a *kapatas* orders the most junior (meaning youngest, and/or most recently hired, or lowest in rank) of the workers to go and buy beer. The order is given on the basis

of the number of presupposition: it is time for a break, there is a store nearby selling beer, most drink beer, etc. If there are no conflicts in accepting the presuppositions, then the command is accomplished. If these cannot be accepted (e.g. because the facts are not true and therefore there is a problem in the presuppositions), there can be no genuine communication. Consequently, the beer is not bought. But the presupposed facts, norms and goals are oftentimes taken for granted, i.e. the facts are there, norms are in place and the goals are attainable. Where they can be taken for granted, then the speech act is deemed truthful, genuine and binding.

If there are constraints to the ideal speech act, there must be attempts to get rid of such blocks before the conversation (could also be negotiations, conflict resolution and the like) begins. Each actor that participates in the speech act should be empowered or free. If Congress, for example, wants *datus* from various indigenous communities to give direct testimony on their objections to the Indigenous People's Rights Act, they should pay for all expenses incurred in coming to Congress and provide them with an allowance, apart from hiring translators so that the *datus* can speak in their own languages.

Communication is also distorted where the validity claims of the speakers cannot be guaranteed. If we assume that a group of people are perennial liars, are always saying things that are morally wrong and are very cynical, language has no mission between them and us. We will never reach a level of understanding with them. Nothing will result except distorted communication. In their view of many politicians, including President Ramos, many progressive and militant Filipinos today see them as not in a position to have validity claims when they speak about being at the service of the nation. They are mostly perceived to act solely on the basis of their self-interests. No matter how sincere the politicians are, very few of the progressive groups will engage in a dialogue with them since they are already perceived as manipulative (*may doble cara*) and corrupt. Unless the parties involved in a process of dialogue are perceived, both objectively and subjectively, as being in a position to claim integrity then there is no use arranging for such a dialogue.

In spite of the socio-cultural and historical reality of domination, distortion and disruption in communication, is dialogue still relevant? Habermas says it is and he proposes this theory as a way to push innovative programs that aim at making it possible for dialogue to happen despite the difficulties involved. He insists that the facilitative conditions should be provided for so that dialogue could take place and its goals achieved. One is that the process should never be corrupted so that it favors only one of the parties involved. Another is that all parties should be empowered to engage actively in the dialogue.

Habermas refers to the creation of a public sphere where issues of concern to the community are openly debated and decisions are arrived at, based

on reason rather than on tradition or the orders of the powers-that-be. However, this sphere eventually got transformed and could no longer function in terms of its purpose to monitor and legitimate power through the medium of public discussions. But media and political parties have been ineffective in creating a discriminating public; they have become instruments of power protecting their own interests. Thus, Habermas sees the need to rationalize the exercise of social and political authority.

He sees that contemporary problems can only be solved if there are ways to reduce the impact of the system on lifeworld (through "restraining barriers") and if sensors can be built to enhance lifeworld's impact on system. Innovations that lead to the creation of mutually enriching lifeworld and system are required. This is possibly where social movements can play an important role. Many of them have been active in resisting lifeworld's colonization even as they have committed themselves to the recoupling of lifeworld and system.

There is a variety of such social movements including ecological, gay, human rights, anti-nuclear and peace movements. Habermas refers to feminism as a modern movement that is unequivocally on the offensive since they have made universal moral and legal claims. In the Philippines, those in community-based health programs have resisted the over-westernization of the health care delivery system and have reappropriated indigenous healing practices. Those engaged in providing solidarity with indigenous people's struggles have pushed for the recognition of customary laws and indigenous systems of conflict resolution.

New theoreticians among those engaged in social movements are reappropriating Habermas: "In the European context, the newness of these social movements is derived from the new forms of subordination typical of late capitalism: the commodification of social life, or the expansion of capitalist relations into culture, leisure and sexuality; the bureaucratization of society; and the massification or homogenization of social life by the invasive power of the mass media. These restatements of Habermas' original insights into the different attacks on the 'organic foundations of the lifeworld' are used to explain the multiplication of 'sites of struggle' inside the modern society and outside of the production process" (Foweraker 1995, 41).

The Relevance on Contemporary Mindanao Realities

Mindanao's history could very well be the unfolding of events that constitute—in Habermasian language—the uncoupling of lifeworld and system. This process goes back to the attempts of the Spaniards to subjugate the Moro and indigenous peoples (today referred to as *lumads*) and the ensuing resistance among some of them (Cacayan-Miclat 1995, Reyes 1997, Rodil 1990/1994, Saber 1979, Salgado 1990). The Moro Wars began as early as 1578 with the coming of the Spanish military expeditions. The Moro people resisted

these encroachments to preserve their independence, culture and religion. But eventually the capacity of the Moro people to resist Spain's obsession to subdue them declined owing to both the impact of the Spanish coercive measures and the problems in leadership due to factors like the conflicts arising from rivalry for succession to the Sultanate. Their strength had been considerably weakened before the invasion of the new colonizers.

Using high powered technology, consolidating its military might and adapting a divide-and-rule tactic, the Americans were more successful in subjugating Mindanao-Sulu. One strategy used towards the integration of the Moro and lumads into mainstream body politic was the resettlement program which led to the influx of landless Christian settlers. As waves of migrants from the north reached Mindanao-Sulu, the population drastically changed. In the 1903 Census, the total population of Mindanao and Palawan totaled 706,539; of these 39.29 percent were Moro, 22.11 percent were the lumads, and 38.69 percent were Christian settlers.

The percentage share of Moro and lumads to total population has steadily decreased. By 1990 (total population—14.6 million), they constituted only 22.79 percent while the Christians made up the big majority of 77.23 percent (Canuday 1997, 6). One can project that by the 2000 Census, the Moro/Lumad share in the total population of Mindanao-Sulu-Palawan might even further decrease.

One major aspect of the uncoupling of system and lifeworld was in the legal system governing the regime of land ownership and control, brought about by the Regalian Doctrine which declared all public land as belonging to the State. As the Philippines became bound to an agrarian and colonial economy, land was transformed into a commodity. Various colonial land laws created by the government negated the Moro and the Lumads' customary land laws and the communal concept of land. Ultimately, this led to the entry of agri-business plantations operated by transnational corporations, the issuance of timber licenses to influential loggers, and the landgrabbing schemes of the elite (both Moro and lowland landlords/politicians). "The ascendancy of foreign powers . . . and the subsequent institution of land laws and policies that legitimized usurpation and the later colonial agenda of disenfranchisement under the guise of 'pacification', upended traditional Moro patterns of land ownership and guaranteed the Moro's wholesale and systematic ejection from their lands" (Fianza 1994, 3).

The changes in the mode of production, the setting up of government bureaucracy and public school system, the introduction of hospitals and similar new ways of responding to the people's political aspirations and economic needs contributed to the further rationalization of the system. Eventually, this system dominated the lifeworld of the Moro and the Lumads. With the coming in of missionaries whose main interest was proselytization, a growing number of Lumads became Christianized. This became another factor that contributed to the colonization of the lifeworld which persisted

in the decades after independence, and worsened during the Marcos years until now.

These developments led to more changes that radically transformed Mindanao's political, economic, social, and cultural realities. As logging operations penetrated the hinterlands and roads got built, the agri-business plantations expanded. Settler villages got established; more migrants found ways to secure land through various ways from applying with the government's homestead program to "buying" land from the Lumads. Stories are still repeated that, in some cases, three cans of sardines and a kilo of salt bought fifty hectares of fertile land. There was outright landgrabbing where the intruder had power. Naturally, violent land conflicts erupted in many parts of the island between loggers and the Maguindanaons, Ilongo migrants and the B'laan, the National Power Corporation and the Maranaos, the Cebuanos and the Subanen, Del Monte and the Higaonon, and a host of other combinations. Inter-ethnic relations went from bad to worse.

Except for small pockets who have been acculturated to lowland society and culture, most Moro and Lumads have felt alienated from everything that constituted the nation-state of the Republic of the Philippines: its history, cultural tradition, legal systems, bureaucracy, and the like. For most of the Moro and the Lumads, there was nothing that made them feel connected to the national government based in Manila. As their economic situation remained stagnant—their laws and customs in danger of disintegration, and their culture and identity in jeopardy—there arose a greater sense of discontent and resentment among them.

All these fueled ethnic prejudices which became more and more institutionalized. Lowland settlers condescended on the Moros and the Lumads. The Moro people also looked down on the Lumad and the settlers. The Lumads just wanted to be left alone. There arose stereotypes, ethnic jokes, and petty quarrels between and among the Mindanao's many ethnic groups. "Time was when the word (Moro) was unspeakably dirty . . . (it) filled one with dark mistrust and dread, the imagination benumbed by mythic tales of banditry, lawlessness, savagery, treachery, and filthy primitivism" (Hipolito 1994, 3).

As the Moro and the Lumads became more minoritized and marginalized in a land that was home to their ancestors and their children since time immemorial, there arose more difficult and tension-filled relationships with the *Kristiyanos*. While there was some semblance of peaceful co-existence among them, communication that helps bring forth harmony and mutual dependence was difficult given all the given barriers and constraints. Those who knew the real score were appalled at the degree of fragmentation that was evolved. They knew it was only a matter of time before Mindanao would no longer be referred to as Land of Promise.

Indeed, it became a bleeding land. Eventually, the pockets of conflicts and tensions would erupt into a dirty little war that had raged for decades, es-

pecially between the Moro rebels with their supporters and the government with its military troops and the armed lowland civilian force. It had been referred to mainly as the Muslim-Christian conflict in Mindanao, but the myth that it was a religious war was being perpetuated by those who benefited most from this war. The irony was that the ones who suffered most from this conflict were the poor: Moro, Lumad, or settler. As capitalist economics and elite politics took hold of the system, the collective Mindanaoan lifeworld became more dominated. Consequently, the majority of Mindanaoans got disenfranchised in the process, whether Muslim or Christian, indigenous or migrant.

The periodization of contemporary Philippine history cannot but highlight the late 1960s as a significant marker. This is true also for Mindanao's history. The events that took place in various parts of Mindanao in the late 1960s have determined how political realities unfolded in the next three decades. In March 1968, the Jabidah massacre took place in Corregidor that fueled widespread outrage among the Moro people against the Manila government. Later, owing to various reasons including the killing of one of his sons by an NBI agent, Datu Udtog Matalam founded the Muslim (later renamed Mindanao) Independence Movement (MIM) in May 1968. A Manifesto was issued to declare the MIM's intent: "to secede from the Republic of the Philippines, in order to establish an Islamic State that would embody their ideals and aspirations, conserve their patrimony, their Islamic heritage under the blessings of the Islamic brotherhood and the regime of the law of nations" (quoted in Cacayan-Miclat 1995, 17). It then called on all Muslims to wage a *jihad* or holy war.

At this juncture of Mindanao's history, Habermas theory had very little relevance. The landscape could not provide even a trace of an ideal speech setting: there were just too many constraints that blocked any influential person to speak freely about the issues. All the key actors could no longer agree on a set of assumptions to guarantee peace in Mindanao. There were difficulties reaching consensus on what would be collective goals for all the Mindanaoans. No open argumentation could take place as to why everyone should work towards conflict resolution. The founding of the MIM resonated with the deep emotions the Moro people who have had enough of Christian chauvinism, but it also fueled fear and anxiety in the hearts of Christians.

Before it got coopted by Marcos, the MIM recruited and trained progressive-thinking Moros that ultimately became the prime movers of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) including Nur Misuari. Meanwhile, "Christian" politicians in Cotabato founded the *Ilaga* which were projected as self-defense organization against the Blackshirts and Barracudas. Conflict over land and the politicians' drive to monopolize political power were the contributing reasons for setting up the *Ilaga*. The late 1960s gave way to the 1970s; things got completely out of control. As the "Muslim militia" and the

"Christian paramilitary and fanatical groups" fought each other, thousands of Moro, Lumad, and settlers abandoned their homes and farms. There were waves of evacuees who reached Sabah (Rachagan and Dorall 1981, 64). In mid-1971, the MNLF was officially organized in Zamboanga City (its slogan: Struggle in Defense of the Homeland and the Belief), in the midst of the war that raged across the island. Marcos took advantage of this tragic scenario and used it as one reason for declaring martial law.

In the following years, the MNLF engaged the military in a running battle that was fought in various parts of Mindanao-Sulu including the assault on the government military installations in Marawi and the takeover of MSU (October 1972) and the burning of Jolo (February 1974). By 1974, 70 percent of the AFP was deployed in Mindanao mainly because of the MNLF. Not only was this an expensive arrangement, but it made it difficult for the AFP to contain the NPA expansion in other parts of the country. These and other reasons (the threat of an oil squeeze, pressure from the Organization of the Islamic Countries, and the pressure from foreign investors) pressured Marcos to initiate negotiations with the MNLF. In December 1976, the OIC brokered the signing of the Tripoli Agreement which included a ceasefire provision. However, owing to various interpretations of some of the texts in the agreement, the signed Tripoli Agreement did not bring peace in Mindanao. The peaceful negotiation in resolving the Mindanao conflict was not going to be fully realized while Marcos was in power.

While this attempt at conducting a dialogue to resolve the conflict was praiseworthy, in retrospect one could see why it was bound to fail. There were existing elements in the interaction that suggest a rational-purposive rather than communicative action. Both parties had their own agenda, each was going to use the negotiations as a way of pushing their agenda. The negotiation served as a means to an end, but such ends were not the same for both parties. No wonder they agreed to sign the same Agreement, but their interpretations would later vary. The elements required of a truly communicative action were not present: the key actors were incapable of speaking sincerely and truthfully, the consensual norms were absent as reciprocity could not take place, and there was suspicion on both sides as to each other's integrity.

The EDSA event in 1986 did not change radically the nature of the dialogue, although Mrs. Aquino could be credited for expanding the space to hold such a dialogue. Once in power, Mrs. Aquino sought a meeting with Missuari leading to a new ceasefire between the AFP and the MNLF (although at this time the MNLF could not claim to be the sole spokesman for the Moro people given the existence of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front which separated from the MNLF in 1977). The 1987 Constitution decreed the creation of the autonomous region of Muslim Mindanao which led to the Republic Act 6734 or the Organic Act for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

(ARRM). While both the MNLF and the MILF rejected this law as bogus and emasculated, the government pushed its implementation (*ibid.*, 25).

The same 1987 Constitution also recognized the rights of the Lumads especially in terms of their ancestral domain. Such a provision led to the SB No. 1728 known as the Indigenous People's Rights Act of 1997 and its counterpart HB No. 9125; both have been recently passed in Congress on third reading. It is expected to be passed as a law before the end of the year. The law will set up the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) tasked to empower the Lumads and draw their participation in advancing their cause. The first moves will be to dialogue with them in terms of the delineation of their territories towards the issuance of a certificate guaranteeing their ownership and control over their homeland.

Both moves to appease the Moro and Lumads continued beyond Mrs. Aquino's term. One can even say that President Ramos has succeeded, to a certain extent, in pursuing the negotiations to the desired outcome leading to peace in Mindanao, after years of strife and violence. The signing of the peace agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the MNLF took place in two settings: in Jakarta in August 1996 and in Malacañang in September. The controversial six-page Davao Consensus signed in June served as the final step towards the peace agreement. Included in the consensus was the 'setting up of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD). Nur Misuari then ran and won as governor of the ARRM and was later appointed as chairman of the SPCPD. Meanwhile, the Ramos government began its peace talks with the MILF.

For all the seeming success of the peace negotiations in Mindanao, there are still Mindanaoans who are afraid that the roots of the unrest and violence have not been fully addressed. They see the present peace situation as one that remains precarious; the illusion of a lasting peace could easily be shattered with new expressions of dissent and resistance. When the Davao Consensus was made public in June, there were two responses across Mindanao-Sulu: many said that it should be given a chance to prosper, others attacked it. A year after the setting of the SPCPD with Misuari acting as its chairman and ARRM governor, many of those who were earlier supportive of him are expressing their disillusionment (Fernandez et al. 1997). They are most unhappy that Misuari has used his offices and has been "riding on the Mindanaoans" aspirations of Mindanaoans for greater participation in governance to campaign for Charter Change (Bagaforo et al. 1997).

A person with a perspective on civil society could easily provide the reasons for the ineffectivity of the government and even the MNLF in forging a peace agreement. He would point to the fact that the basic masses have not been able to actively participate in forging the peace agreement since there were no such concrete mechanisms established by the powers that be. (Khadir Mozzafar as quoted by Cacayan-Miclat 1995, 26). Feminists would say that

women were disenfranchised in this process since only men took part in the discussions. There could be conclusions that the government and the MNLF had not proven their sincerity in making a significant difference in pursuing genuine autonomy and peace (*ibid.*, 25). An Islam scholar would point to the clash in agenda (Gowing 1979).

Those belonging to the Habermasian school would offer the following reason as to why, they, too, believe that the existing GRP-MNLF peace agreement remains precarious: There were just so many blocks preventing the possibility of genuine communication. On one hand, the key actors operated solely within the framework of utilitarian expectations. The processes were governed by the means-end principle; each party would hold on to the agreement only in so far as it provides legitimization to their being in power. On the other hand, the ideal speech setting was absent, the deeper contentious issues were pushed to the margin which would still make coordination work difficult, and the key actors had problems projecting their validity claims.

Using Habermas' framework of a communicative action, can one therefore say that in contemporary Mindanao, nothing would suggest the possible relevance of his theory? That nothing can show some resonance of various aspects of his theory? Maybe this theory is best appropriated if one goes beyond the GRP-MNLF scope and, for that matter, any mechanism linked to government (including the Commission on National Integration which later became the PANAMIN, and later transformed into the Office of Muslim Affairs and Office for Southern/Northern Cultural Communities; the DENR, DAR, the National Power Corporation and the Philippine National Oil Company, and the AFP—all those who have to deal directly with the Moro and Lumads for various reasons).

It is in the arena outside of the government that one might find those involved in initiatives who could appreciate the relevance of such a theory and would resonate with the practice of it. They can be found in civil society, specifically those involved in the social movement that has provided solidarity with the Moro and the Lumad peoples who continue to struggle to protect their rights and to promote justice and peace. These have included non-governmental organizations (NGO), people's organizations (PO), Church, media and academic groups who have been involved in such solidarity linkages.

The Church, especially the Roman Catholic Church, provides an interesting case study. Missionaries had accompanied military expeditions throughout the late 1500s to the 1800s in the hope of bringing Christianity to the *infieles*, *irehes*, and *feroces*. One example is the experience of the Jesuits in the 1860s, in what is now Cotabato, where they established "a mission near the soldiers and near the Muslim settlements and near the hunting grounds of non-Christian tribes, at or near the delta of the Rio Grande . . . (its) aim was to evangelize the pagans by establishing a Christian community start-

ing from scratch . . ." (Bernad 1991, 3). Within a year of their arrival, they baptized the members of a Tiruray family. Throughout the long years of their evangelization work in Mindanao, the missionaries succeeded in converting the Lumads but very rarely were they able to convince the Moro to give up their Islamic faith.

A sharp increase in the presence of foreign missionaries took place during the American regime. One after another, they came hoping to baptize the pagans: the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (1912 in Agusan and Surigao), the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (1937 in Cotabato and Sulu), the Columbans (1938 in Western Mindanao) and many others. As more Christian migrants penetrated the hinterlands, settlements multiplied where the missionaries established parishes.

Despite the arrival of more missionaries, very rare conversions took place among the Moro people. But with the Lumads, they made inroads. Following World War II, the Christian population rose by leaps and bounds, mainly because of the continuing migration. Dioceses were erected: Davao in 1949, Cotabato in 1950, Jolo in 1953, Marbel in 1960, Isabela in 1963, Dipolog and Butuan in 1967, and many more in the 1970s. As the migrant population increased, the Catholic population became more dominant except in Jolo, Marawi, and Isabela. Today, Catholics constitute the majority in the dioceses of Cotabato (52 percent), Ipil (62 percent), Pagadian (72 percent), Iligan and Kidapawan (78 percent), Marbel (80 percent), and Zamboanga (81 percent).

Catholic proselytization among the Muslims and the Lumad was considerably halted with Vatican II. Ecumenism and interfaith dialogue were encouraged. Thus was born what is now considered the main thrust of the Church presence among the Moro and Lumad, namely, to conduct a dialogue of faith and life. Various factors pushed for the urgency to of such a dialogue. First was martial law which created havoc on the lives of all Mindanaoans. Second was the birth of Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC), a triennial conference involving all dioceses where church people come together to share their specific situations and come up with relevant responses. Third, there were Church leaders who actualized the desire to begin the dialogue, beginning at the grassroots level.

The major proponent was the late Bishop Bienvenido Tuddud. He had studied Islam and, given the tense situation in Marawi, he saw the importance of such a dialogue. In 1982, through his influence, the Prelature of Marawi articulated this mission statement:

To be loved by God and to be able to love Him in return—this is a human experience as real as it is mysterious. This divine and human exchange is actually the essence of what Christians call the *Good News*, and of what Muslims mean when they refer to God as the Merciful (*Al-Rahman*), the Compassionate (*Al-Rahim*), and the Loving One (*Al-Wahhud*) . . . To announce and proclaim it is an integral part of the mission of Christianity and the *da-wah* of Islam . . . Every gift received

from God is good. Every good must somehow be communicated. Belief in the Divine Mercy and Compassion must be shared. This sharing is dialogue . . . In a situation of prejudice, dialogue means an abiding and genuine search for goodness, beauty, and truth . . .

In an atmosphere of animosity, dialogue means powerlessness and vulnerability. From a position of power, one can only negotiate about terms. From a position of weakness, one can truly communicate his trust in the other. Trust is most real when there looms the possibility of betrayal. To dialogue means to open one's heart. This is a position of vulnerability. This is a high risk which must be taken by anyone who wants to enter into genuine dialogue. . .

In an area where Muslims and Christians lived together, the dialogue described is an offering to both. It is an offering because, though it is a demand on the believer, he should not force it on those with whom he must relate . . . It is an offering because it is ever extended not only in the pleasantness of appreciation but also in, and beyond, the pain of rejection. Dialogue is an offering because it respects the antipathies of both Muslims and Christians, and the pace with which they strive to ease their hurts and to heal their wounds. Here dialogue is compassion. (Linsangan 1995, 224-25.)

Towards actualizing this proposed dialogue, the MSPC, in collaboration with the Philippine Action for Cultural Ties (PACT) Program of the National Council of Churches of the Philippines, set up the *Duyog Ramadhan* Program. This yearly program aims at educating Christians about Islam and Muslims during the period of Ramadhan. Various groups, organizations and communities have adapted this program in order to foster unity and understanding among the Mindanaoans. In Maguindanao, for example, this led to the setting up of *Kadtuntaya sa Mapiya na Bagel a Ummah* (Better Understanding and Unity of Peoples). Many other similar groups emerged like the Silsilah Dialogue Movement and the Peace Advocates of Zamboanga.

A recent spin-off of this dialogue movement took place in the wake of the SPCPD controversy that led to demonstrations of various groups against the GRP-MNLF peace agreement, including those led by priests in the cities of Iligan and Zamboanga. This was the series of dialogues between Bishops (Catholic and Protestant) with the Muslim Ulamas, beginning in November 1996. At that first meeting, they identified the following as the major concerns which they were to share with their communities in a spirit of peace, based on truth and justice:

- What can we do together to ensure security for our brother Muslims in Christian areas and brother Christians in Muslim areas?

- How can we maintain the momentum of peace-building and promote the culture of peace? How do we change the deep-seated prejudices from both sides?

-How can we concretely share our common beliefs, values, practices, doctrines, and traditions? How can we distinguish between what is observed (what is done) and the official teaching behind the practice of action?

-How can we assist the MNLF brothers who will not be integrated into regular community life?

-How can we relate with the MILF? How can we campaign for what is right and true for genuine peace and development?

In the past year, there has been an upsurge of activities to promote this dialogue involving schools, NGOs, and the media. Individual church people had taken new roles to expand the space of dialogue. One is Fr. Eliseo Mercado OMI, president of the Notre Dame University in Cotabato City, who accepted a key position in the SPCPD, his position: "Our partnership should enhance a new culture that enables and empowers us to draw from each other's traditions and common resources to help face today's threats to global survival and work together toward peace with justice and the integrity of creation. We must spare no effort to live and work together towards reconciling conflicts, eradicating bigotry and prejudices, and empowering grass-roots-level communities to act upon their own choices in self-development towards a more just and participatory society (Mercado 1997, 35).

In terms of their involvement with the Lumads, Church people continue to engage them in dialogue both in terms of activities at the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), as well, as in the current campaign to promote their rights, specifically vis-à-vis ancestral domain issues. The latter continues to be done at the local level (through programs that help them know more about their rights and to support organizing efforts), at the regional level (support programs in securing their control over their ancestral domain) and at the national level (advocacy work for the passage of the Indigenous People's Rights Act of 1997). At the regional level, this has been conducted through the *PANAGTAGBO*, a network of NGOs and Lumad organizations, active in coordinating efforts to secure rights to ancestral domain, to oppose development aggression into their homelands (e.g. mining, infrastructure projects, commercial tree plantations) and to strengthen their ranks towards more effective advocacy work.

In the course of such involvements, church people have learned the Lumads' languages, conducted ethnography towards a greater knowledge and appreciation of their culture and history, entered into a process of understanding their faith tradition and lived in a manner facilitative of dialogue. During both the Marcos and Aquino administrations, the military and local governments were very suspicious of their immersion among them, especially if these areas were considered part of rebel territories. A few suffered the consequences; quite a number were harassed and even arrested. A few even were killed. This is also true for those immersed in Moro communities. Priests, nuns, and laypeople have been kidnapped or subjected to

harassment. A few, including Bishop Ben de Jesus, OMI and Fr. Salvatorre Carzedda, PIME were murdered.

One cannot idealize the Church's presence among the Moro and the Lumads today. There are still holdovers of the conservative pastoral approaches of yore. There are those—and they cut across race, gender, age, and status—who still believe that only a dead Moro is a good Moro, that only Christians will be saved in the end, and evangelization's priority should still be attracting the Moros and the Lumads to embrace Christianity through whatever means. As fundamentalism is a reality among the Muslims, the *Katoliko sirado* syndrome persists in the Church. However, this is no longer a popular view. There is reason to believe that, today, a growing number of Church people would rather do their share in promoting dialogue of faith and life.

All these suggest that Habermas' theory has a place in this dialogue movement. One can infer a number of patterns in all that has happened since the Church in Mindanao seriously took its role in the waging of peace. In the midst of conflicts and violence, church people directly linked to Moro and Lumad communities encouraged all parties to establish harmony among themselves while affirming their need of mutual understanding. In both formal and informal settings, they argued as to how they can best appreciate each other's faith traditions and cultural legacy. All parties sought to be open to one another and agree on what are the common assumptions of the culture of peace. In the process of coordinating their action for peace and justice, they sought to find the norms legitimized by their faith traditions. Since all can be presumed as wanting to do their share to neutralize the fragmentation and highlight their shared commonalities, there are less problems making validity claims.

However, if they confine themselves only within the circles linked to the dialogue movement, their contribution to the recoupling of system and lifeworld might remain limited. There is need for them to challenge the system's continuing colonization of the lifeworld, especially because the present trends show the system's greater rationalization. In terms of the economy, the Ramos government's Medium Term Development Plan (MTPD) gave birth to the Mindanao Development Framework Plan (Daing 1994). One strategy is linking Mindanao to the East Asian Growth Area (EAGA) which has led to an upsurge of foreign investments and major infrastructure projects. On the other hand, the government's bureaucracy got more consolidated by the setting up of the Office of the Presidential Assistant in Mindanao (OPAMIN), the expansion of support government agencies, and the SPCPD.

While both economic and bureaucratic advancements have changed the social landscape of Mindanao (improved infrastructure, increase in employment, higher levels of income among those in a rising middle class, some level of peace and stability), the changes have not translated into a better quality of life for the majority of Mindanaoans. The poorest among the poor,

especially among the Moro and the Lumads, remain marginalized. Not only is their access to resources, power, and social services very limited within the lifeworld, they see that more and more of their cultural and religious traditions are vanishing. Today they just find themselves left with just fragments of their collective identity.

This is where the dialogue movement should help strengthen as well as influence the agenda of the Mindanaoan social movement. Church and other groups that have been engaged in the dialogue of faith and life with the Moro and Lumad communities should link up with NGOs, POs, media and the academe for the purpose of challenging the dominance of the system. This is the essential power of the Mindanaoan civil society, especially in terms of the tri-people perspective, namely, the recognition that three distinct peoples (Moro, Lumad, settlers) whose lives have been shaped by the same unfolding historical realities of Southern Philippines.

Tri-people is a social construct invented by the Left in Mindanao which they consider as "both a scientific and practical term because it is an accurate description of the situation obtaining in Mindanao and recognizes the historicity of the reality" (De La Rosa 1996, 1). The social movement that gave birth to this concept believes that "only by establishing equality among the peoples of Mindanao can respect, mutual understanding, unity, and therefore peace, be truly achieved . . . (and) only in peace can we then talk of progress and development" (*ibid.*, 8).

This social movement that encompasses a variety of NGOs (e.g. Land and Natural Resources Center, AFRIM), network of NGOs (e.g. PANAGTAGBO, CODE-NGO), political movements (e.g. KUSOG MINDANAO), cultural groups (Kaliwat Theatre Collective), church groups (Mindanao Peace Congress, PACT), schools and media outlets have a potential to get their act together and initiate a coordinated communicative action. At present, there are pockets of such coordination. One good example is the Tri-Peace Center for Peace and Development, based in Pagadian City. They have begun bringing the tri-peoples from various parts of Western Mindanao together to coordinate their development efforts. They have also challenged the State and corporate firms interested in making investments in the region, to take seriously the people's demands to participate in the decision-making processes.

One can only hope that this movement will become stronger and that the powers-that-be will have the wisdom to engage them in communicative action so that peace and development in Mindanao will be actualized in the next millenium.

Conclusion

This article attempted to make a simple summary of the major points of Habermas' communicative action theory. The reader, like many of Habermas' critics, might find this theory far too ideal. This becomes even more so, if

situated in a locale like Mindanao, which for centuries has been the site of violent confrontations, conflicts and wars. While there is some semblance of peace and stability at present, there is no guarantee that violence will not erupt in the near future. For many Mindanaoans who are suspicious of the powers-that-be's long-term intentions, the situation remains precarious.

This is precisely why, despite having such idealistic pretensions, Habermas' theory is relevant for Mindanao. In terms of actual practice, the dialogue movement (initiated by the Church interested in engaging the Moro and Lumad communities in a dialogue of faith and life) has undertaken activities that resonate with some of the aspects of the theory.

The greater potential is if and when the broad Mindanaoan social movement (or the civil society composed of NGOs, POs, political movements, the Church's dialogue movement, academic and media institutions, and the like) is able to get its act together to coordinate their various efforts and play a significant part in the peace and development process. Once united in the same vision of what will truly benefit Mindanao's tri-people and their ranks consolidated, they would be empowered to challenge the State and corporate institutions not to play the monopoly game. The social movement can stop the imposition of their will on the majority and be forced to listen to the militant cry of the people.

The process has actually began. As the movement matures and is able to flex its muscles, it just might be able to play a key role in the recoupling of system and lifeworld.

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