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Disrupting Epistemic Injustice:

Gender Equality and Progressive Philippine Catholic Communities

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Introduction

Epistemic injustice refers to an action that inflicts harm by compromising a person's capacity as a knower. For example, if a person's testimony is rendered less credible because of some prejudices that have nothing to do with the reliability of the person, then the person suffers a testimonial injustice. Victims of such injustice are mostly members of groups that have prejudice against them such as women and ethnic or racial minorities. Alternatively, if an individual's experiences are not represented in a social space because of certain prejudices against that person, then that person has suffered an hermeneutical injustice. The inequality that arises from such injustice is due to the absence of hermeneutical resources made available to certain groups of people. Without these resources, marginalised individuals may not understand their feelings and experiences, or be able to communicate their shared or common experiences.

The concept of epistemic injustice was first introduced by Miranda Fricker as a 'potent yet largely silent dimension of discrimination.'^[1] Various groups suffer epistemic injustices—mostly groups that already have existing prejudice against them. Aside from women and members of racial or ethnic minorities, members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex + communities have also been victims of such injustice. LGBTQI+ individuals, for example, have been subject to misgendering or the use of incorrect pronouns, which is a type of hermeneutical injustice; and non-inclusion in demographic categories in data gathering, which is a type of testimonial injustice. While such discrimination is prevalent all over the world, minimal attention has been given to the problematisation of epistemic injustice in relation to members of gender minorities.^[2]

In the Philippines, gender minorities have likewise suffered discrimination through such forms of epistemic injustices. In the country, members of the LGBTQI+ communities have been systematically discriminated against in terms of their credibility and lack of representation in certain social spaces. These injustices result in undercutting the capacity of the members of Filipino gender minorities to understand their own experiences. To a large extent, such injustices are due to the prevailing binary constructions of gender (as only masculine or only feminine) and leanings toward heteronormativity—a view embraced by contemporary Christianities—especially, the Roman Catholic Church beginning from the 1950s to the present.^[3] For many Roman Catholic Christians, the gendered subjectivities of the LGBTQI+ have been frequently denied, dismissed, and over-written. For example, catechism teaches that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.'^[4] In line with this, Fr Jerome Secillano, executive secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) Public Affairs Committee, stated that LGBTQI+ members should 'change for God, the Church and its doctrines.'^[5]

In this paper, we discuss specific epistemic injustices suffered by gender minorities in the Philippines. We also show that societal changes have been evident throughout the years. We review some progressive Philippine Catholic communities' sustainable development efforts toward gender equality or toward the eradication of discrimination, marginalisation, and violence based on a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression (SOGIE). Despite these epistemic injustices, we reveal that there are ways by which gender disorientations may be disrupted by progressive Philippine Catholic groups and communities in the era of contemporary Christianities.

Epistemic injustice and gender

Fricker introduced the concept of 'epistemic injustice' to refer to a wrong done to someone that compromises their capacity as a knower.^[6] This compromise leads to knowers being harmed when their capacity to inform or provide knowledge is suppressed. There are four lenses through which we can look to identify epistemic injustices. First, epistemic injustice occurs because of inequitable relations among knowers and the epistemic diversion of some dominant group. Second, epistemic injustice is something that hinders the progress of epistemic relations and is a form of betrayal. Third, epistemic injustice is a fundamental aspect of epistemic systems. And fourth, epistemic injustice is an exploitation of epistemic labour. Epistemic injustice is a form of

epistemic violence wherein individuals are silenced because they are not recognised as knowers, to the point that they may be coerced to curtail their testimony for the audience's sake.^[7] When access to information is restricted, and facts are distorted, the experiences of silenced individuals are invalidated. As such, individuals or groups of individuals are 'harmed' because of society's lack of access to the information that they could have provided.

When prejudice is based on one's social identity, such as race, gender, or religion, this is referred to as identity prejudice. Identity prejudice is a type of prejudice which falls under the scope of epistemic injustice.^[8] It is a kind of power relation based on and sustained by collective and socially conceived, albeit imagined, identities. These identities are grounded on social categorisations that deliberately preserve power positions in society. Epistemic injustice occurs when identity prejudice leads to the person's deflated credibility, and/or a kind of hermeneutical marginalisation resulting from the inadequacy in the generation of social meanings.

Fricker identifies two kinds of epistemic injustice: testimonial and hermeneutical.^[9] The first kind, testimonial injustice, happens when a speaker's credibility is weakened, because of some prejudice, and so is taken less seriously than they deserve. An example of this is when an individual's statements are not believed on account of their sexual orientation, identity or gender. A concrete example in the Philippines, taken from Human Rights Watch, is when LGBTQ+ students raised concerns about being bullied in their school, teachers merely dismissed them, and even instructed that 'being LGBT is sinful or unnatural.'^[10]

There are three different varieties of testimonial injustice according to Jeremy Wanderer: transactional testimonial injustice, structural testimonial injustice, and testimonial betrayal.^[11] Transactional testimonial injustice happens within self-conscious interpersonal transactions. Structural testimonial injustice is characterised by the unfair distribution of epistemic goods and opportunities. Testimonial betrayal is a form of epistemic injustice experienced as a betrayal of trust. The aforementioned case of the LGBTQI+ students is an example of both structural testimonial injustice and testimonial betrayal. While bullying complaints were received by the school system from non-LGBTQI+ students and were addressed accordingly, LGBTQI+ students' testimonials were simply dismissed and ignored. Furthermore, the teachers who should have protected the complainants blatantly betrayed the complainants' trust.

The second kind of epistemic injustice, hermeneutical injustice, happens when an individual's ability to make sense of their own experience is unfairly weakened because of some type of prejudice. When individuals or groups are unable to comprehend their own suffering due to the lack of relevant critical concepts in their culture, hermeneutical injustice occurs. The interpretive gap is unfairly disadvantageous to individuals since their ability to make sense of their own experience is compromised.^[12] José Medina classifies varieties of hermeneutic injustice according to four criteria: the source of the problem, the dynamics of the problem, the breadth of the problem, and the depth of the problem.^[13] Based on the first criterion, hermeneutic injustice is either semantically produced when concepts are not available or not allowed to be used, or performatively produced when a person is unfairly judged based on their style of communicating or communicative performance. In terms of dynamics, hermeneutic injustice is either institutional when institutional designs are biased towards an hermeneutic community or practice, or interpersonal when it is localised to interpersonal exchanges. In terms of breadth, hermeneutic injustice is either incidental, when the case is isolated and minimal, or systemic, when the injustice is widespread and maximal. Finally, in terms of depth, hermeneutic injustice could cause harm that is either skin-deep with little negative effect to an individual's epistemic life, or marrow-of-the-bone when one's epistemic life is seriously compromised or what Medina calls an 'hermeneutical death.'^[14] when one's voice is *killed*. Going back to the case of the LGBTQI+ students, because of the lack of information and resources, discussion on gender matters and LGBTQI+ issues in high school, or an LGBTQI+-inclusive sexuality education, LGBTQI+ youth suffer bullying and abuse in Philippine culture. For instance, the *Just Let Us Be: Discrimination Against LGBT Students in the Philippines* reports the range of abuses and widespread bullying and harassment against LGBTQI+ students in the secondary level due to the absence of a national law to protect LGBTQI+ communities in the Philippines.^[15]

Considering the prevalence of ignorance on LGBTQI+ issues in the country, such hermeneutical injustice in this case, is semantically produced, institutional, systemic, and marrow-of-the-bone. In other countries, several studies have identified and explained instances of epistemic injustices in LGBTQI+ cases. Anna Boncompagni claims that hermeneutical injustice in the LGBTQI+ community is not only caused by the gap in the collective hermeneutical resource, but also because of the existence of multiple and conflicting hermeneutical resources relative to their experience and practices, and the complex way by which these resources interact.^[16] Karen Cuthbert likewise points out that while there are hermeneutical sources on asexuality for example, in many ways they remain *unintelligible*.^[17] Adam Greteman, Karen Morris and Nic Weststrate recognise that epistemic injustice specific to the LGBTQI+ community is often reproduced due to the lack of knowledge and cultural transmission between and within generations.^[18] And yet, epistemic injustice experienced by bisexuals is linked by Gio Iacono to various forms of microaggressions that lead to oppressive discourses.^[19] Some of the insights above show that LGBTQI+ cases of epistemic injustice are not only institutional but systemic as well, and a genuine understanding of the extent of such epistemic harm requires an examination of the varied forms of gender marginalisation endemic in society.

Religion and gender equality policies in the Philippines

Gender equality is a fundamental human right. Gender minorities, however, suffer epistemic oppression that can be traced to both testimonial and hermeneutical injustices in the country. Philippine laws and social norms are still discriminatory and hinder adequate representation of gender minorities in various spheres of the country's social institutions. This environment of exclusion lends itself to human rights abuses and discrimination that continue to affect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexuals and gender-diverse persons.[20]

In a 2019 survey by the US-based Pew Research Center, entitled 'The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists,' it was revealed that 73 percent of Filipinos (who are primarily Catholic) declared that 'homosexuality should be accepted by society.' [21] Interestingly, while the survey found a strong relationship between people who affiliate with a religious group with less accepting attitudes toward LGBTQI+, Filipinos tend to be more tolerant of gender diversity than their religiosity would suggest. [22] The Philippines consistently ranked as one of the most LGBTQI+-friendly countries in the world in these Pew surveys. On the contrary, however, another Pew survey on 'Global Views on Morality' finds that 65 percent of Filipinos believe that homosexuality is 'morally unacceptable.' [23] In the absence of a national law to protect LGBTQI+ people in the Philippines, more than 30 anti-discrimination ordinances have been passed to protect gender minority groups from abuse in their own local communities. [24] Nevertheless, LGBTQI+ activists in the Philippines insist that a national law is still necessary. While little data is available on hate crimes in the Philippines, the Transgender Europe's Trans Murder Monitoring project suggests that the absence of anti-discrimination laws can be deadly. [25] At least 77 murders of trans and gender-diverse people took place in the Philippines from 2008 to September 2021. [26] In light of this obvious discrimination and violence, legal protections are clearly necessary. With arguments opposing the protection of LGBTQI+ rights made on religious grounds, espousing biblical teachings that being LGBTQI+ is sinful or immoral, Filipinos' religiosity translates to the unacceptance of sexual minorities and gender diverse people.

The Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression (SOGIE) Equality Bill, formerly the Anti-Discrimination Bill, is a bill that seeks to address the acceptance of the LGBTQI+ communities. It has, however, continuously faced challenges in the legislative branch of government for almost two decades now. This ambivalence is indicative of the systemic injustice faced by the LGBTQI+ community. The bill which aims to end gender-based discrimination by penalising discrimination based on SOGIE was first drafted in Congress in 2000. Although the bill finally passed the House of Representatives with unanimous support from 198 lawmakers without abstentions or dissent and reached the Senate plenary in 2016, it languished in the Senate for three years making it the longest-running bill under the Senate interpellation period in Philippine history. In 2020, the bill was refiled after it was turned down in previous Senate sessions, and deliberations are ongoing at the committee level. According to Metro Manila Pride, an organisation advocating for the empowerment of the LGBTQI+ community, the prolonged process 'speaks to the lack of urgency granted to crimes that target Filipino gender minorities.' [27]

During legislative deliberations, LGBTQI+ individuals have even been unfairly judged because of their alleged lifestyles and have been isolated due to their supposed minority experiences. This is due in part to the lack of critical information and discernment by Philippine society in general. For example, the SOGIE Equality bill was even linked to paedophilia and necrophilia during the Senate public hearings. [28] Lyndon Caña, a lawyer from the Coalition of Concerned Families of the Philippines, condemned the SOGIE Equality bill and stated that the bill does not provide any benefits to the 'straight community.' [29] House Deputy Speaker Eddie Villanueva, founder of the Jesus Is Lord Church, also implied that the LGBTQI+ community should undergo 'emotional, psychosocial, and spiritual rehabilitation.' [30] For a time, the CBCP insisted that the anti-discrimination bill be 'cleansed of provisions on gay rights' because it may lead to same-sex marriage. [31] These pronouncements reflect a type of hermeneutical injustice, wherein lawyers and lawmakers themselves lack the relevant critical socio-cultural concepts in assessing the bill, and understanding the experiences of individuals who are discriminated against on the basis of their SOGIE.

The lack of critical thinking here can be traced to the influence of religious, dogmatic beliefs. In particular, the prevailing belief that binary constructions of gender are only masculine and feminine. Furthermore, the supposed 'immorality' and non-recognition of non-heteronormativity tends to exclude those who do not conform to conservative gender constructs from policies that may protect their rights. The Catholic Church tends to historically exercise its powerful influence against Philippine legislative bills considered as anti-life or anti-family, or labelled as death bills (which include divorce, euthanasia, abortion, total contraception and homosexual relations). [32] The intersection of these gender constructs with cultural ideals is evident in Philippine society's popular consciousness, particularly through power relations embedded in gender assignments in the basic unit, the family. [33] Conservative Filipino culture adheres to more 'rigid, sexist, or restrictive gender stereotypes.' [34] Accepting non-traditional (or egalitarian) and diverse gender orientations would then go against 'traditional cultural values and beliefs.' Therefore, according to Danielle Ochoa et al., same-sex marriage is often framed in the predominantly Catholic Philippines as a moral issue (rather than a rights issue) which goes against God and the supposed natural order. [35]

The Philippines is 'an embodiment of both conflict and harmony between doctrinaire teachings on identity and modernity' in Catholicism's worldwide effort to 'reconcile its difficult relationship with sexual orientation and gender expression.' [36] Despite the shift in attitudes toward sexual minorities in Catholic religious institutions, and the CBCP's efforts to condemn violence and discrimination against LGBTQI+ people, the Catholic Church and other religious groups in the Philippines have remained unsupportive and critical of anti-discrimination laws and policies that would protect the rights of LGBTQI+ people. [37]

Religious views pose a major hurdle to the Ang Ladlad LGBT Party, a sectoral party representing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Filipinos. The party has been applying for party-list accreditation with the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) since 2006, but it has been denied on the grounds of a lack of substantial membership base. Applying again in 2009, they were again denied by the COMELEC, this time on the grounds that it 'tolerates immorality, which offends religious beliefs.' The Philippines Supreme Court (SC) overturned the resolution of COMELEC, and stated that 'moral disapproval, without more, is not a sufficient interest to justify exclusion of homosexuals from participation in the party-list system.'^[38] Furthermore, 'the denial of Ang Ladlad's registration on purely moral grounds amounts more to a statement of dislike and disapproval of homosexuals, rather than a tool to further any substantial public interest.'^[39] As another instance of hermeneutical injustice to the LGBTQI+ community, the CBCP made a stand against the SC's decision, and claimed that Ang Ladlad's accreditation will inevitably lead to the legalisation of same-sex marriage and the destruction of family values.^[40] Despite this, Ang Ladlad became the first LGBTQI+ political party that attempted to represent the LGBTQI+ community in the House of Representatives. However, it failed to gain sufficient votes to claim a seat in congress in both the 2010 and 2013 elections.^[41] Ang Ladlad has again applied for accreditation to participate in the 2022 election, but was nonetheless rejected with finality due to procedural grounds or a defective application.^[42] The inclusion of marginalised groups in national legislatures is associated with the adoption of policies that benefit that group.^[43] Ang Ladlad's bid to win congressional seats is thus critical in the process of passing a national legislation that protects people from discrimination based on SOGIE. With the lack of a national policy that protects members of the LGBTQI+ community from SOGIE-based discrimination, and that recognises LGBTQI+ rights as human rights, results to continued discrimination and violations of human rights.^[44]

Aside from discrimination of LGBTQI+ individuals, gender minority couples also suffer marginalisation. LGBTQI+ individuals face stigma and discrimination that make them especially susceptible to socio-cultural, political and legal disadvantages. At the same time, the LGBTQI+ are likewise treated in a negatively different way because of their SOGIE, which thereby relegates them to the fringes of society. Although sexual orientation is mentioned in various Philippine laws and same sex-relationships are not criminalised, same-sex couples remain unrecognised legally. In many instances, same-sex couples in the Philippines are not legally protected from abusive and prejudicial actions. In areas from housing, to employment, to parenting, and public accommodations, LGBTQI+ couples are especially neglected when it comes to health-specific responses.^[45] This may be in part due to the Philippine Catholic Church's declaration that same-sex relationships or unions are sinful.

The Roman Catholic Church has an ambivalent relationship with its LGBTQI+ members, who mostly remain loyal even when they feel alienated, rejected, judged, or forced to reconstruct their sexual morality.^[46] The issue of same-sex union only adds to the ambivalence of this already complex relationship between the Church and the LGBTQI+ community. While Pope Francis seemingly indicates support for same-sex relationships, saying that 'they are children of God and have a right to a family,'^[47] some Philippine bishops are quick to point out that the Pope may have been misunderstood. The Pope may be supportive of same-sex civil unions, but he is still against same-sex marriage.^[48] The prelates affirm the Church's teachings that marriage is the union of man and woman and cite this as the reason why same-sex marriage is not permitted and priests are forbidden to bless such unions.^[49]

Gender equality has been frequently presented as a direct threat to religious values and institutions. LGBTQI+ issues are frequently weaponised by conservative political and religious groups as a direct threat to national cohesion, culture and tradition.^[50] Ultraconservative religious groups have prevented the development and implementation of LGBTQI+ inclusive laws and policies.^[51] Some religious groups justify discrimination against LGBTQI+ people based on their religious beliefs. The Catholic school, Assumption Iloilo, for example, has drawn criticism for adopting a definition of immorality that includes homosexuality alongside fornication, pornography, rape, premarital sex and sexual abuse, among other acts or behaviours in its employment contracts and student enrolment forms.^[52] In a statement, the school defended its stance maintaining that it is in compliance with the Catechism of the Church, which also promotes acceptance of the 'homosexual condition' or a person's sexual orientation.^[53] The definition, the school authorities explained 'does not sanction the condition or orientation of a person' and 'sanctions "acts" consisting [of] sexual misconduct from the viewpoint of a Catholic institution regardless of the "condition" or "orientation" of a person.' This means that the person's sexual orientation should not be discriminated against but the possible non-heteronormative acts that the person performs (in connection with their sexual orientation) must be held in check. The college supposedly had the right 'to adopt a definition of what constitutes immorality in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church.'^[54] Commission on Human Rights (CHR) spokesperson Jacqueline de Guia, however, reminded the college of Iloilo City of Resolution 2016-572 or the Anti-Discrimination Ordinance, 'which defines refusal and failing to accept as a student and subjecting a person to terms on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity as acts of discrimination and thus, within the ambit of the said ordinance.'^[55]

Some Philippine Catholic communities' restrictive attitudes toward homosexuality and blatant campaigns against LGBTQI+ persons contribute to the dangerous climate of hostility experienced by Filipino LGBTQI+ individuals.^[56] Jayeel Cornelio and Robbin Dagle have argued that the Catholic bloc in the country has weaponised religious freedom to defend their supposedly 'moral sensibilities' which has in turn resulted in the active blocking of various bills pushing for LGBTQ rights.^[57] While not all stigmatisation of people based on their SOGIE stem from religious prejudices, these sensibilities continue to provide justifications for anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination.^[58] The preponderance of negative and ill-informed understanding of SOGIE in Philippine society

adds to the difficulties of LGBTQI+ individuals in articulating their SOGIE. Zyra Evangelista, Darren Dumaop and Grant Nelso have argued that it is possible that the sense of oppressive homonegative messages that sexual minority Christians receive from their environment lead to various unhealthy outcomes, such as internalised homophobia.^[59]

There is a pressing need to enact non-prejudicial protections in the Philippines to counter negative religious beliefs about homosexuality, which continue to form the basis of society's negative attitudes and beliefs toward LGBTQI+ individuals. Ian James Kidd suggests that contact points between epistemic injustice and religion are motivated by the link between one's religious identity and epistemic sensibilities.^[60] Kidd identifies three ways in which religious sexism leads to epistemic injustice. First, by silencing the experience, thoughts, and reflections of other genders.^[61] Second, by denying their role in the formation of theological meaning.^[62] And third, by depriving other genders of epistemic authority. The prevailing gender constructions and the non-recognition of non-heteronormativity play a huge role in prejudice against one's epistemic sensibilities about LGBTQI+ individuals.

Disrupting injustices

Despite these epistemic injustices, gender disorientations may, in fact, be disrupted in the era of contemporary Christianities. There are various ways to disrupt epistemic injustice. The usual approaches are to either develop cognitive tools that enable the identification of epistemic injustice or suggest forms of interventions that empower marginalised groups. Nadya Vasilyeva and Saray Ayala-López propose that we recognise and understand how individuals think about structures.^[63] As a cognitive tool, structural thinking can help identify patterns and gaps that create and sustain discriminatory epistemic practices. Karen Newbigging and Julie Ridley claim that advocacy is an effective way of addressing epistemic injustice because it enables marginalised voices to be heard. Furthermore, advocacy enables marginalised people to access conceptual resources.^[64] Justo Serrano Zamora, on the contrary, argues that overcoming epistemic injustice in collective mobilisation requires transformations that result in collective learning facilitated by the openness to inquiries and experimentation.^[65] The #MeToo movement, a social movement against sexual harassment and rape culture that promotes solidarity among victims as they share their stories and name their perpetrators, demonstrates how progressive movements effectively address epistemic injustice. Debra Jackson argues that #MeToo disrupts epistemic injustice by establishing the agency of the victims through empathy. #MeToo also created concepts that help victims understand their experience of abuse and harassment.^[66] The movement helps in the struggle for recognition through an emphatic audience and conceptual resources. In Thailand, disrupting injustice was done by community-led organisations through digital HIV prevention and legal rights education of gay men, men that have sex with men (MSM) and transgenders. Such initiatives accordingly disrupt 'the denial of access to justice for populations disproportionately at risk of HIV.'^[67]

Philippine Catholic communities have likewise developed some specific sustainable development efforts toward the goal of gender equality. We look at certain indicators in domains such as health, human development, leadership, psychological, security and justice, and sociocultural factors to argue for such a claim.^[68] For the health domain, we look at how current Catholic communities promote gender-specific health needs. The HIV epidemic, for example, is a prevalent health issue in the country. Cases have been soaring among gay and bisexual youth, which is in part due to the limited access to contraceptives and the inadequacy of sexual health education.^[69] One of the reasons for this is the Catholic Church's strong opposition to sex education,^[70] and the CBCP's condemnation of the use of condoms (outside marriage) because it supposedly promotes promiscuity.^[71] In criticism of this view, Catholic monk Paul Bongcaras urges people to help out instead, and he does this through health information dissemination, handing out condoms to sex workers and people in slum areas, and providing shelter to those disowned by their families.^[72] Bongcaras's acknowledgement of specific contraceptive needs makes visible sexual health information and services that are usually barred by Catholic communities' social stigma on sexual health education. The same reproductive health rights have also been fought for by the Catholics for Reproductive Health (C4RH), 'a group of discerning Catholics bonded together to encourage fellow Catholics to speak out in support of reproductive health.'^[73] The group insists that there is 'no dissonance with their being Catholic and simultaneously believing in the advocacy and goals of reproductive health and rights.'^[74] After all, sexual and reproductive health are crucial to the total healthcare of LGBTQI+ individuals.^[75]

In the human development domain, we look at how some Catholic communities promote the understanding of equality in society, and empowerment among the LGBTQI+ individuals and communities. Bukal ng Tipan, a pastoral centre serving the dioceses of the Philippines, and other parts of Asia and Europe, promotes LGBTQI+ inclusion in their programs on participatory church courses, pastoral organisation development courses, leadership formation programs, and youth programs. Likewise, the group Rainbow Catholics Philippines promotes gender equality, and fights for the Catholic LGBTQ+ people who were 'shunned by the oppressive teachings of the Church.'^[76] The protests of Rainbow Catholics have led to other religious groups apologising for previous prejudices against gender minorities. Both the Bukal ng Tipan and Rainbow Catholics Philippines are part of the Catholic communities that contribute to crisis responses, strengthen social cohesion, and prevent conflict in and out of gender minority communities.

Regarding leadership, however, there are very few LGBTQI+ representatives in national and local governments. Representative

Geraldine Roman, the first transgender politician in the country, is an inspiration for gender minorities to be accepted by society. In one of her interviews, Roman talks about how the Catholic Church is a source of her consolation, and how her Catholic faith is not in conflict with the LGBTQI+ advocacies.[77] While a study by Fides del Castillo, et al. confirms that LGBTQI+ individuals do not have personal tensions with religious institutions per se, and there are minimal correlations between religiosity and one's sexual orientation or gender identity,[78] Roman likewise shares that the Jesuit community has accepted her SOGIE, and how such a Catholic community has contributed to her lived experiences which became a pillar for her type of governance and attitudes towards leadership.[79]

For the psychological domain, we look at how Catholic communities build psychological well-being, self-esteem, self-worth, and the sense of belonging of gender minorities. The leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis himself, has encouraged the Catholic community to be more inclusive, merciful, less judgmental and welcoming to all, including gay people. Pope Francis referred to LGBTQI+ people as 'children of God,' and made mention of how 'a civil union law needs to be created so gays are legally covered.'[80] His support to the community is further shown by his encouragement to parents to 'accompany their [LGBTQ+] children, and not hide behind an attitude of condemnation,' because 'gays have a right to be accepted by their families as children and siblings.'[81] Although the Catholic Church cannot solemnise or bless same-sex marriages (like the Open Table Metropolitan Community Church in the Philippines,[82] and many other Christian denominations throughout the world) the Pope supports civil union laws which may help LGBTQ+ couples secure joint legal rights.[83] Pope Francis's pronouncements, while met with controversy in the country, especially due to the reaction of the CBCP, has created a type of credence to previously banished LGBTQI+ groups, and has blurred the dichotomy between 'those who belong and those who do not, between insiders and outsiders, own and other.'[84] This has led to more positive and worthy self-images of LGBTQ+ individuals.[85]

In response to the call of the Department of Education for gender responsiveness, some Catholic schools have made gender and development, and sensitivity workshops mandatory for teachers and students. Student leaders from Catholic schools have even outrightly supported the passage of the SOGIE Equality bill.[86] In a statement from the Catholic School Student Councils, Catholic student leaders declare that 'Catholic compassion is for equality':

Raised on the Christian values of compassion, love, and acceptance, as Filipino youth, as student leaders in our Catholic institutions, we reach out to the various groups who stand in opposition, to recall the teachings of the Church, and see that the LGBTQ+ community is no different from oneself. We strongly urge the Senate and the House of Representatives to champion the cause of equality, not just for us, but for future generations.[87]

Surprisingly, Elena Avramovska claims that the Catholic Church unintentionally produced proponents of gender equality in the country. Gender equality advancements flourished during the democratic transitions, and during the Martial Law period in the country, 'Church-based organisations were the only safe spaces for the consolidation of gender equality strategies ... [and] strong gender activists [were] created from nuns and church based community organisers.[88] A staunch critic of religious groups who block the SOGIE Equality Bill, Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB., argues that religion should not be used to justify discrimination, and that everyone deserves respect irrespective of their SOGIE.[89] Going back to the CBCP, although they are not in full agreement with the Pope on the issue of same-sex unions, the CBCP is actually supportive of the SOGIE Equality bill. CBCP President and Caloocan Bishop Pablo Virgilio David fully endorses the bill and states that it is vital for members of the LGBTQI+ community to be recognised.[90]

For the socio-cultural domain, we look at how Catholic communities encourage and promote autonomy among gender minorities, gender equitable attitudes, and LGBTQI+ acceptance and awareness. In a study conducted by Sabine Chiongbian et al., queer young adults have learned to accept their sexual orientations and gender identities through their Catholic youth ministry.[91] Their church youth groups have received them willingly as members, which in turn, fostered the courage to come out of the closet. Such engagement with other Catholics, with the support of priests, have developed more positive attitudes within themselves and the community. To give back to the community, these young adults have also extended the same type of help to other people outside their circles.

Among Roman Catholic Church clergy, however, giving LGBTQI+ individuals their rightful social space is necessary. As a testimony, gay priest Fr. RJ affirms the existence of gay clergy in the country. He claims that 'homosexuality it is not an issue anymore within the Catholic clergy.'[92] During the annual Manila LGBT pride parade in 2016, Fr. RJ (a pseudonym) declared that his sexual orientation has never hindered his mission as a Catholic priest. To which Claretian priest Eduardo Apungan, vice chair of the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines, and Manila Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo responded that there should be no problem in the case of priests who are in a situation like RJ's, as long as they remain faithful to their vow of chastity or celibacy.[93]

Samuel Piamonte, M. Quintos and Minami Iwayama's study of the experiences of gay *santeros* and caretakers of religious images or *camareros* yielded insights on the religion-gender dynamics in the Philippines where the engagement of gay members (who are out of the closet) of the Filipino community in religious practice could possibly increase the acceptance of gender minorities in a religious and hetero-masculine society.[94] A study on the history of *pagsasanto* in the Philippines by Peter Romerosa and John Francis Antonio affirms the changing and expanding roles of gender minorities in religions, through the growing participation of gay *camareros* in the practice of *pagsasanto*, which has redefined a religious tradition exclusively performed by old-rich women

(*camareras*) and prominent political families.^[95]

The equality and non-discrimination guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and human rights treaties, which apply to all people regardless of SOGIE already protect LGBTQI+ people from violence and discrimination.^[96] To ensure that gender minorities in the Philippines are being protected from discrimination based on their SOGIE, and that they have a fair chance at justice, Philippine policy makers, along with religious communities and organisations, must continue to safeguard the rights of gender minorities. This includes obligations to protect individuals from homophobic and transphobic violence, prevent torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, repeal laws criminalising same sex relations and transgender people, prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and safeguard freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly for LGBTQI+ people.^[97] Unfortunately, such protections are limited if a culture is not critically adept with the concepts that surround SOGIE, and if gender minorities are continuously being deprived by some Catholic communities in sharing their unique experiences and voices.^[98] The tides are changing, however, and some progressive Catholic communities have sought to challenge hermeneutic and testimonial injustices imposed on the LGBTQI+ individuals.

Conclusion

The specific epistemic injustices suffered by gender minorities are first and foremost semantically produced, where knowledge and concepts are unavailable to society particularly through the lack of anti-discrimination laws, rampancy of identity prejudice, and lack of proper sex and gender education in the country as hindered by some Catholic communities (most of the time, the ultra-conservative groups, and sometimes the CBCP). Furthermore, we suggest that they are institutional and systemic. When members of the LGBTQI+ community are blatantly discriminated against, and marginalised in the country, their epistemic life is seriously compromised.

While epistemic injustices continue to haunt LGBTQI+ individuals in the Philippines, due in part to the pending approval of the SOGIE Equality bill, and the blatant lack of critical knowledge of certain Catholic communities about SOGIE, some Catholic communities bring to fore the experiences, thoughts and reflections of 'other genders.' Progressive Catholic individuals, and community groups, have highlighted not only the unique experiences of LGBTQI+ individuals in various domains but their role in the formation of theological meaning. Gender disorientations may be disrupted only if we hear and listen to the voices that must be heard. After all, Pope Francis leads the acknowledgement of the specific role of LGBTQI+ individuals in Catholic communities as *Children of God*.

Notes

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