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Decency and Dignity: Exploring Margalit's Concept of Humiliation in the Filipino Context

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Abstract

While emphasizing the connection between dignity and self-respect, Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit contends that a decent society is one where institutions do not humiliate individuals. The Filipino translation of humiliation as *paghiyâ* introduces nuances, as its root word *hiya* also encompasses shame and embarrassment. In distinguishing between shame, embarrassment, and humiliation in Filipino society, this article argues that the closest translation aligning with Margalit's concept is *yurak*. However, it also contends that applying the concept of *pagkayurak ng pagkatao* (desecration of one's dignity) to Filipino social institutions presents challenges due to cultural values emphasizing respect, equality, and fairness.

Keywords: *humiliation, hiya, yurak, decency, Margalit*

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The exploration of justice and decency has captivated the minds of scholars and philosophers throughout history. One such thinker in contemporary times is the Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit.¹ In his notable work *The Decent Society*, Margalit poses the question “What is a decent society?” to which he provides a prompt categorical answer, “a decent society is one whose institutions do not humiliate people.”² This claim underscores the significance of the concept of humiliation in discussions surrounding decency within the socio-political context. Margalit proceeds to define humiliation as “any sort of behavior or condition that constitutes a sound reason for a person to consider his or her self-respect injured.”³

Adopting the concept of humiliation as defined by Margalit offers a profound lens through which we can understand and

¹ Avishai Margalit distinguishes himself in contemporary philosophy through his profound engagement with the concept of a “decent” society. While many scholars concentrate on defining a just society—one that adheres to principles of fairness, equality, and legal rights—Margalit emphasizes the importance of decency in societal institutions and interactions. This distinction is crucial because, although every decent society is inherently just, it can be argued that not every just society meets the criterion of decency. In Margalit’s view, a society can uphold justice in a formal sense—ensuring legal rights, equality before the law, and procedural fairness—yet still perpetuate practices and norms that degrade individuals’ dignity and self-respect. For example, a society might ensure equal legal rights to all its citizens but still maintain cultural practices that stigmatize and marginalize certain groups, thereby causing humiliation. Margalit’s focus on decency then brings attention to the everyday lived experiences of individuals and the subtle ways in which their dignity can be eroded, even in a system that is formally just. By prioritizing decency, Margalit offers a profound and practical approach to the discourse of how a society values and upholds human dignity. This perspective encourages one to look beyond mere legal compliance and fairness in order to consider how social institutions and interactions affect individuals’ sense of self-worth and respect.

² Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1.

³ Margalit, 9.

evaluate the health of societal institutions. This perspective shifts the focus from that of merely ensuring legal justice to that of ensuring a society that preserves the self-respect and dignity of individuals. For Margalit, humiliation does not simply entail causing someone to feel shame or embarrassment. Rather, it involves a deep and systemic violation of one's inherent worth and dignity. By adopting Margalit's framework, we can critically assess our own societal institutions—not just on their efficiency or fairness, but also on their ability to maintain and uphold human dignity. This perspective is particularly valuable in Filipino society. Following Margalit's framework, it can be argued that societal structures, practices, and norms in the Philippines deeply influence an individual's sense of self-worth and respect.

However, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the concept of humiliation, it is important to situate this concept within specific local contexts, such as the dynamics of Filipino society. This approach is essential for grasping how the term “humiliation” is translated and interpreted in the Filipino cultural and societal context, enabling a more nuanced comprehension of the concept within this particular setting. Given this approach, the pursuit of a translation for the term “humiliation” in Filipino yields the word *hiya*. Hence, the state of being humiliated can be expressed as *napahiya*. The statement “I was humiliated” can then arguably be translated as “Napahiya ako.”⁴ However, “hiya” in Filipino does not simply refer to “humiliation” but also to shame and embarrassment. In fact, translating “hiya” from Filipino to English appears to align “hiya” more accurately with “shame” or “embarrassment” rather than “humiliation.” For instance, “Napahiya ako kanina” translates to “I

⁴ I state here “arguably” because as this article points out, “Napahiya ako” appears to be more aptly translated as “I was embarrassed” rather than “I was humiliated.”

was embarrassed earlier.” “Nakakahiya naman,” translates to “It’s embarrassing indeed.” “Nahihya ako” translates to “I am ashamed.”

This article first presents Margalit’s concept of decency, which is linked to humiliation. Second, it seeks to distinguish between shame, embarrassment, and humiliation in the context of Filipino culture and society.⁵ I argue that shame is an internal experience that arises when individuals feel they have violated social or moral standards. Likewise, embarrassment is an external occurrence but is temporary and does not necessarily result in disrespect. Conversely, humiliation is an external occurrence, which is manifested in

⁵ The category for humiliation, as discussed by Margalit, holds significant value because it encapsulates more than just momentary shame or embarrassment; it denotes a profound violation of one’s self-respect and dignity. In Filipino society, where the concept of *hiya* (“shame”) is pervasive, it is essential to distinguish between different forms of social and personal distress. By recognizing humiliation as a separate and severe category, we can better address and mitigate the conditions that lead to such profound personal injury. For instance, practices or policies that may seem benign or merely inconvenient on the surface might, in fact, be deeply humiliating to those affected. This distinction is crucial because it highlights the deeper, often systemic issues that cause lasting harm to individuals’ dignity. Identifying humiliation as a distinct category also enriches the discourse on what constitutes a decent society. It prompts a critical examination of whether humiliation is prevalent in the Philippines, and if so, how it manifests within societal structures and cultural practices. This analysis can lead to more informed discussions on how to transform societal institutions to prevent such degradation. Conversely, if humiliation is found to be less significant in the Filipino context, this exploration can guide us to focus on other factors that contribute to a decent society. By delving into the concept of humiliation, we can cultivate a more precise and culturally sensitive understanding of dignity and decency. This approach not only aids in identifying and addressing the specific challenges faced by Filipino society but also broadens the scope of what it means to create and sustain a decent society—where every individual’s dignity is upheld. Given this, adopting Margalit’s framework not only helps in identifying and mitigating humiliation but also in shaping a broader, more inclusive discourse of a decent society that resonates with the Filipino experience.

individuals who are made to perceive themselves as lesser in status or worth than others.

Third and consequently, I argue that, given Margalit's discussion of humiliation in relation to self-respect, the closest translation of humiliation in the Filipino language appears to be *yurak*, which in English reads, "to trample upon."⁶ Hence, the expression "I was humiliated" could then be translated as "Niyurakan niya ako/ang pagkatao ko" ("He or she trampled upon my dignity"). Ultimately, in this article, I claim that humiliation appears to not align with the intricacies of Filipino society. I posit that it may be more of a Western concept as it appears to be more individual-centric, focusing on self-respect and dignity.

Margalit's Concept of Decency

Margalit's notion of a decent society is straightforward: a "decent society is a nonhumiliating one."⁷ This notion implies then that the essence of decency is closely tied to that of humiliation, which Margalit regards as an "injury to a person's self-respect."⁸ While Margalit associates accounts of humiliation with offenses against a person's autonomy (for anarchists) or autarchy (for stoics), he emphasizes that self-respect is more closely linked to dignity and honor rather than simply autonomy, autarchy, and self-esteem.

Additionally, Margalit makes a clear distinction between dignity, honor, and self-respect, on the one hand, and social honor on the other. Social honor, according to Margalit, is more aligned with self-esteem than with self-respect. On the contrary, honor, in Margalit's

⁶ José Villa Panganiban, *Diksiyunaryo-Tesouro Pilipino-Ingles* (Manila: Manlapaz Publishing Co., 1969).

⁷ Margalit, *Decent Society*, 41.

⁸ Margalit, 11.

description, is bestowed upon individuals simply because they are human beings. Hence, a decent society is that which contains institutions that “accord all people their due honor.”⁹ This concept of honor is regarded as the manifestation of dignity and the feeling of respect that persons “feel towards themselves as human beings.”¹⁰ It is the “attitude persons have to the fact of their being human.”¹¹ Consequently, Margalit views dignity as the “behavioral expression of one’s self-respect.”¹² By “expression” here, Margalit refers to representation rather than mere presentation.¹³ It is for this reason that “wounding”¹⁴ a person’s dignity would be considered an experience that is humiliating. As dignity and self-respect are linked both to honor and to one another, according to Margalit, dignity can be tested positively and self-respect, negatively. For instance, a person’s dignity demonstrates self-respect through “positive acts which are not responses to provocations.”¹⁵ Meanwhile, self-respect is that which is “typically revealed when a person’s honor is violated,” and such honor would be violated if the person is humiliated.¹⁶

Margalit stresses that humiliation is an injury to “one’s sense of intrinsic value.”¹⁷ It is the “rejection of human beings as humans,

⁹ Margalit, *Decent Society*, 41.

¹⁰ Margalit, 51.

¹¹ Margalit, 51.

¹² Margalit, 53.

¹³ In Margalit’s discussion, dignity as the expression *qua* representation of self-respect means that the expression is imbued with meaning that reflects the true nature and value of dignity, rather than being merely shown or displayed. Representation in this context implies that institutions and individuals actively acknowledge and uphold the intrinsic worth of every person. In contrast, expression *qua* presentation tends to be more superficial. It involves showing or expressing respect in a way that focuses on appearances or formalities rather than genuine acknowledgement of a person’s worth.

¹⁴ Margalit, 53.

¹⁵ Margalit, 51.

¹⁶ Margalit, 51.

¹⁷ Margalit, 120.

that is, treating people as if they were not human beings but merely things, tools, animals, sub-humans, or inferior humans.”¹⁸ In a humiliating situation, a person experiences an “existential threat” and feels defenseless because the humiliator makes the person feel a “sense of utter helplessness.”¹⁹ Humiliators feed on individuals’ fear of impotence in protecting their own vital interests.

Furthermore, Margalit asserts that the kind of humiliation that he refers to is its normative sense involving an individual who has been “provided with a sound reason for feeling humiliated” but actually does not feel that way.²⁰ Margalit stresses that his account of humiliation emphasizes the reasons for feeling humiliated, namely the living conditions of individuals. According to Margalit, conditions of life become humiliating “only if they are the result of actions or omissions by human beings.”²¹ He further claims that only human beings can “produce humiliation,” which means that “there can be no humiliation without human beings to bring it about” or, in short, without any humiliators.²² Likewise, Margalit also argues that humiliation can occur whether or not there is a humiliating intent behind it.

A decent society, then, is one that fights “conditions which constitute a justification for its dependents to consider themselves humiliated.”²³ Likewise, Margalit states that a society is decent “if its institutions do not act in ways that give the people under their authority sound reasons to consider themselves humiliated.”²⁴ By institutions here, Margalit refers to governing and social institutions.

¹⁸ Margalit, *Decent Society*, 122.

¹⁹ Margalit, 122.

²⁰ Margalit, 9.

²¹ Margalit, 10.

²² Margalit, 10.

²³ Margalit, 10.

²⁴ Margalit, 10.

Margalit cites bureaucracy as an example of a humiliating social institution whereby, when transactions are being done, people are labeled with numbers. Bureaucracy can be perceived to be humiliating as bureaucrats treat “people in a humiliating way, akin to treating them as numbers.”²⁵ Another example of a humiliating social institution is welfare. According to Margalit, welfare not only fails to avert humiliation—it actively induces it. It fosters dependence among individuals who lack self-respect and who are “willing to sell their birthright of personal autonomy and pride for a bowl of lentils from the public kitchen.”²⁶

From the foregoing discussion, it is clearer how a society, for it to be decent, must resist conditions that subject its members to humiliation, the very concept to which we now turn our attention.

Translation Challenges: *Hiya* and “Humiliation”

As mentioned earlier, the concept of humiliation, for it to be fully understood, must be contextualized in the Filipino setting by translating the term “humiliation” into Filipino. Such translation is vital in order to foster effective communication and promote cultural understanding among peoples using different languages. According to Jie Zhang, language is intricately tied to its respective culture of origin and serves as a conduit for communication across diverse cultural landscapes.²⁷ Without taking into account the nuances and cultural context embedded within a language, misunderstandings and misinterpretations are inevitable.

Furthermore, Morena Bracaj emphasizes the significance of cultural elements in shaping how individuals perceive and interpret

²⁵ Margalit, *Decent Society*, 221.

²⁶ Margalit, 224.

²⁷ Jie Zhang, “Language Mirrors Culture with Speech Styles,” *Sino-US English Teaching* 12, no. 6 (2015): 464–470.

written or spoken texts.²⁸ This process entails the translating of terms in order to facilitate a deeper comprehension and appreciation of the cultural backdrop in which a language operates. Thus, in order to truly grasp the concept of “humiliation,” it becomes imperative to translate it into Filipino. By doing so, we delve into the Filipino cultural framework, thereby allowing us to gain a deeper understanding of the emotional, social, and psychological dimensions associated with the concept. By translating the term, we are able to discover meanings and insights that would otherwise remain obscured.

Google translates humiliation simply as “kahihyan,” which is defined by the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF) as “isang aktong nagdudulot ng matinding pagkapahiya; pagiging kahiya-hiya,” or “an act that brings about profound humiliation; that of being shameful.”²⁹ An example of a sentence given by KWF is “Malaking kahihiyán pára sa kanilang pamilya ang pagkakasangkot niya sa krimen,”³⁰ which can be translated in English as “His involvement in the crime is a great humiliation for their family.” Embedded both in the word and in its definition is the term “hiya,” which is the root word of “kahihyan.” Hence, humiliation is closely linked to “hiya” and, when translated back to English by Google, leads to the word “shame.” Hence, the abovementioned example can also be translated as “His involvement in the crime is a great *shame* for their family.”³¹

²⁸ Morena Braçaj, “Reflection on Language, Culture and Translation and Culture as a Challenge for Translation Process,” *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 4, no. 4 (2014): 332–337.

²⁹ Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino, “kahihiyán” in KWF Diksiyonaryo ng Filipino, 2021, <https://kwfdiksiyonaryo.ph/>.

³⁰ Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino, “kahihyan.”

³¹ In fact, when I used Google to translate the sample sentence, this translation emerged. Google used the term “shame,” rather than humiliation, for “kahihyan.”

KWF defines “hiya” as “damdáming sumusugat sa isang nakagawa ng kasalanan, kamalian, o anumang bagay na pangit sa iba” (a feeling that wounds someone who has committed a sin, mistake, or anything unpleasant to others).³² It is a Filipino concept that has been explored by Filipino scholars. In 1988, Vicente Rafael explored the concept of hiya vis-à-vis *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude). In his work, Rafael translated “hiya” as shame. Among the passages that demonstrate this translation include “Do not be constrained by shame [hiya],”³³ “renew your repentance and your shame [hiya] at having offended God,”³⁴ and “truly I am shamed [hiya na hiya] in front of you, my God.”³⁵ Rafael lifted all of these passages from Tomas Pinpin’s *Librong Pagaaralan nang manga Tagalog nang uicang Castilla*, which was first published in Bataan in 1610.³⁶ In addition, Rafael presented an account of “hiya” as “the appropriate affect that accompanies indebtedness” or “utang na loob.”³⁷ Likewise, Rafael noted that it is also “the feeling that arises when one senses one’s exclusion from a circuit of debt relations.”³⁸

According to Rafael:

Hiya is also irritation or vexation at being made an object of amusement or a foil for someone else’s aggrandizement. To subject someone to this state of shame is *hiyain*, that is, to mock, to jest, to disconcert

³² Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino.

³³ Vicente L. Rafael, *Constructing Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 102.

³⁴ Rafael, 122.

³⁵ Rafael, 122.

³⁶ Tomas Pinpin, *Librong Pagaaralan nang manga Tagalog nang uicang Castilla*, in *La primera imprenta en Filipinas*, ed. Manuel Artigas y Cuerva (Manila: Tipo-Lit. Germania, 1910), 235—359.

³⁷ Rafael, *Constructing Colonialism*, 126.

³⁸ Rafael, 126.

and confuse, and figuratively to slap and trample upon (*dar una bofetada*). To this extent, to be in a state of *hiya* is to be in a vulnerable position, available to receive another's blows, whether physical or figurative.³⁹

While this account of *hiya* appears to be close to the concept of humiliation, it is worth noting that Rafael also stated that *hiya* has a positive sense “as in *magbigay hiya*, to render respect, to consider and honor someone.”⁴⁰

Jeremiah Lasquety-Reyes also presents an extensive discussion of *hiya*, particularly in treating it as a passion and at the same time in defending it as a virtue.⁴¹ According to Lasquety-Reyes, passion is “*hiya*” in the sense of shame or embarrassment, which is “closer to *napahiya* (shamed).”⁴² Meanwhile, virtue is “*hiya*” as an “active and sacrificial self-control of one’s individual wants for the sake of other people,” which Lasquety-Reyes claims is “closer to *kahihayan* (sense of propriety).”⁴³ He also presents other Filipino words with *hiya* as the root word, such as “*mahiyain* (adjective of the subject), *nahihiya* (verb)” and “*nakakahiya* (adjective of the action/situation).”⁴⁴

Likewise, Rudolf Martinez also presents an account of “*hiya*” vis-à-vis “*hulas*,” which he translates as “compassion fatigue.”⁴⁵ Martinez cites Bulatao and defines “*hiya*” as a “painful emotion arising from a relationship with an authority figure or with society,

³⁹ Rafael, *Constructing Colonialism*, 126.

⁴⁰ Rafael, 127.

⁴¹ Jeremiah Lasquety-Reyes, “In Defense of *Hiya* as a Filipino Virtue,” *Asian Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2016): 66–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2015.1136203>.

⁴² Lasquety-Reyes, 66.

⁴³ Lasquety-Reyes, 66.

⁴⁴ Lasquety-Reyes, 66.

⁴⁵ Rudolf Cymorr Kirby P. Martinez, “‘*Hulas at Hiya*’: Reflections on Filipino Context of Human-Connectedness and the Nature of Nursing,” *Journal of Health and Caring Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2019): 120.

inhibiting self-assertion in a situation which is perceived as dangerous to one's ego."⁴⁶ He argues that "hiya" is at the core of "Filipino relationality" and that it is a "mechanism by which Filipinos actively control and refine their actions and words to protect the perceived fragile self of the other person and, in the process, prevent their embarrassment."⁴⁷ Martinez also claims that because of "hiya," respect for individuals, especially those in positions of authority, is naturally heightened to the extent that the individual's words, tone of voice, and expressive gestures are carefully chosen to prevent causing offense to the authoritative figure. This approach is adopted to present a non-threatening posture and avoid questioning the expertise and authority of the other person.⁴⁸ For instance, according to Martinez, in the healthcare setting, patients may disclose more information to nurses than to doctors and physicians, out of feeling more "hiya" toward the latter than the former.

It is worth noting that these accounts of Filipino scholars that explored the concept of hiya focused on shame, and sometimes embarrassment, as its translation. However, none of these accounts referred to it as humiliation. Likewise, none of these accounts even mentioned humiliation in their discussion of hiya. Lasquetty-Reyes used "kahihayan"—Google's original translation for humiliation—to refer to shame.

⁴⁶ Martinez, "Hulas at Hiya," 120.

⁴⁷ Martinez, 121.

⁴⁸ Martinez, 121.

Distinguishing Shame, Embarrassment, and Humiliation and Their Application in Filipino Discourse

While these three emotions may initially seem interchangeable, they actually possess clear and distinct variations. Shame, as “hiya,” and some Filipino words such as “kahihyan” and “hiyang-hiya,” at their core, emerge as an internal experience tied to perceived violations of societal or moral norms. It delves into the profound sense of inadequacy or guilt one feels when breaching these standards. An action is “nakakahiya” if it breaches a social norm. For example, the utterance “Pasensya ka na. Hiyang-hiya ako sa ginawa kong hindi pagbayad ng utang,” can be translated as “I am sorry. I am so ashamed for not repaying the debt I owe.” This utterance entails that the person did something that was tantamount to violating a certain social or moral norm, i.e., the duty to repay one’s debt. Likewise, “Kahihyan lang ang dinala mo sa pamilya natin dahil nagpabuntis ka ng maaga,” can be translated to “You brought nothing but shame to our family because you got pregnant early.” This statement implies that a daughter of the family breached a societal expectation, specifically, that she should not conceive outside of marriage or that she should only do so at a particular age. Hiya as shame here, then, does not imply the wounding of one’s self-respect. Rather, it means that an individual filled with “hiya” is conscious of societal expectations and norms, and the feeling of shame arises when these expectations are not met. Hence, in the Filipino context, hiya encompasses a sense of propriety and conformity to community standards.

In contrast embarrassment as “hiya,” and consequently “napahiya/pinahiya” and “nakakahiya,” is portrayed as a transient and external occurrence, often arising from awkward or uncomfortable situations. It stands apart from disrespect and

involves a momentary discomfort rather than a deep-seated violation of values. “Nakakahiya ‘yong ginawa kong paglalasing kagabi” can be translated as “What I did getting drunk last night was embarrassing.” “Napahiya siya sa ginawa mong pagbukong sa kanya” is equivalent to “He got embarrassed because of your revelation about him.” These statements connote “hiya” as something that is momentarily felt. It does not imply an injury to one’s self-respect. Rather, it simply suggests that the individuals experience a temporary unease or awkwardness due to their actions or the actions of others. The terms “napahiya” and “pinahiya” encapsulate this feeling of embarrassment, signifying a state in which a person feels exposed or uncomfortable within a particular social context. In the first example, it is attributed to getting drunk, while in the latter, it is linked to the revelation of one’s secrets.

In these instances, “hiya” does not necessarily denote a profound breach of moral or societal standards. Instead, it signifies a momentary lapse in social grace, often triggered by a situation that deviates from the expected norms. This feeling is closely tied to the immediate social context and does not necessarily result in a lasting impact on one’s self-respect, honor, or dignity. Likewise, the use of “nakakahiya” emphasizes the potential impact of one’s actions on others, suggesting that the action or situation not only caused embarrassment to the individual involved but also had repercussions within the social sphere, such as causing others’ discomfort or inconvenience.

Lastly, as discussed in the previous sections, humiliation manifests externally when individuals perceive themselves as diminished in status or worth. Unlike shame, which may stem from personal moral reflections, and embarrassment, which is fleeting, humiliation involves a more profound impact on one’s perceived societal standing, while portraying a sense of degradation or inferiority. In the grand scheme of the complex meaning of “hiya,”

humiliation may be translated as “hiniya,” connoting intent. “Hiniya niya ‘yong kaibigan niya,” can be translated as “He humiliated his friend.” However, this meaning of “hiya” does not seem to concord with Margalit’s account since he stresses that humiliation in a non-decent society happens even without the presence of intent.

***Yurak* as the Closest Translation of Humiliation**

Building on the preceding discussion, it becomes apparent that the concept of humiliation, particularly as elucidated by Margalit, does not align seamlessly with the Filipino cultural concept of hiya. As expounded in earlier sections, Margalit characterizes humiliation as an injury to a person’s honor, dignity, or self-respect. Furthermore, in Margalit’s framework, a humiliating situation or condition leaves individuals feeling helpless and vulnerable, rejecting their humanity and conveying a sense of inferiority. Margalit emphasizes that humiliation involves a humiliator, regardless of whether the act is intentional. In the vision of a just society, Margalit contends that social institutions should strive to eliminate or resist conditions that lead to the humiliation of individuals.

Given this discussion, it appears that there is one Filipino word that captures how Margalit views humiliation, i.e., “yurak.” This translation captures the essence of Margalit’s idea of a profound violation. Therefore, the phrase “pagkayurak ng pagkatao,” or “desecration of one’s dignity,”⁴⁹ aptly describes the grievous injury to self-respect and dignity that Margalit associates with a non-decent society. This desecration is not merely about causing someone to feel ashamed or embarrassed. It signifies a deeper violation that leaves individuals feeling stripped of their humanity and worth. The

⁴⁹ In this work, I also used the terms “trample” or “stomp” to vividly illustrate the act of desecration by emphasizing the violent nature of the violation, which symbolizes the forceful degradation of one’s dignity.

act of “pagkayurak ng pagkatao” thus conveys the severe and dehumanizing impact of humiliation as understood in both Margalit’s and the Filipino cultural framework.

The *UP Diksiyonaryong Filipino* defines “yurak,” a noun, as 1) “paulit-ulit na tapak upang makawasak o makapaminsala”; and, 2) “pagsirà sa puri, karangalan, o pangalan ninuman.”⁵⁰ In the first sense “yurak” pertains to an act in which one repeatedly stomps (“tapak”) on an object with the intention of destroying it. The second meaning of the term indicates the destruction of one’s honor, reputation, or name. While the first usage frames “yurak” as an action directed toward an external object, in the second context, experiencing “yurak” involves envisioning the stomping act and its force as if it is directed toward oneself. As a result, the phrase “Niyurakan mo ang pagkatao ko” (“You trampled on my dignity”) conjures an image of being forcefully stomped upon.

The essence of yurak parallels Margalit’s concept of humiliation. Primarily, Margalit describes humiliation as “injuring” or “wounding” one’s self-respect or dignity, terms that imply the use of force. Similarly, as discussed earlier, “yurak” involves a forceful element. Consequently, the experience of “yurak” encompasses feelings of helplessness and vulnerability, instilling a sense of inferiority in the person subjected to it. In the context of “niyurakan ang pagkatao,” it signifies not only rejection but also destruction of one’s dignity and humanity. Importantly, the infliction of “yurak” can occur, whether intentionally or not. Cruel words or actions, deliberate or not, can be perceived as “mapangyurak,” leading to the rejection or being destructive of another person’s dignity.

⁵⁰ Virgilio S. Almario, ed., *UP Diksiyonaryong Filipino* (Quezon City: Sentrong Wikang Filipino, 2001), 957.

Social Dynamics and “Pagkayurak ng Pagkatao”

As discussed in the preceding section, Margalit's concept of humiliation aligns better with “yurak” than with “hiya.” However, regarding humiliation as “yurak” leads to a problem, that is, it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine Filipino social institutions as “nangyuyurak ng pagkatao” for several reasons.

Firstly, unlike “hiya,” “yurak” is not commonly used in everyday Filipino discourse. One can very easily say, “napahiya ako”; however, the same does not apply to “niyurakan mo ang pagkatao ko.” Likewise, there are several variants of hiya, as discussed earlier, such as “kahihiyain,” “nakakahiya,” “hiyang hiya,” “mahiyain,” and “kahiya-hiya” to name a few. These words are part of everyday conversations among Filipinos.

Additionally, despite not being used in common conversations, “yurak” or “niyurakan ang pagkatao,” are terms that Filipinos are certainly familiar with and encounter mostly on television dramas such as primetime *telenovela* or *teleserye* (long-running tv series). Filipino *teleseryes* employ, among others, the prominent rags-to-riches formula in stories wherein the protagonist suffers miserably at the hands of the antagonists. Because of the force that comes with “yurak,” the formula is very easily seen as something dramatic, which is why it fits perfectly in plots of Filipino drama, whether in the movies or television.

Lastly, “yurak” seems to be an experience typically inflicted by another individual. Mirroring its portrayal in teleseryes, one might encounter “pangyuyurak ng pagkatao” when someone of a higher socioeconomic status degrades an individual of a lower socioeconomic status. The act of an affluent person who makes someone less privileged feel inferior and of negligible worth, it is often perceived as an act of “pagkayurak ng pagkatao” since the individual from a less privileged background is made to feel subhuman solely based on his or her position in the social hierarchy.

Cultural Implications

Thus, given these trends in teleseryes, the dramatization of “yurak” in media serves to accentuate its forceful nature, making it a potent element in portraying intense conflicts and character dynamics. However, the challenge arises with the attempt to extend this concept to Filipino social institutions. It is challenging to conceive of or characterize these institutions as “nangyuyurak ng pagkatao” because, in Filipino culture, social institutions are generally viewed as being governed by principles that prioritize respect, equality, and fairness. These institutions are expected to function as pillars of support for individuals and to foster a sense of belonging and contributing to the overall welfare of society. Engaging in acts that trample upon one’s very personhood contradicts these fundamental principles and goes against the intended purpose of social institutions.

Similarly, within Filipino society and culture, there exists a prevailing respect for social institutions, which are often perceived as wielding authority over individuals. This respect is palpable in Filipino customs, particularly in the deference shown toward elders. Practices such as that of placing an elder’s hand on one’s forehead and using polite terms like *po* and *opo* during conversations exemplify the reverence accorded to elders. Likewise, Filipinos, in general, hold a respectful and trusting attitude toward figures of authority, including their elders. The elderly, or “nakatatanda,” are commonly esteemed for their wisdom and knowledge, and this cultural acknowledgment translates into a practice among elder folk of advising the younger generation to heed their guidance. Given this inherent respect for authority figures, it becomes challenging to envisage how Filipinos might experience a sense of “yurak” emanating from social institutions.

Lastly, in order to feel or experience “pagkayurak ng pagkatao,” a person must possess pride because it is intimately connected to

one's sense of self-worth and dignity. One who has pride has an inherent understanding and appreciation of one's own value and worth as a human being. Pride may make a person feel undeserving of demeaning treatment, as self-respect and intrinsic worth demand respectful and fair interactions. Therefore, when this pride is assaulted or demeaned, the person experiences a profound sense of violation and dehumanization. Without pride, the emotional and psychological impact of “pagkayurak ng pagkatao” would be less severe because the individual would lack the foundational sense of self-respect that gives rise to feelings of being deeply wronged or humiliated.

However, pride is something that is seen as sinful in the Filipino society, it being a Christian society. According to Gilbert Meilaender, in Christianity, pride is the “fundamental temptation” and the “most fundamental sin” because it is an act of distrusting God and attempting to be like God.⁵¹ Meilaender claims that when humans try to be like God, they try to free themselves from their place in the world and make decisions from a god-like perspective, rather than trust God's plan.⁵² Likewise, Filipino Christians believe in the biblical passage, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” This concept of meekness refers to being humble, patient, and having a gentle demeanor. In Filipino culture, this trait is often esteemed and valued, as it aligns with the broader Christian teaching that such individuals will find favor and reward in God's kingdom. Hence, those circumstances that may be humiliating for others may not really be so for Filipinos.

⁵¹ Gilbert Meilaender, “Eritis Sicut Deus: Moral Theory and the Sin of Pride,” *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 3, no. 4 (October 1986): 397.

⁵² Meilaender, 397.

Given these cultural factors, the concept of humiliation may also be influenced by cultural differences, suggesting that the experience of humiliation might be more Western-centric. Western perspectives often emphasize individual-centric concepts like self-respect and autonomy, which may contribute to a more pronounced focus on the personal implications of humiliation. In contrast, Filipino culture places a substantial emphasis on collective values, familial ties, and communal harmony. The interconnectedness of individuals within the Filipino community underscores the importance of maintaining social cohesion and preserving relationships. Consequently, the experience of humiliation in the Filipino context may not solely revolve around dignity and self-respect but could also encompass broader implications for the communal harmony and familial ties that are integral to Filipino society. Therefore, Margalit's concept of humiliation may not completely align with the intricacies of the Filipino context.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of the concept of justice and decency, as approached by Margalit, offers valuable insights into the societal dynamics and the role of humiliation within the broader discourse. Margalit's assertion that a decent society is one where institutions do not humiliate individuals serves as a fundamental framework for understanding the intersection of power, authority, and self-respect. The Filipino cultural context introduces the term "hiya" as a translation for humiliation, revealing a complex interplay between shame, embarrassment, and the external manifestation of diminished self-worth.

As this article delves into the Filipino nuances of "hiya," it becomes evident that the local understanding of the term does not seamlessly align with Margalit's concept. The Filipino cultural landscape, with its emphasis on collective values, familial ties, and communal harmony, introduces a unique perspective on the

experience of humiliation. While Margalit emphasizes individual-centric concepts like self-respect and dignity, the Filipino context underscores the interconnectedness of individuals and the importance of maintaining social cohesion.

In grappling with the translation challenges of “hiya” and humiliation, it becomes apparent that the Filipino term may not capture the forceful nature inherent in Margalit’s concept. Here, the term “yurak” emerges as a more fitting translation, adhering closely with Margalit’s description of humiliation as an injury to one’s honor and dignity. The forceful connotations of “yurak” encapsulate the profound impact on self-worth, mirroring the existential threat Margalit associates with humiliation.

The article navigates through the intricacies of shame, embarrassment, and humiliation within the Filipino cultural context, establishing distinctions that contribute to a more nuanced understanding of these emotional states. While “hiya” encompasses a sense of propriety and conformity to societal standards, “yurak” becomes the closest approximation to Margalit’s conceptualization of humiliation.

In addressing the social dynamics and the notion of “pagkayurak ng pagkatao,” the article acknowledges the challenges of extending the concept of “yurak” to Filipino social institutions. The prevailing respect for authority figures and the inherent principles of respect, equality, and fairness in Filipino social institutions pose a challenge to envisioning these entities as engaging in acts that are effectively “nangyuyurak ng pagkatao.” The cultural implications further underscore the influence of pride, communal harmony, and familial ties in shaping the Filipino experience of humiliation.

Ultimately, the exploration of Margalit’s concept of decency, when viewed through the lens of Filipino culture, unveils a rich tapestry of societal dynamics. The convergence and divergence of these concepts offer a platform for further scholarly inquiry into the

universality and cultural specificity of humiliation as a social phenomenon.

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