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Pakikipagkapwa: A Filipino Value in Attempt to Counter Biodiversity and Cultural Diversity Loss

Abstract

Many would think of biodiversity merely in the context of environment, ecology, or nature. Species thrive because of diversity, and that includes human beings. However, this article treks an unusual terrain of biodiversity. The damage we made towards nature bespeaks the harm we likewise do against the vulnerable 'other' in society, in particular the Deaf people. The people who are Deaf discussed in this article are the ones who identify themselves as entho-linguistic cultural minority. In addition, they do not consider deafness to be a deficit; rather, some of them view their condition as different, or to some is diversity. Contextually, this writer presents an alternate way to afford respect with humility by employing a moral Filipino value of *pakikipagkapwa* (shared inner-self).

In a society that seems to remain numb to the groaning of our *kapwa* (the Other or fellow-being), this article challenges us to reconsider if we truly care for the non-human and the Deaf, who remains the vulnerable 'other' today.

Pakikipagkapwa: A Filipino Value in Attempt to Counter Biodiversity and Cultural Diversity Loss

Kristine C. Meneses, Ph.D.

Introduction

It is a paradoxical reality that some economists and researchers claim economic development and advancement in the field of science, yet many people seem stingy in affording respect to the human Other and to the non-human ‘other’. Some people, who ignore their connection with nature, consequently, fail to recognize that all of us live in a shared habitat with the rest of creation. Human beings are part of the entire body of a growing universe and a groaning organism. The encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, summons us to be responsible in caring for our only and shared habitat – earth. Various scholars and organizations continue to engage and discuss the encyclical *Laudato Si*, concentrating on the exponential damage many of us did and are still doing against nature. One of the concerns today is the rapid destruction of the biological diversity. Indeed, there is a need to set and restore a balance, as well as an urgency to care for our life support, – the ecosystem.¹

Further, the Pontiff addresses the importance of cultural ecology, pointing to the relation between nature and culture, where culture is not merely about indigenous peoples (IPs) who, from their cultural marrow protect and sustain the nature. Rather, the encyclical underscores the interconnectedness between biodiversity and cultural diversity, as it states in no. 144:

There is a need to respect the rights of peoples and cultures, and to appreciate that the development of a social group... nor can the notion of the quality of life be imposed from without, for quality of life must be understood within the world of symbols and customs proper to each human group.

Concerned citizens, environmental groups and movements continue to raise awareness about humans’ interdependence and connection with nature. Nonetheless, still many unconcerned citizens continue to exploit nature and maltreat the non-human ‘other’, which seems analogous to the treatment afforded to those considered as insignificant in society. The violence we inflict on the non-human and other life forms, consequently leads to our lack of the sense of fraternity towards the human Other – Deaf people.

In this regard, I attempt to expound the notion of cultural ecology and diversity by including an ethno-linguistic cultural minority group in the equation – Deaf people. The link between biodiversity and cultural diversity is often opaque. Most people thought of a dichotomized treatment towards nature, yet there is an alarming parallelism on how we treat nature – the ‘other’, and how we treat the Other fellow-being, especially towards Deaf people, who some consider themselves as another human variety.² This paper begins with an

¹ Ecosystem, on the one hand, is a complex community of producers, consumers, decomposers that interact within boundaries as imposed by physical surroundings, its cycles in the web of life. Defined in David Suzuki, *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature* (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2008), 200.

² The Deaf community where I belong here in the Philippines, Our Lady of the Annunciation Parish and Shrine of the Incarnation, accepts the perspective that Deaf people are a human diversity. Though most Deaf see themselves as different, most of the Deaf Filipino leaders I know advocates and gradually introduce the concept of Deaf as human diversity. For them, the idea of Deaf is different that creates separation, while Deaf as diverse implies harmony. A short film showing the openness of Deaf people to the concept of human diversity, this can

overview of biodiversity, and after which, I present its relation to cultural diversity. Followed by this is an introduction of a Filipino notion of *kapwa* (the Other, fellow-being) and the value of *pakikipagkapwa* (shared inner-self). From here, I appropriate *kapwa* and *pakikipagkapwa* in relation to how humans must treat biodiversity, cultural ecology, and the Other diverse humans – Deaf people. At the end of this article is a theological reflection leaning on respect and embrace of diversity.

I. Biodiversity: Life Forms in Variety At Risk of Loss

In the encyclical, *Laudato Si* section 3, Pope Francis allotted a section on biodiversity, where he explains the importance and the value apart from their usefulness to humans,³ and of all forms of life both the seen and the unseen by our naked eyes. The Pontiff enumerates instances of non-human extinction due to human activity and undiscerning intervention in the name of progress, production, and profit. Today, most people involved in industries,⁴ see nature as a product and property with a monetary equivalent. Perhaps an overview of biodiversity will help us understand what stockholders and consumers seem to undermine. What is biodiversity and why is this crucial to our lives?

Biodiversity is understood broadly as the variety of life, which includes communities of living organisms (biotic and abiotic, species and individuals)⁵ interacting with the abiotic environment that comprise and characterize the ecosystems.⁶ This world, our shared habitat nurtures and nourishes diversity, which is vital in sustaining and in making life of all creatures flourish. Given the complexity of nature, taxonomists and researchers cannot affirm the number of varieties we have in our ecosphere. Though they have identified and have catalogued partially around 1.75 million species, they claim that there are more undiscovered life-forms on earth.⁷ Because of the incalculability and the diversity of life-forms,⁸ we must admit that we do not understand fully how the ecosystem works. Unfortunately, due to our lack of comprehending completely nature's diversity, many of us continue to destroy drastically our shared habitat.

Placing a Christian definition of biodiversity, Kevin O'Brien⁹ defines it well as "the variety of creatures in God's creation that manifests God's glory"¹⁰; hence, when people remain insensitive to the groaning of our ecosystem, "thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us."¹¹ Catholic bishops

be viewed at <http://attitude.co.uk/nyle-dimarco-stars-in-politically-charged-short-film-about-the-future-of-disability/>

³ Pope Francis' assertion echoes what Deep Ecologist advocates claim.

⁴ These industries include those in manufacture, mining, and I that ventures to production.

⁵ Kevin O'Brien, *Ethics of Biodiversity: Christianity, Ecology and the Variety of Life*, (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 4. O'Brien is an Associate Professor at Pacific Lutheran University. He teaches Christian, comparative and environmental ethics. The focus of his work is the interconnections between faith, social justice, human ethics and concerns on environment.

⁶ Tom Barker, Martin Mortimer, Charles Perrings, "Biodiversity, Ecosystems and Ecosystem Services" in *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity: The Ecological and Economic Foundations*, ed. Pushpam Kumar (Washington, D.C.: Earthscan, 2010), 45-46.

⁷ O'Brien, *Ethics of Biodiversity*, 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹ *Laudato Si*, No. 33.

in their conferences reiterate the importance of biodiversity,¹² when in 1991, the United States Conference of United Bishops issued a pastoral letter titled, “*Renewing the Earth*”.¹³ The bishops reminded the people that the current environmental degradation is a modern expression of human sin. God created this world with integrity and balance, and yet in the name of modernity and advancement, humans have lost touch and sight of the Divine in nature. The deterioration of our biodiversity mirrors the broken connection of humans to all creation, which bespeaks a loss of purpose and of gradual numbness in sensing God around us.

Further, we must remember that the human Other and non-human ‘other’ live in a dynamic symphony in this shared habitat; thus, the exploitation of this shared space, such as unregulated or extreme mineral mining will result to the displacement of the non-human ‘other’, that can have an unknown adverse effect in the entire ecosystem.¹⁴ It matters to remind ourselves that a less diverse planet will result to a reduced ability to support life.

As a consequence, in some ways, it is a disturbing truth that most economists measure nature’s value by assigning a monetary equivalent on goods and services that ecosystem delivers and produces for humanity. Pavan Sukhdev, the Chair of The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB),¹⁵ argues that business needs to quantify and value nature for a proper accounting of the impact of loss and degradation on biodiversity and ecosystems, in order for economic managers, policy makers to manage tangibly risks and opportunities. For the TEED, by calculating the natural capital,¹⁶ we are reducing an ecological liability and a future collapse of ecosystems. In 2014, the journal of Global Environmental Change published the value of the services of the global ecosystems as much as USD124.8 trillion per year,¹⁷ which is twice of the world’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) combined. However, even in the growing advocacy on calculating the services of biodiversity and ecosystems, this natural capital remains to deteriorate. Perhaps, a study could enlighten us of the effects when we begin to monetize nature and our shared habitat.

¹² To cite some, namely: In USCCB, they have issued *Renewing the Earth* (1991), *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good* (2001),¹² and *Faithful Stewards of God’s Creation: A Catholic Resource for Environmental Justice and Climate Change* (2007). The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines in 1988 issued a pastoral letter titled, *What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?* The Australian Bishops’ in 2002 issued *Social Justice Statement: A New Earth, The Environmental Challenge*, and the Irish Bishops’ Conference wrote a *The Cry of the Earth: A Call to Action for Climate Justice, Pastoral Reflection on Climate Change* (2014). Even the World Council of Churches suggests that we become mindful of the integrity of creation, aside from its call for justice and peace in the world, which was adopted by the Vancouver Assembly in 1983. Some of the pastoral letters cited here were also mentioned in *Laudato Si*.

¹³ The complete title of this document is *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in the Light of the Catholic Social Teachings*. This social teaching was issued on November 14, 1991.

¹⁴ Studies have shown that an extinction of bees would follow the extinction of human beings. Global Research: Center for Research on Globalization, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/death-and-extinction-of-the-bees/5375684> (accessed on 2 October 2014).

¹⁵ The TEEB aims for a new kind of corporate and state responsibility that reframes nature as the solution to global challenges than a part of the problem. For further information, visit their website at <http://teebweb.org>. There are other groups that advocate for natural capital, which is the natural capital coalition, <http://naturalcapitalcoalition.org>.

¹⁶ Natural capital is a form of capital that accounts (1) stocks, that is biodiversity, (2) flows, pertaining to ecosystems and abiotic services, and (3) value, that is biodiversity and ecosystems’ benefits to business and society. It considers nature as an asset which humans and non-humans derive a range of services that sustain life. Natural capital is a quantification of the biodiversity and global ecosystems.

¹⁷ Robert Constanza et al., “Changes in the Global Value of Ecosystem Services,” in *Global Environmental Changes*, Vol. 26 (May 2014): 156.

A geneticist and environmental advocate, Dr. David Suzuki, said that in the study made by Robert Constanza¹⁸ in 1997, the latter argues that nature gives us what we need more than all the economies in the world combined.¹⁹ The rough estimate of Constanza was, it takes USD35 trillion a year to replace what nature can do for us, and in contrast to USD18 Trillion of all the economies of the world can offer us.²⁰ Dr. Suzuki further argues that economists in their equation of growth do not consider “what nature can do for us for nothing”.²¹ Nature can do much for us, which technology, no matter how modern, cannot duplicate what it does. This means that economists fail to see that what nature does for us is largely non-monetary, and therefore useless to quantify. When we begin to quantify and monetize nature, it, then, becomes a property with no rights, gradually creating an understanding that we can purchase and replace it. In the process, the linkage of humans with nature begins to collapse, and it replaces our connection with nature to a mere transaction. Thus, when we calculate nature in financial terms, with monetary equivalence, this corresponds to cutting our sense of connectedness with nature, which is happening today. It is, therefore, disconcerting that in quantifying or monetizing nature, we, in turn, commodify and privatize nature, thus the exploitation and extreme accumulation of resources leaving the two-thirds “Other” of the world impoverished. In a sense, our way of life degrades the ‘other’ nonhuman species, and the most vulnerable in our society.²² This means that apart from the calculated benefits that nature provides humans and non-humans it is imperative to consider the intrinsic value of nature, actualized on a greater regard and responsibility for it. Such regard has to begin with acknowledging our connectedness with nature.

With the planet’s current climatic cycle and its uncontrollable rage, stakeholders and consumers, all of us must acknowledge that environmental degradation is a moral issue, and therefore it is a Christian imperative that we act on regaining the “sacred balance”²³ in nature, and in our relationship with fellow-beings.

II. Cultural Ecology: Respecting with Humility to the Different-Other

Culture has different dimensions and definition, depending on whose perspective sees it. Ordinary people would refer culture with artifacts as a basis for the material culture of a group, race, or tribe. Social scientists and anthropologists develop varied definitions of culture from their observations and long years of study of a group, race or even of a phenomenon. E.B. Tylor²⁴ defines culture as a “complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs, and any capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”.²⁵ Another concept of culture revolves around the system of values, perspective, or worldview, and a way of life expressed in certain ways through which it

¹⁸ Dr. Constanza is an ecological economist and the founding director of the Gund Institute for Ecological Economics at the University of Vermont. He earned his doctoral degree in Environmental Engineering Sciences at the University of Florida.

¹⁹ The 11th Hour (CA: Appian Way/ Greenhour/ Tree Media Group Production, 2007).

²⁰ Robert Constanza et al., “The Value of the World’s Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital,” *Nature* 387, (May 1997): 253-260.

²¹ The 11th Hour (CA: Appian Way/ Greenhour/ Tree Media Group Production, 2007).

²² O’Brien, *Ethics of Biodiversity*, 4.

²³ From the book of David Suzuki, *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature* (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2008).

²⁴ He was perhaps the first to provide a general definition of culture.

²⁵ EB Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London: Murray, 1871).

reveals the meaning.²⁶ On the other hand, Antonio Gramsci²⁷ views culture by underscoring the hegemony in and around it through consent, rather than force. Gramsci believes that we adhere to the systems and mores, which are not necessarily what we uphold; rather it is kept in place because we consent the ruling of the dominant and powerful groups, who protect and maintain their interests. Clifford Geertz,²⁸ an anthropologist, considers culture as text is public²⁹ because for him, “meaning-making” is always a public domain,³⁰ and does not reside in thoughts.

Turning to the encyclical, *Laudato Si*, presents culture as analogous to indigenous peoples (IPs) or indigenous cultural communities’ (ICCs) way of life that bespeaks their strong sense of connectedness with nature. They value their habitat and respect for nature with humility by asking it to be kind to them. Hence, their relationship with nature is with reciprocity. In the Philippines, we have 112 entholinguistic tribes or IPs³¹ where majority settles on the uplands of the northern and southern part of the country. In fact, 75% of our key biodiversity areas (KBA) are ancestral domains of the IPs, where their ancestors passed to them an indigenous knowledge³² of caring for the land and water that sustain their communities. As a result, it makes them the front-liners for the conservation and preservation of our shared habitat and nature. An example of these IPs is the *Maeng* tribe in Tubo, Abra (located at the northern tip of the country). They have a practice called *kaynga*, which means taking care of nature alongside with people, or better known today as “sustainable natural resource management”.³³ Aside from the tradition or cultural practices of the IPs, their knowledge system of caring for nature³⁴ and habitat is significant in maintaining a healthy and flourishing biodiversity and ecosystems in the country.³⁵ Surely, when we think of biodiversity, we immediately link this with nature; yet life’s flourishing has also its connection with culture. An ethnobotanist, Wade Davis,³⁶ claims that a demise of cultural diversity reflects the erosion of “ethnosphere,”³⁷ which is the sum of all cultures in the world,

²⁶ Raymond Williams, “Analysis of Culture” in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Audience*, 2nd ed. ed. John Storey (Athens, Georgia: Univ. of Georgia, 1998), 48.

²⁷ Antonio Gramsci’s main contribution to the notion of power is, it exists not through force but because of consent of the society. To know further his view see *Selections from the Prison Notes of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971). His point of view influenced Paulo Freire who adopted it in his conscientization pedagogy explained in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

²⁸ Geertz earned his doctorate in Anthropology at Harvard University, where his work is heavily influenced by humanities.

²⁹ His proposal was based on his study of the Balinese’s behavior in cockfights. Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” in *Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973a), 402-453.

³⁰ Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Towards an Interpretative Theory of Culture,” in *Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973f), 12.

³¹ The Philippine government recognizes the importance of IPs and ICCs that on October 29, 1997 the Republic Act No. 8371 known as the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act was issued. This is an Act to recognize, promote and protect the rights of the IPs. It is worth noting that the Philippines is the first country in Southeast Asia that granted such law to IPs.

³² Specialists on environment and ecology would also refer this to “traditional knowledge” or “traditional ecological knowledge”, which is a system of IPs in gaining knowledge of the world around them.

³³ Pia Ranada, “PH Ethnic Tribes Lauded for Role in Forest Conservation” *Rappler*, October 22, 2014.

Available at <http://www.rappler.com/science-nature/environment/72786-ph-ethnic-tribes-conservation-practices> accessed on January 23, 2017.

³⁴ Today, there are sporadic efforts in establishing Schools for Indigenous Knowledge and Traditions in the curriculum to preserve and to pass on to the new generations the practices they do in caring for nature.

³⁵ The office of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples acknowledged the contribution of the IPs.

³⁶ W. Davis is foremost a Canadian anthropologist. He is also a resident explorer of the National Geographic Society. Davis is a passionate defender of life’s diversity.

³⁷ O’Brien, *Ethics of Biodiversity*, 157.

both the accumulation of existing cultures and the evolution of this culture from ancient traditions. Further, for Davis, the ethnosphere “frames the world’s cultures as a dynamic system that parallels the earth’s other ‘spheres’, including the atmosphere, biosphere, cryosphere and lithosphere. This framework emphasizes the diversity, complexity, interrelatedness, vulnerability, and the importance of the world’s cultures.”³⁸

In addition, Davis contends that the disruption of the ethnosphere’s equilibrium is a result of the influences and activities of western global capitalism (as industries expand, there is greater demand for land and waters) that effectively displaced the IPs from their habitat and from nature. This does not only cause deterioration of the ecosystem but together with it as total disregard to the people who inhabit the land and waters. For this reason, global capitalism that does not practice social and ecological responsibility is also in effect disregards the IPs, thus resulting to the decline of ethnosphere. Further, he considers, “When overwhelmed by external forces, people (IPs) disperse because of the drastic conditions imposed on them from the outside rendering them incapable of adapting to new possibilities for life... It is not change that threatens the integrity of the ethnosphere, *it is power, the crude face of domination.*”³⁹ Davis’ notion of ethnosphere raises an awareness that extinction happens to both global ecosystems and indigenous people and their cultures. Learning from ancient/native cultural wisdom, the intricate differences between humans and nonhumans are apparently what connect us with nature and with one another. If we truly care about life, then we must respect with humility the diversity of life that is present in non-humans, fellow-beings, who for Filipinos, are our *kapwa* (the other, or fellow-human).

Culturally, what can the Filipino moral value of *pakikipagkapwa* (shared inner-self) contribute in terms of seeing the interconnectedness or oneness of humans with non-humans? In the succeeding sections, I tackle and appropriate a Filipino value of *pakikipagkapwa* in our relation with the ‘other’ non-human, and the Other fellow-being, particularly the Deaf people.

III. *Pakikipagkapwa*: Filipino Take on Respect and Humility for the “Others”⁴⁰

In no. 42 of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis states that, “all creatures are connected; each must be cherished with love and respect for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.” Hence, it is imperative that we acknowledge the diversity of life, with respect and humility. In the Philippines, respect is manifested on how we relate to our *kapwa*⁴¹ (the Other or fellow-being) through *pakikipagkapwa*.⁴² To gain a deeper appreciation of this Filipino moral value, it is apt that this term is classified.

The noun affix *pakikipag* indicates an “action performed with someone”.⁴³ To further dissect the word *pakikipag*, the affix “pa” connotes either a command or a request to be

³⁸ From an online reference, <http://www.eoearth.org/view/article/152682/> (accessed 12 October 2014).

³⁹ Wade Davis, *Light in the Edge of the World: A Journey to the Realm of Vanishing Cultures* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 2007): 121-122.

⁴⁰ The “Others” referred here would be human and other beings who are unseen in the worldview of most Filipinos.

⁴¹ The “a” is vocalized as a in “hut”, thus, *kup-wu*.

⁴² Similarly, the “a” is vocalized as a in “hut”, while the “i” is vocalized as i in “sit” or “eel”; thus pronounced as *pu-keek-ee-pug-kup-wu*.

⁴³ “Learning Tagalog: *Pakikipag*, A Noun Suffix”, available from http://learningtagalog.com/grammar/nouns/noun_affixes/pakikipag.html; accessed January 16, 2016 and “Tagalog Noun Affixes” available from http://d2ter2x3z9nfv.cloudfront.net/downloads/tagalog_noun_affixes.pdf; accessed January 16, 2016.

performed, in which the word “*paki*” signifies a favor asked by a person to the Other. On the one hand, the affix “*pakiki*” indicates insistence or an act that is continuous. Hence, another meaning of this compounded affix, *pakikipag* can be, “a joint action in intense or continuous manner”.⁴⁴ *Pakikipag* can likewise be an “action involving intentionality or initiative (*kusang-loob*)⁴⁵ that comes from a desire within (*loob*)⁴⁶ a person” that will benefit the Other. For Filipinos, the Other or fellow-being is his/her *kapwa*.

The *kapwa* is generally a concept that hinges both “the other” and “shared identity”, who is both an outsider and insider. Encountering our *kapwa* calls us to recognize their presence before us. It is interesting to note that in dividing the term *kapwa* into two, a richer understanding unfolds. The word *kapwa* is a shortened version of *kapuwa*. When dissected into *ka* and *puwa*,⁴⁷ the affix *ka* means “shared”, while *puwa* is the root word of *puwang*.⁴⁸ The Tagalog term *puwang* can be a sort of a hinge of two opposed meanings. When taken negatively, it means “separateness”, “space”, “something missing” or “gap”. The term becomes positive when the affix *ka* is added, which could mean “bridging” or “connecting the gap”, “filling up the in between space”. Therefore, the term *kapwa* changes the condition from separation to oneness, or solidarity to some extent. Further, *kapwa* reflects a relationship that bridges a gap or eliminates a space between two beings. That being so, the term *kapwa* appeals to accept the Other fellow-being who is “similar” to me, and at the same time “different” from me.⁴⁹ A Tagalog phrase that can best capture this concept of *kapwa* is “*hindi iba sa akin*” (not different from me).⁵⁰ The clause, “*hindi iba*” means “not different”, while “*sa akin*” can be a phrase pointing to the “self” or as “owning”. Thus, taken together, the phrase can mean that the self is “willing to share a space we both live in” or “to be in union with the one whom I consider no longer an outsider, but one with the self”. For Virgilio Enriquez,⁵¹ the *kapwa* reflects the Filipino intimate psyche and way of life, which carries the ethos of sharing, oneness⁵² and caring for the “Other” as oneself. Hence, there is the unity of the self with the Other. This implies that the person accepts, and deals with the Other as an equal, not as a rival. An intimate reading of *kapwa* could be that the person accepts a deeper sense of responsibility for one’s fellow who is not different from me (*hindi iba sa akin*). Therefore, it acknowledges a dimension of justice and responsibility for our *kapwa*.

This Filipino cultural perspective of the Other as *kapwa* has been reinterpreted in varied ways by our local scholars and theologians.⁵³ In this case, is it possible to consider

⁴⁴ Agnes M. Brazal, “Reinventing *Pakikipagkapwa*: An Exploration of Its Potential for Promoting Respect for Plurality and Difference” in *Pluralism and Fundamentalism in the Church* (Manila: Dakateo, 2003), 56.

⁴⁵ The “u” is vocalized as u in “pool”, and the “o” is vocalized as o in “soil”. Thus, the word is pronounced as *koo-sung lo-ob*.

⁴⁶ Pronounced as *lo-ob*.

⁴⁷ Shortened to *pwa* It is pronounced as, *poo-wu*.

⁴⁸ The “ng” is vocalized as ng in “bang”, thus is pronounced as *poo-wu-ng*

⁴⁹ Brazal, Reinventing *Pakikipagkapwa*, 56.

⁵⁰ *Hindi iba sa akin* is pronounced as *heendee eebu su akin*. The Tagalog term “*akin*” is pronounced similarly as the English term “*akin*”.

⁵¹ Virgilio Enriquez is the father of Filipino Psychology (Sikolohiyang Pilipino). He earned his doctoral degree in Northwestern University.

⁵² The Meaning of *Kapwa*, posted by Rem July 6, 2012; available from

<http://pathfinderscommune.com/2012/07/06/the-meaning-of-kapwa/> *Ka* is the cosmic union that denotes any kind relationship with everyone and everything. *Puwang* is *space*, similar to Lao Tzu’s, is the ever-essential emptiness and formlessness that is the matrix of all life in the universe.

⁵³ Some of these scholars are: Virgilio Enriquez and Carmen Santiago, *Sikolohiyang Pilipino: Teorya, Metodo at Gamit* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1989); Virgilio Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology: The Philippine Experience* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1994); Katrina de Guia, *Kapwa: The Self in the Other* (Manila: Anvil Publishing, 2005); Dionisio Miranda, *Loob: The Filipino*

nature as our *kapwa*? Can we adapt the value of *pakikipagkapwa*⁵⁴ on ways we relate to nature, where we are, in fact, part of it?

In her article, “Reinventing *Pakikipagkapwa*,”⁵⁵ Filipino feminist theologian, Agnes Brazal, builds her argument on Enriquez, who developed an understanding of this value from a Filipino Psychology perspective. Enriquez considers the inclusive characteristic of *pakikipagkapwa* and from this, Brazal extends the notion of our relationship with nature. In the Filipino context, part of nature is the non-human ‘other’ or the spirits that dwell in nature, which are the elementals or environment spirits. The Filipino indigenous worldview believes that environment and ancestral spirits⁵⁶ natural habitat are the things around us, such as animals, plants, trees, stones, lumpy soil, waters, and forests. Hence, the IPs unsurprisingly respect nature because they believe that we share and live in the same space with the “supernatural” beings. One of the practices of Filipinos is when trekking in an unfamiliar place, we customarily say, “*tabi-tabi po*” (excuse me/us). This is a tone and an act of humility that acknowledges the presence of Other beings, who remain invisible and could be in the place where one is trekking; thus those who trek must request a permission to walk through the way. There are places in the Philippines that some people consider enchanted, where supernatural beings reside, such as Mounts Pulag and Banahaw. When people trek on these mountains, they observe silence because the spirits in the area dislike noise. The spirits allow the trekkers to visit their habitat or allow them to enter their “sacred space” with the condition that trekkers must respect the place, not only by keeping one’s tone down, but also to keep it tidy. In the event that trekkers violate such condition, they will surely lose their way in the forest or will be redirected upon descent from the mountain. Trekkers must apologize to the spirit dwellers in order to see and reach the foot of the mountain. Another enchanted mountain is Cristobal, where few hikers dare to trek. Aside from its dark atmosphere and muddy trail due to a constant rainy condition, locals believe that some dark or black spirits dwell on this mountain. Similarly, some rivers and lakes are believed to be enchanted, such as the Madlum river in San Miguel, Bulacan, a province in Central Luzon. There have been incidents of unexplained tragedies that took the lives of people. Residents of the place claim that tourists (local and foreign) usually disappear when they swim in the river. An example is the Filipino’s version of the first couple, *Maganda at Malakas*, who emerges from a bamboo, and later gave birth to the Philippines’ Central islands of Cebu and Samar.⁵⁷

Citing these instances show us that nature, the ‘other’ beings, and humans together share this space, this habitat. To some extent, it is plausible to consider nature as well as the environment spirit dwellers as *kapwa*. As mentioned above, the word *puwang* in *ka-puwa* indicates a changing of condition of separation to “oneness”, thus the ‘other’ beings as well as nature could be seen as *kapwa*, *hindi iba sa akin* (the Other is not different from me). The Filipino worldview suggests that I, the self, “accept and be willing to share space with the other”, be this non-human or environment spirits. This perspective weighs in Brazal’s point

Within, A Preliminary Investigation into a Pre-theological Moral Anthropology (Manila: Logos Publications, Inc., 1988) and Jeremiah Reyes, “Lood and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics” *Asian Philosophy* 25, 2 (2015): 148-171.

⁵⁴ Another Filipino theologian, Roland Tuazon, reinterprets and appropriates *pakikipagkapwa* from a political perspective using an anadialectic approach. See “*Pakikipag-kapwa* and its Transformative Potential: an Anadialectic Interpretation,” in *Asian Christian Review* 5 no. 3 (2011): 11-29.

⁵⁵ Agnes M. Brazal, “Reinventing *Pakikipagkapwa*: An Exploration of Its Potential for Promoting Respect for Plurality and Difference” in *Pluralism and Fundamentalism in the Church* (Manila: Dakateo, 2003), 50-70. She is a Filipino Feminist Theological Ethicists, affiliated in De La Salle University, Manila.

⁵⁶ Brazal, *Reinventing Pakikipagkapwa*, 58.

⁵⁷ Brazal, *Reinventing Pakikipagkapwa*. 57.

that Filipino indigenous stories and beliefs unravel human's concealed interconnectedness with nature. We do not only share the same space with nature, but we are part of nature.⁵⁸ Further, Brazal argues that *pakikipagkapwa*, through the lens of Filipino indigenous religiosity, is a cultural value integral on how we relate with our fellow-being that respects the 'other' beings.

Thus, far, culturally and linguistically, the Filipino value, *pakikipagkapwa*, is inclusive because it focuses on shared commonality among peoples and shared nature with 'other' beings. Respect for the Other and 'others' is reflective when we recognize that our dwelling is a shared habitat. Nonetheless, in spite of this recognition, many humans gradually lose the sense of interconnectedness or oneness towards Other-'other'⁵⁹ fellow-beings. Discounting our shared life with the Other-'other' beings reveal a disregard to the variety of life, and to some extent is comparable to our disengagement with the diverse fellow-beings, the Deaf people.

The next section presents some of the ways where we disqualify and disengage from the Other human variety who are gradually being "extinct" – Deaf people. The "extinction" of the Deaf is a reality because we continue to enforce normalcy upon them, which can be a sign of arrogance towards the diverse-Other fellow, Deaf.

IV. Biodiversity and Cultural Ecology: Linking the Lives of the "Diverse-Other"

The encyclical, *Laudato Si*, affirms that the crisis in our ecosystem extends to humanitarian problems that affect the lives of the vulnerable and voiceless Other. Number 49 of *Laudato Si* states that

we have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*.

Boff, the originator of the phrase "*the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*", which is a sentiment of Pope Francis, and of Larry Rasmussen,⁶⁰ connects respect of diversity to social justice. Given that we share one habitat, the earth with other species, Rasmussen claims that social justice is our obligation in promoting the well-being of all. In the same vein, theologians James Cone,⁶¹ Leonardo Boff⁶² and Ivone Gebara⁶³ present their concerns

⁵⁸ Inside a bamboo is a fresh water, which people can drink when they are thirsty. Similarly, the bamboo is analogous to a woman's reproductive anatomy, where the uterus is the "home" of the fetus, and the child's physiological development occurs. The uterus is a bank of water/fluid.

⁵⁹ The Other-'other' refers to humans (Other) and the non-humans ('other'). It is hyphenated to show their connection.

⁶⁰ Larry Rasmussen is a Professor Emeritus of Social Ethics in Union Theological Seminary. Rasmussen is one of the world's foremost Christian environmental ethicists. His latest presentation is on social ethics of water, which includes water democracy and justice; here he also tackled our current ethical framework on handling water crisis.

⁶¹ James Cone is an African-American Theologian who advocates Black Liberation Theology. Through his theologizing, he was able to articulate the distinctiveness of the theology in the Black Church. The main point that influenced his theology is his experience of discrimination, the segregation towards African-American. Aside from this, he also used the Scripture (its liberative elements) and the life of Christ in his theologizing.

⁶² Leonardo Boff is one of the pioneers and well known of Liberation Theologians. He is currently a Professor Emeritus at Rio de Janeiro State University.

⁶³ I. Gebara's works and commitment focus on feminism and liberation theology. She is a nun and her congregation is Sisters of Our Lady (Canoneses of St. Augustine).

for the marginalized in society. Cone emphasizes the bias of God towards the oppressed. He speaks from the context of an African-American who believes

the logic that led to slavery and segregation in the Americas, colonization and apartheid in Africa, and the rule of white supremacy throughout the world is the same one that leads to the exploitation of animals and the ravaging of nature.⁶⁴

Most Christians seem to ignore or deny all together the linkages between environmental degradation and the oppression towards the vulnerable in society. On the other hand, Leonardo Boff asserts the presence of two bleeding wounds in today's society. One is the accelerating wound of poverty that tears the "social fabric of millions of people the world over,"⁶⁵ and the systematic hostility we inflict destroys the sacred equilibrium of the ecosystem of our shared habitat. A lack of foresight and sense of connectedness with nature will result to an "ecocide"⁶⁶, that is, the destruction of our ecosystem. In addition, for Boff, the link between the two wounds is the neglect for the poor, and the different Other/*kapwa* by the hegemonic few who choose to accumulate and overconsume. Such insensitivity is double injustice that dehumanizes the vulnerable and voiceless Other in our society⁶⁷ and subsequently disrupts the sacred balance of our shared habitat. In the same vein, Ivone Gebara firmly believes that no human community should seek to overpower the Other; rather, all should understand and celebrate the innate diversity of species. In no. 66 of *Laudato Si*, it explains that sin is our failure to love and be just that "manifests in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature". The utterly disrespect for diversity and differences, with nature and among peoples whose culture is uncommon to us exhibits this sin. For Gebara, when we acknowledge and accept diversity, we acquire the disposition of humility that causes us to embrace the differences between and among humans and non-humans. Sharing Gebara's view is again Wade Davis, who reiterates the need to be in awe of differences, and appreciate the intrinsic value of other cultures.⁶⁸ Diversity, be this biological, cultural or human is inherent in all creation, which makes it possible for all creatures (seen and unseen) to coexist in our shared habitat.

In this sense, there is a need for an ethic of biodiversity, exemplified in an attitude of humility, which when accepted entirely, it can prevent the privileged and dominant in society from controlling, manipulating, and disqualifying the Other-'other' vulnerable, the voiceless, and the diverse Deaf. Perhaps, we might ask, in what manner did we displace and disqualify the Deaf?

A. The Deaf Other: Disqualified for Being Different and Diverse

Cultural ecology in this section goes beyond the common understanding of IPs or ICCs. Davis observes that cultural ecology is under threat through some measures of "extinction", such as in language. In addition, extinction could be in a form of a monolithic culture, where its paradigm prescribes uniformity because it views diversity as a cause of discord. If we go

⁶⁴ O'Brien, *Ethics of Biodiversity*, 178.

⁶⁵ O'Brien, *Ethics of Biodiversity*, 182.

⁶⁶ The problem with Ecocide today is more obvious and is seen in large-scale land use which destroys habitats that consequently displace inhabitants, such in the case of deforestation. Another example is the oil spills, be this incidental or deliberate. Mining is another problem where landscapes are removed.

⁶⁷ O'Brien, *Ethics of Biodiversity*, 183.

⁶⁸ O'Brien, *Ethics of Biodiversity*, 157.

back to Davis' notion of ethnosphere, we can say that the Deaf culture is threatened by the power, the crude face of domination of the hearing Other who continues to pathologize deafness, and in the process forgets who matters, the Deaf.

Moving beyond the pathological notion of deafness, a Deaf who involves herself/himself to Deaf communities is likely to embrace the notion of ethno-linguistic minority, highlighted by their unique pictorial and gestural language. For Carol Padden and Tom Humphries,⁶⁹ culture is not "fixed" but fluid because it is subject to change in time. In fact, many Deaf embrace the notion of "cultural" that suggests a fluidity of experience. Further, for Paddy Ladd,⁷⁰ he views deafness as a way of life, characterized by a continuous discovery of Deafhood. Deaf culture, deafness and Deafhood are an example of a cultural ecology, which is fluid because it is diasporic, different, and diverse.⁷¹

Throughout history, Deaf people have been the object of control by the dominant hearing world. Many of us consider deafness as an auditory anomaly, thereby medicalizing its condition. In families where majority are hearing people, these families will naturally insist and enforce normalcy to their Deaf child or relative, thereby "obligate" them to avail the assistive devices such as hearing aids or go through cochlear implantation (CI) because this can repair a defective hearing. To this date, many hearing people still view the Deaf and deafness with stigma, identifies them with derogatory labels such as hearing-impaired, disabled, deaf and mute, deaf and dumb, and handicapped, to name some, who mainly look at their "incapability" than their being. These labels and the insistence of normalcy upon them have ethical and cultural implications, such as discrimination and the gradual demise of Deaf culture because Deaf transmits culture through sign language (SL). To wear hearing aids or go through CI, the hearing mainstream now expects them to learn to speak and hear. Consequently, feared by many Deaf people, such normality will end the SL, as well as this ethno-linguistic cultural minority.

In South Korea, almost all the Deaf children now wear cochlear implants as young as three-years old. Because of the existing stigma and discrimination towards Deaf Koreans, parents of a Deaf child eventually opt for a CI for their child. In Singapore, a Deaf Franciscan priest shares to a Deaf community in the Philippines that there is a gradual "extinction" of Deaf people through the government's implementation of Oralism or lip-reading⁷² in educational institutions. In addition, the assistive devices promote the belief that when a Deaf learns to speak he/she can "normally" function in society. Insisting that written and spoken language is the norm and that SL is inferior is Davis' deep concern on the vanishing of cultural diversity in the form of language loss.⁷³ He sees that language loss is in parallel to the demise of the environment. Therefore, in silencing the Deaf minority by preventing them to use their language has ethical implications, such as: inability to self-express, untapped their potentials, it can cultivating low-esteem, prevent them in asserting their identity, and a development of their Deafhood. Countless incidents of marginalization that Deaf people

⁶⁹ Tom Humphries and Carol Padden, *Inside Deaf Culture* (MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 141. Padden was born Deaf with Deaf parents. She also has a Deaf brother while Humphries lost his hearing at the age of 6. He is the only Deaf in their family. They are a couple.

⁷⁰ Ladd is from a third-generation Deaf family. He is considered guru of Deaf people, an activist for Deaf culture and criticizes the medical model as an indirect colonization of the Deaf by the dominant hearing/world (colonizer). He published his dissertation, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood* in 2003.

⁷¹ Some people who stand firm in medicalizing their condition find it hard to accept that their notion of another human variety see them as deviant.

⁷² Lip-reading is also known as Oralism, which is a form of discrimination.

⁷³ Davis, *Light in the Edge of the World*, 5-6.

experience from some hearing people, individually and socially. One good example is our Catholic Eucharist liturgy that is *sound and word* laden, which Deaf people feel alienated. Most of them feel that they are an outsider-Other; they sense their difference and therefore feel inferior. On the other hand, many hearing people continue to internalize a domination paradigm. As attested by most of the Deaf I know, availing the assistive devices such as the CIs, hearing aids, and methods of language learning such as Oralism are dehumanizing because society sees what they cannot do than what they can do. More so, the desire of the hearing majority to repair their condition results to a denial of our shared dignity and humanity with them. The hard truth is that we refuse to adjust for them, and we demand them to adjust for us. Refusing to see the beauty and unique diverse Other creates an imbalance in cultural diversity.

Deaf people, who have outgrown a pathological view of deafness, have a greater appreciation of their Deafhood and culture,⁷⁴ that constitutes uniqueness in terms of a three-dimensional language (hands, face and body), varied forms of communication, and of ethnicity. Our insistence and enforcement of “normalcy” on them is analogous to our denial of the reality of human diversity.

Conclusion: The Diverse-Other Calls: Respect with Humility for Life Variety

A Christian Ethicist, James Nash, said that

nature is sacred by association, as the bearer of the Sacred. We are standing perpetually on holy ground because God is present not only in the burning bush, but in the nurturing soil and atmosphere, indeed, sharing the joys and agonies of all creatures. The sacramental presence of the Spirit endows all of creation with a sacred value and dignity.⁷⁵

In conclusion, I remain hopeful that we will regain the balance and harmony that are almost lost in our shared habitat, and that we will finally respect and embrace diversity in its all dimensions. Indeed, we face some gigantic ecological problems, yet there are sporadic and significant efforts made by unsung eco-heroes. People exert efforts by actively putting their foot forward to effect change. We are summoned to sense and see the vulnerable and voiceless Other-‘other’, by recognizing our interconnectedness in the entire web of life. We should listen to our predecessors, our indigenous sisters and brothers who know well on what connectedness with our shared habitat truly means, respecting its difference, and be in awe of diversity, in which we all embody. Respecting differences must extend to the Other-‘other’ by allowing them to flourish equally in our shared habitat.

The Deaf adapted the concept of ‘cultural’ that ascribes to fluidity because they allow, without complaint, the interruption of the hearing people who enter their lives. Deaf people know what it means and feel to be the Other, to be separated, a situation they do not want the hearing Other to experience. This is the reason they desire and welcome collaboration, partnership, participation with the hearing Other, and therefore uphold the value of *pakikipagkapwa* (a fluid sharing of inner-self). Perhaps we must recognize the way we treat

⁷⁴ For further readings on Deaf people and culture, please refer to the following basic books: Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*, (U.K.: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2003), Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, *Deaf in America: Voices From a Culture*, (USA: Harvard University Press, 1988) and *Inside Deaf Culture*, (USA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

the Deaf people, which is a reflection of how far we have ill-treated the non-human ‘other’ in our shared habitat. If we abuse and exploit, dictate and control how Deaf people must live their lives by enforcing “normalcy”, that is to hear and to speak, this is analogous to our attitude towards the voiceless in our eco-community, in a far more damaging scale. An anonymous IP from the Philippines gives a view of our interconnectedness with nature:

Because it is rooted in our life. If you kill nature, which is being conserved by the IPs as the foundation of how they embody their culture, the IPs will also disappear. It is a tandem: life as an IP, our culture, our tradition, and the integrity of the ecosystem itself.⁷⁶

As suggested by Gebara, the only means to end this violence and injustice towards the diverse Other-‘other’ is an attitude of respect and humility. Further, our shared habitat – earth is a lived space of diversity, created by God who value diversity of all forms. Similarly, to enforce normalcy on the Deaf, is to deny or even refuse all together the existence and our inherent diversity with nature who live in a shared habitat. Why insist on standard measurements, when we behold the beauty and thrive on biological, cultural and human diversity, God’s unfathomable wisdom, is not it?

⁷⁶ Pia Ranada, “PH Ethnic Tribes Lauded for Role in Forest Conservation” *Rappler*, October 22, 2014. Available at <http://www.rappler.com/science-nature/environment/72786-ph-ethnic-tribes-conservation-practices> accessed on January 23, 2017.