Towards a Feminist Democratic Theory of the Global South: Examining Mediated Emotions in the Philippines

PhD Research Proposal

Olivia S. Mendoza
Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance
University of Canberra

Abstract:
In this paper, I present the outlines of my study on Filipino emotional repertoire and the ways in which these are expressed, transmitted, and amplified in online political discussions and debates. I argue that for the deliberative ideals of inclusion, diversity and listening to take root in the Philippines, the deliberation processes in between elections should target affective indigestion, alienation and dismissal, and work towards building enabling affective economies. The study is animated by the question: what roles do emotions play in realizing the emancipatory promise of deliberative democracy? Democratic theorists and practitioners are concerned with emotions since in many cases they drive group polarization, bullying, hate speech and the pathologizing of public support for specific electoral candidates. I take seriously this complex relationship of emotions to political participation in an age of disinformation, impunity, and social inequality, by asking what it means to be "'capable agents' who are able to diagnose their political problems and intervene to improve their situations" (Hammond 2019, 801 in Ercan et al., 2022, 7). I look into to the conditions for meaningful political participation in the Philippines and how these are complicated by exclusions, marginalization, illegitimate decision-making, or harms in the affective level, using data from online engagements. I examine the feeling rules and the social identity power dynamics that are embodied, enacted, and enforced in Facebook and Twitter trends and mainstream news. The empirical study will be informed by the growing area of feminist philosophy that deals with political emotions and affective economies and democratic theory's increasing openness to feminist thought. In this way, I offer my contribution to the feminist critique of political communication by providing an empirically grounded account of Filipino political emotions online.

Keywords: affective labor, emotions, deliberative democracy, Philippines

Memo to discussant/fellow participants:

I am at the beginning of my PhD program, having started in August 2023. This paper presents my PhD research proposal in broad strokes, introducing my topic and aims. I would appreciate comments on the feasibility of the project (especially on scope and strategies) and potential directions to take.

Introduction

Classic deliberative democratic theory has neglected the emotions. It has been criticized for its emphasis on deliberation as the ideal form of political participation and justification. In focusing on rational discussion, it has perpetuated inequalities of gender, race, and class that it has purported to dismantle. In response to these criticisms, deliberative democrats sought to expand and supplement the notion of deliberation with other communicative modes such as story-telling, humour, passionate street demonstrations, music and dance, decorative slogans, guerilla theatre, and more. It is in this effort that emotions have figured more and more in deliberative democratic theory. Deliberative democrats write that deliberation already inherently involves passion,[1] insisting that deliberative democrats have aways assigned emotions an indispensable role in their theories (Hall, 2007; Neblo, 2020). Still, others are sceptical in this move to supplement deliberation with forms of emotional expression, or assert emotions' intrinsic connection to deliberation (Saam, 2018).

This research is motivated by these theoretical developments. It engages the literature that advocates for the value of emotions in realizing the emancipatory aspirations of deliberative democratic theory. It brings feminist critical philosophy's insights on affective labour, affective regulation, and affective economies into conversation with feminist democratic theory's ambition to decentre the privilege accorded to cool-headed rational discussion typically associated with white, bourgeois, western, heterosexual men (Young, 1990). This research will attempt to show that together, both traditions of feminism have a powerful potential to bring pluralism, diversity, equality, inclusion and listening at the heart of deliberative democracy.

[1] This research follows others in using emotions, affects, feelings, and sentiments interchangeably (Ahmed, 2004; Jones et al., 2019; Nussbaum, 2013). Chapter 2 explains further why. In this research, emotions are defined as intentional appraisals of the world. Mediated emotions, the focus of the research, are emotions that are carefully staged and discursively constructed through media. This will be discussed further in the succeeding sections.

The Research Question

This research will study Filipino emotional repertoire and the ways in which these are expressed, transmitted, and amplified in online political discussions and debates. Specifically, it will look into the feeling rules and the social identity power dynamics that are embodied, enacted, and enforced in Facebook and mainstream news. It will include an empirical study that will consist in examining online news and comments sections on social media. The empirical study will be informed by the growing area of feminist philosophy that deals with mediated emotions and affective economies (Ahmed, 2004, 2015; Cherry, 2021; Nussbaum, 2015; Richardson-Self, 2021; Whitney, 2018b) and democratic theory's increasing openness to feminist thought (Asenbaum, 2020; Fonow & Cook, 2005; Morán & Ross, 2021; Pateman, 1989; Phillips, 1993; Young, 1990).

It focuses on the conditions for meaningful political participation in the Philippines and how these are complicated by exclusions, marginalization, illegitimate decision-making (Ercan et al., 2022), or harms in the affective level, using data from online engagements. It asks:

How can emotions advance deliberative ideals of inclusion, diversity and listening?
What can a feminist philosophical analysis of political emotions of the Global South contribute to democratic theory?

The research argues that for the deliberative ideals of inclusion, diversity and listening to take root in the Philippines, the deliberation processes in between elections should target affective indigestion, alienation and dismissal, and work towards building enabling affective economies.

Table 1: Overview of the PhD Research Proposal

Topic	The role of emotions in advancing deliberative democratic aspirations
Research Questions	How can emotions advance deliberative aspirations of inclusion, diversity and listening? What can a feminist philosophical analysis of mediated emotions in the Philippines contribute to democratic theory?
Theory	Feminist democratic theory of the Global South Theory of affective resistance in the Philippine digital sphere

Data collection	Text analysis of emotional expressions in online news articles and comments sections In-depth interviews with select journalists
Data analysis	Emotion discourse analysis

Defining Affective Labour, Affective Economies, and Mediated Emotions

'Affective economies' here refers to socio-political and feminist philosopher Sara Ahmed's term to describe how emotions 'do things,' that is, "how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective" (2004, 119). And by 'affective indigestion, alienation and dismissal' the research refers to socio-political philosopher Shiloh Whitney's terms to describe various types of exploitative affective labor (Whitney, 2018b, 2018a). All such terms are drawn from feminist philosophies of the affective turn. In the Philippines, there is a myriad of venues to deliberate during election season, but little to no deliberation happens in between elections. Furthermore, political emotions such as hate, resentment, and anger (Lorde, 1981; Richardson-Self, 2021; Srinivasan, 2018) are most felt leading to election dates, but are hardly processed in between election seasons. This is a concern for democratic theorists and practitioners since such emotions drive group polarization, bullying, hate speech (Asenbaum, 2020, 4) and the pathologizing of public support for specific electoral candidates (Curato, 2016, 91). Furthermore, such emotions proliferate in the context of massive disinformation in the Filipino and English-speaking internet, which earned the Philippines the title "the petri-dish for disinformation in Asia and the world" (Occeñola, 2019).

The research extends Asenbaum's work on difference democratic thought and the politics of presence by examining data from the Philippines. It takes seriously the complex relationship of emotions to political participation in an age of disinformation, impunity, and social inequality, by asking what it means to be "'capable agents' who are able to diagnose their political problems and

intervene to improve their situations" (Hammond 2019, 801 in Ercan et al., 2022, 7). It hypothesises that the algorithm of online trends and influencers brings to the fore important questions for Philippine democracy: which socio-economic classes have the resources to engage in political discussions online; to what extent are algorithms related to or dictate political support; how do trends exploit affective tendencies; and how can the normative ideals of deliberative democracy be fostered in the multifaceted world of the Internet.

In her study of emotions, politics, and digital media, Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) examined how emotions are constructed in mediated texts. She describes mediated emotions as carefully staged, for a particular purpose, and is a fundamental driver of social and political action (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, 8). As such, they are distinct from emotions as they circulate through individual bodies, in the sense that their mediated construction is important in understanding what these are. Drawing from her work, this research asks: which emotions gain purchase in the Philippines digital sphere, why, and with what consequences?

Research Method

Feminist scholars have long insisted on the importance of emotions in the political life. Political philosopher Martha Nussbaum, for instance, demonstrated why love for the nation matters for social justice. Nussbaum defines 'political emotions' as emotions felt by individuals and have the nation as its object, in the sense that they are channeled towards national commitments such as inclusiveness, equality, relief of misery, and the end of slavery, etc. As such, they can move people toward collective goals, or to the opposite, a selfish narrowing of interests, and the exclusion of others. Political emotions are typically recorded in songs such as national anthems, in poetry expressing love and pride in the beauty of the land, and in parks, memorials and monuments (Nussbaum 2015, 203). Such conceptions of emotions show their centrality in political participation. In the case of the Philippines, an illuminating study of political emotions is Nicole Curato's "Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte's Rise to

Power" (2016) where she showed how the political logics of anxiety and hope undergird Rodrigo Duterte's strong public support, using data from ethnographic fieldwork in disaster-affected communities where Duterte enjoyed decisive victories. This research builds on these works by focusing on the political emotions of hate, resentment and anger since these pervade discussions on political participation in the Philippines. Unlike Curato (2016) and Nussbaum (2015), I am not limited to a specific geographic area of the Philippines nor to physical infrastructures and spaces, but rather use data from the more general scope of the Filipino and English-speaking Internet. Comments sections in social media are key sites for political dialogues (Richardson-Self, 2021, 81). Political discussions in the Philippines are typically emotionally laden, leading to heated exchanges and even familial divides. As such, there is a lot of emotional labor that goes into participating in political discussions, both online and offline. In this sense, my project will explore how democratic theory and methodology may benefit from feminist insights on political emotions that are enacted in the social media comments sections. In this case, from a close examination of how Filipinos express, transmit, and amplify specific emotions as they participate in political discussions online.

This research employs emotion discourse analysis in examining emotional expressions online. Developed as a methodological framework for studying emotions in foreign policy discourses, emotion discourse analysis focuses on how actors talk about emotions when discussing subjects, events, or social relations. Koschut (2022) outlines three steps in employing the framework: (1) selecting appropriate texts, (2) mapping the verbal expression of emotions, and (3) interpreting and contextualizing their political implications. In this way, emotions are made empirically accessible with an eye on their political consequences. This research will employ the framework in its mapping of unique online users in the Philippines as they engage in news content produced by mainstream media and published on Facebook.

Data collection: text analysis of online news articles and in-depth interviews

This research will collect data from one platform (Facebook), and from two national news outlets (*Rappler* and *Philippine Daily Inquirer*). As of early 2023, 80.3M Filipinos, or around 70.5% of the total population, use Facebook. The said social media platform has become a key site of news consumption, across the different socio-economic classes. It has become both an equalizing and polarizing platform at the same time. The research chose the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *Rappler* as the oldest and newest news outlets in the Philippines, with 8.3M and 5.3M followers, respectively. Richardson-Self (2021), in her study of hate speech online in Australian legacy media, notes how national news outlets have a their huge role in the news segment of cyberspace – but they can only do so insofar as social media platforms have facilitated the hosting of their content, being designed in a way that they enable user discussion and interaction (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). As such, news comments sections are therefore expected to demonstrate that these spaces are key sites where feelings toward the nation, country, or democracy, about personalities or political events, are embodied, enacted, enforced, and amplified.

The research's aim is to examine feeling rules and the social identity power dynamics figure in news comments sections on social media. As voters turned their attention to the imagined future of the country, what emotions were felt, which once were maligned, silenced, or encouraged, and with what consequences? Taking inspiration from Richardson-Self (2021), the researcher intends to read and manually document in an excel spreadsheet the comments that had been left in response to articles shared by *Rappler* and the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* in the span of two months. Manual recording is important for two reasons: 1) the research aims at having a robust data set that captures the creative ways in which internet users communicate, including expressions that can outsmart automated detection software, such as inserted punctuations and misspellings deliberately used for misdirection or to escape algorithmic references to their statements; and, 2) the research aim to inhabit this nook of the cyberspace in the sense of following not only conversations but to occupy the space and ask what it feels like to have such emotions toward the

nation or one's democracy, as it is generated by the choice of thumbnail, headline, and the directions that dialogues take in comments sections.

Data collection is limited to English and Filipino-speaking users for the reason that these are the languages that the researcher can speak and understand and am most familiar with. Analysis will focus on the month before until a month after the 2022 national elections, i.e. April 2022 and June 2022. During these months, emotions are felt around conversations on the imagined future of Philippine democracy. At the time of recording, i.e., more than a year after the said months, what is expected to be captured are dispositional, rather than, occurrent emotions. This means that participants would have had plenty of time to process their emotions and reflect more clearly about what they felt then, and moving forward, with the country in mind. For the proposed research, this is important because in the Philippines, there is a myriad of venues to deliberate during election season, but little to no deliberation happens in between elections. Furthermore, political emotions such as hate, resentment, and anger (Lorde, 1981; Richardson-Self, 2021; Srinivasan, 2018) are most felt leading to election dates, but are hardly processed in between election seasons.

This data would be supplemented by in-depth interviews with select journalists who had experience following key election personalities and writing about their on-the-ground experiences of covering important events around the elections. Their experiences with people and knowledge of what is being felt in the actual world outside of the internet are essential for triangulating written emotional categories that proliferate social media. At the same time, the news articles they write do not only seek to objectively record actual happenings as a standard of good journalistic practice, but in doing so, their role as writers is significant in naming and articulating emotions. It is interesting to note that as they do this, Wahl-Jorgensen notes, journalists outsource emotional labour to non-journalists – their sources, members of the public who are autorised to express emotions in public. This is how news media contribute to both establishing and challenging 'emotional regimes' (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, 4). With in-depth interviews with journalists, this

research highlights how mediated emotions are a fundamental force that underpins the dynamics of deliberation in the context of the digital sphere.

Aims

The dissertation hopes to offer an original contribution to the feminist critique of political communication by providing an empirically grounded account of mediated emotions in the Philippines. My proposed project aims to join the conversation around political emotions (Curato, 2016), feminist democratic theory (Asenbaum, 2020), deliberation that happens on the Internet (Asenbaum, 2021; Ercan et al., 2022), and decolonization of knowledge production insofar as I focus on the political context of the Global South (Banerjee, 2022; Johnson, Genevieve Fuji, 2021; Morán & Ross, 2021). I join deliberative democrats in hoping to realize the emancipatory promise of deliberative democracy through 'solidaristic research' – one that interrogates and ends affective forms of injustice which can interfere with and potentially harm political communication.

This research is also a contribution to area studies, particularly in understanding shared political emotions in the Philippines. To date, there is no existing research that looks at the intersection of feminist critical philosophy of emotion and democratic theory, informed by empirical insights from emotional experiences in the Philippines. Most researches on emotions in the Philippines are studied from anthropological or psychological approaches, with no intention to develop a theory, especially a democratic and feminist one.

Chapter Overviews

This PhD research is a "thesis by published works" that will consist of four articles. Each article is an independent piece of scholarly work. The articles are arranged in such a way that they show the progressive strategy of answering the research question, "How can emotions advance deliberative democratic aspirations of inclusion, and diversity, listening?" The first paper will map the research trajectory of deliberative democratic theory's treatment of the emotions. The second

will look towards feminist critical philosophy's emphasis for insights on affective labour and injustice. The third paper will apply a feminist philosophical analysis of mediated resentment, a dominant emotion in online political discussions in the Philippines in 2022. Finally, the fourth paper will conclude with a positive proposal on how the Philippine case provides us with lessons on affective resistance.

The first article will be entitled "Emotions and Democratic Theory." It maps the debates on emotions in democratic theory. Emotions have been variously construed in the literature as either enemies, essential elements, or neglected aspects of deliberation. First, the paper begins by analysing dominant discourses on the role of emotions in deliberative democratic theory – the binary, conciliatory and pluralistic positions. Second, it asks why the emotion question matter for deliberative theory. This section argues that deliberative democratic theory has much to learn from the notion of affective labour in feminist critical philosophy, and feminist democrats are right in raising this agenda since the 1990's. Third, the paper highlights a path toward development by following the pluralistic position: emotions must be studied individually for any fruitful analysis to happen.

The second article will be entitled, "What Deliberative Democratic Theory Can Learn from Feminist Discourses on Affective Labour." This is a theoretical paper on feminist democratic theory's conversation with feminist critical philosophy. Both of these traditions of thought have critical roots: they insist on dismantling structures of domination in the world. Both are animated by a vision of a world where democratic systems are spaces of freedom, equality, diversity and pluralism. In this regard, analysis of democratic systems should focus on interrogating their histories of domination over ways of thinking, acting and feeling. This paper will begin with exploring what deliberative democratic theory can learn from feminist philosophical discourses on affective labour, especially its vicious types: affective alienation, indigestion, and dismissal. Second, the paper will show how democratic spaces, especially the digital sphere, are precisely the kind of avenues where emotions may be expressed and circulated. But when toxic and bitter emotions

gain purchase and are amplified, what happens to democracy? What effects would such a digital culture have on political agents? Finally, the paper will underscore what is at stake if affective injustice is not taken seriously in deliberative democratic theory.

The third article, "The Aptness of Resentment: Emotions and the Philippine Digital Sphere," is an empirical paper that presents my analysis of data from text analysis and in-depth interviews using emotion discourse analysis. Since any fruitful account of emotions should be specific enough to contexts, the article will discuss the emotional experience of Filipinos toward the 2022 Philippine national election, focusing on resentment. Using Shiloh Whitney's conceptualization of affective indigestion, the paper analyses mediated emotions that dominated the Philippine digital sphere in 2022. It argues that resentment toward the promises of democracy, and the ultimate electoral win of populist leaders, was the result of many years of affective labour. The aptness of resentment is key to understanding this development in Philippine politics. The paper's analysis has three important elements: first, the shared emotion of resentment; second, the role of the digital sphere in providing a venue for such an emotion to be expressed and amplified; and third, the need to understand how shared emotions mediated by the digital sphere undergird political participation. The paper concludes by gesturing toward engineering our digital democratic spaces, in ways that are cognizant of the aptness of undigested emotions. There is a need to look closely into mediated resentment, for us to harness the affordances of digital technologies while still facilitating the normatively desirable outcomes for a vibrant democracy.

The fourth article, "Affective Resistance and Feminist Democratic Theory," argues that for a feminist democratic theory that is embedded in the conditions of the global south to be possible, affective resistance must be a core agenda. Feminist democrats ought to make it a priority to interrogate and end affective forms of injustice, as well as consolidate efforts toward building enabling affective economies. The paper identifies propositions for how this can be possible in theory and practice.

Limitations and Boundaries of the Thesis

This research is limited to the Philippines in its effort to engage the literature on decolonising deliberative democracy. However, while the empirical data is specific to the Philippines, the research hopes that its theoretical contributions on affective counter-regulation can be extended to other societies inasmuch as all societies are full of emotions.

Finally, the research will systematically analyse a single emotion: resentment. As mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs, this is primarily to contextualise and unpack the emotion extensively. This does not mean that other emotions will not be discussed. In the course of examining resentment, other 'background' emotions such as anger, hate, anxiety, unforgiveness, love and hope will be discussed too. Harbouring resentful feelings toward corrupt populist leaders, for example, is typically motivated by love for democracy, compassion for others, and anger at injustice.

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