

The Failure of Common Unity in the Philippine Social Experience

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"If the justice system fails, the community will not." I like this. But in the Philippines, every time the justice system fails, there's no other recourse because there's no community. This is sad.

Community is "common" "unity". This is what I wish we had in Philippine society. In the context of the Philippines, we see localities which we superficially call "communities". But strictly they are not because, in practically all instances, family interest surpasses and even supersedes "community" interest. People give more importance to the family than to the "community" and in a lot of cases, family interest doesn't sit well with "community" interest and vice versa.

People seriously mind and get themselves involved in a dangerous situation in a *barangay* (local village) not because the whole *barangay* is in trouble but because their families will be in trouble. There are so many unsolved crimes in a "community" because people don't want to testify as witnesses in court. Why? Because they're afraid that their families would get into a big trouble. And that is true. But since there is no community, nobody tells someone that her/his family will not be in trouble because the community will protect her/his family. This proves to us that, generally, Filipinos don't care about the community because there is just no community to care about. They'd rather care about their respective families because they are more real than the community.

We see **group actions**[1] in the Philippines not because people are pulled together by a common commitment but either because there is a strong leader (usually a warlord) who "commands" them to organize or there is a "magnetizing" factor (like something with a "showbiz" level of strength) that spontaneously pulls them together. But since a group action is not grounded on a principled commitment, at the end of the day, the group disintegrates and the action finally gets insignificant. The **EDSA People** ("People's" is not quite accurate) **Power Uprising** ("Revolution" is likewise inaccurate) was a clear case in point.

The lack of a sense of community is the very reason why the Philippines does not take off from its dismal situation. Why is there no sense of community in the Philippines? Because Filipinos, by and large, do not have the appropriate lens to see the facts. And even if there are a few critical ones who have been using the right lens, the majority have continually refused – even repudiated – the value of such a lens. This condition divides society and a society is divided precisely because the majority have no sense of community.

We have beliefs and many have the boldness to express their beliefs. The failure of many is their inability to elevate their beliefs to the level of knowledge by the process of verification. Verification is the way to ascertain the truth of a belief by either finding out if it corresponds with the facts or if it has logical coherence. If we hold a belief and we defend such a belief through rhetorics alone without considering the value of verification, what we believe in is not a matter of knowledge but of blind faith. But, mind you, blind faith can unite society and hence forge a community. However, such a community is bound to head towards a dead-end – a tragic disaster that demolished Nazi Germany in the mid-1940s and decimated the more than 900 members of Jim Jones’ cult who in 1978 committed mass suicide in Jonestown, Guyana.

The lens of empiricism strengthened by common sense and logic will lead us to see the facts and hence towards the formulation of beliefs verified through such facts. We call this **the lens of straightforward empiricism**. With the straightforward empirical lens, what one sees is what one gets. When one sees the facts, s/he automatically gets into the formation of a belief/beliefs which is/are articulated in a statement/statements whose truth(s) is/are of course dependent on the facts. A society whose majority of people have been using the lens of straightforward empiricism will spontaneously head towards the creation of a community of open-minded denizens.

Let’s take as a case in point the issue of martial law in the Philippines during the time of Marcos dictatorship. A sensible discussion of which simply requires an uncomplicated presentation of sufficient facts. Facts in this sense are those that happened during that period in the history of the Philippines like (1) The murder and disappearance of those who bitterly opposed and criticized Marcos’ deceptions. (2) The plunder of billions of dollars (not pesos) from the nation’s coffer. These issues among others are not matters of belief but matters of fact.

Now if someone claims that all of these really happened during the Marcos dictatorship, these claims are beliefs. The truth or falsity of these claims/beliefs depends on the process of verification which is simply a way to validate these claims/beliefs against the facts. Thus, we can safely say at this point that the most reliable lens is the lens of straightforward empiricism.

When facts have already been presented, nobody can get away from them for they are not mere beliefs. It takes a blind believer to insist on what s/he believes in despite the contrary evidence presented by the facts. And this is the very situation most of us have gotten into because many don’t want to let go of certain beliefs that have long been determined to be contrary to facts. In a society where countless unverified beliefs proliferate, with most of them even contradicting each other at different levels of intensity, no community – common unity – will ever be realized.

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Note

[1] The term “**group actions**” used in the present context is NOT in relation to actions effected by progressive political movements which are of course grounded on principled commitments. That is basically the reason why their actions are solid and significant. In the context of the post, I meant “group actions” that are barangay-based.

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