

Identifying the Locus of Potentiality: Parallels between Heidegger's Call to Conscience and the Concepts of 'Hiya' and 'Ulaw'

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the phenomenological methodology of suffixation. By attaching socio-culturally specific modifiers to Heidegger's terms— such as 'Tagalog-Das Man' or 'Bisaya-Dasein'— this study registers distinct historical and socio-cultural variances. This methodological approach preserves Heidegger's ontological integrity while grounding the study in the specificities of a circumstantial thrownness in the Filipino lifeworld. Based on readings on Heidegger and his analysis on the concepts of Mitsein, the call of conscience, Befindlichkeit, and historicity, supported by readings in ethnographic and textual sources from Dagmang, Lasquety-Reyes, Quisumbing, Bulloch, Ilano, and historical reports on the Negros famine, the paper argues that socio-cultural affects such as the concepts of the Tagalog hiya and Bisaya ulaw does not merely exist in the stagnation between power and description, but rather they are temporal attunements: inheritable attitudes that the suffixed Dasein-Tagalog or Bisaya- can appropriate, transform, and re-throw along with itself into a second, owned thrownness. The paper concludes with the argument that the true locus of potentiality exists and can be identified between the suffixed Das Man and Dasein as they are found in their specific temporality and historicity, from which further phenomenological studies should proceed from.

Keywords: *Martin Heidegger, Ethnophenomenology, shame, ulaw, hiya*

INTRODUCTION

In the labor of understanding and identifying the locus of potentiality, much effort is allocated in elucidating the preamble, the preface- before actually getting into the meat that is the individual subject. If a subject's potentiality were treated as a text yet to be written, the approach of the Romantic hermeneuticians would suffice. However, as the moderns would point out, there is more at play between the interpreted and the interpreter, the intersection- the interpretation in-itself- being a far more promising

area of inquiry. In a sense, a Gadamerian-Ricouer-esque approach to interpreting the individual would suit the study and analysis of the subjects' dynamism better. Despite figures like Ricouer and Gadamer diverging from the methodology of the Romantics, in their most recent forebearer Heidegger, and his conceptualization of the Dasein as initially amidst the Das Man, persists one undeniable aspect within the existential and phenomenological study of man and his possibilities, an aspect that can be seen as the lasting influence of the Romantics: that he is entrenched, much to Sartre's indignation, amongst others. Be it their interpersonal relationships or in the study of them, even the process of separating the two requires that they be, by definition, inseparable. At least, at first.

The term 'Bisaya Dasein' would therefore seem like a Heideggerian oxymoron. To the Romantics, it would make perfect sense. The Dasein, though having been thrown into and eventually- through a feeling of guilt and call to conscience- emerge from the Dasein to face its potentiality in anticipatory resoluteness, still finds itself amidst the Das Man, but is not and should not be defined by it. In speaking its truth, the Dasein does so while still be using the language and grammar of its Das Man. This paper does not seek to misinterpret Heidegger by proposing that such a Dasein can come to be known and identified in a socio-cultural instance of Das Man such as that of 'Bisaya.' Nor does it seek to ever define an instant of Dasein as particularly Bisaya, relegating it back into the Bisaya Das Man. But rather, the term 'Bisaya Dasein,' as used in this paper and many such other contexts in which Dasein can be suffixed, pinpoints and identifies the moment of conscious process of the Dasein emerging from a Das Man that just so happens to be Bisaya, or any other socio-cultural Das Man it suffixes. Dasein is not yet itself, but the Das Man's 'dictatorship' over it slowly weakens. It describes the liminal, transitory process of 'it' into 'self.' In this, one cannot exactly identify the loci of potential- of when and where the Dasein finally achieves it- but finds its starting point. And thus the entire point of the paper: 'identifying' the loci of potentiality. In this case, the Bisaya Dasein.

An ethno-phenomenology of Tagalog and Bisaya shame

First and foremost, a clarification: in the introduction, it seems as if the use of *Das Man* is used to mean the socio-cultural. This however is not the case, nor will this paper endorse this equivocation. Adhering strictly to Heidegger's definitions, this paper maintains that the *Das Man* is "*this mode (that) makes visible what we might call the 'subject' of everydayness, the they [das Man]*." (2010, p.118) The term '*Bisaya Das Man*' or any other socio-cultural instance in which '*Das Man*' can be suffixed, and therefore is not an implication of '*society, culture equals the Das Man*' but rather a distinction of their temporality, specifically the *Das Man* manifesting itself in the Bisaya temporality. But in order to bring about that '*Dasein-to-be*', inquiry must be made into the specific temporality in which the *Dasein* finds itself, as Heidegger says '*In the kind of Being which it has in Being-with-one-another, Dasein is its Self as the they-self. In terms of this Self, and as the they-self, it is dispersed in the they and must first find itself.*'" (p. 27; p. 127) There are variances of how the *Das Man* may manifest and impose itself upon the subject other than just everydayness. Heidegger's phenomenology of worldhood and historicity and what it implies admits to temporality grounding the historical, and therefore socio-cultural variance of *Das Man*'s where-ness: "*In Dasein's temporality, the historicity of Dasein is grounded.*" (p.72; p. 436)

And so for the most part, *Dasein* maintains itself, for since *Das Man* "is everywhere" and *Dasein* is "thrown into the they", the historical-temporal horizon of its manifestation will vary depending on where the *Dasein* is thrown, and therefore will be suffixed by it. (p.27, 38, 128, 223) Thus, while Heidegger speaks of everydayness one must take into account that the temporality in which Heidegger himself was thrown into manifested in a mood of 'everydayness'- and so he described it and suffixed it to *Das Man* as such. But Heidegger's own thought also allows for variances in the structure of specific historical and socio-cultural modes—such as the aforementioned Bisaya *Dasein* and the manifestation of the Bisaya *Das Man* as *alwaysness* (which we shall discuss later)—through which this Bisaya *Das Man* and its *alwaysness* may continually impose itself upon Bisaya *Dasein*. (p. 25-27, 38, 72, 118-129, 223, 381)

The term 'ulaw' in Bisaya is highly associated with the pervasive Filipino socio-cultural attitude of utang-na-loob, socio cultural aspects that are found in how the Das Man manifests in the Bisaya temporality. More than the standard phenomenological interpersonal relationship between subjects, these subjects exist amidst each other in a Husserlian intersubjectivity: both independently from (in potentiality) and codependent to (in temporality) each other's existential situations. Being-here is essentially *Mitsein* (being with)- wherein in potential independence we are '*always essentially its (Dasein) own possibility*' (p. 9, 67) and in temporal codependence others are '*an existential characteristic of Dasein even when factually no other is present-at-hand or perceived. The being of Dasein is Being-with*' (p. 26, 126) both existential characteristics of Dasein, respectively. Between that is the suffix that attaches itself to both the phenomenological subject and other that manifests from the das Man- the socio-cultural. In this, the socio-cultural, the traditional, the customary- any and all manifestations of the Das Man- should not be seen as stagnant. These are in constant generation from an interplay between subject and other that sees into the direction of individual potentialities occurring amidst temporal situations concurrently with each other, because of each other, in response to each other, in cooperation with each other, and or despite each other. The emergence of the Dasein from his suffixed Das Man emerges to be thrown still, but with the ownership of potentiality, the point of being Dasein in the first place is to be able to aim where you are thrown into (*Entschlossenheit*). And you will be thrown into a 'where' much alike your initial where in which you had been thrown into prior to you coming into your conscience, but this second 'throwing' to your second 'where' (*Mitgeschichtlichkeit*) will bear the hallmark of your free choice- amidst the second or more thrownness and where's of others who emerged from their suffixed Das Man's. (p.60; 284)

This concept of *suffixation* of the Dasein and Das Man as either Bisaya or Tagalog is an innovation, albeit an important one for this paper's purposes. The Das Man "*names the shared, everyday interpretive horizon through which Dasein understands itself and others*"(p. 27, 74, 118; pp. 436-439) - and so the Das Man as it manifests in the socio-cultural, therefore names it after itself. And so, we have this pervasive Filipino socio-cultural attitude that has within it regional variances. It is therefore not

enough and far too generalizing to merely say ‘Filipino Dasein’ or ‘Filipino Das Man.’ For within it lies living societies and cultures that are active and potent instances of Dasein and Das Man, who consequently name themselves, as living cultures do. This paper would like to argue that the Bisaya conceptualization of shame, ‘ulaw’ is more dependent on the socio-cultural attitude of utang-na-loob (utang-na-loob, in Bisaya phrasing) than the Tagalog term ‘hiya’.

The phenomena of the Tagalog ‘Hiya’

In the Tagalog conscience, hiya is not a complete term. Hiya always implies Being-with-others (*Mitsein*), and therefore it is often paired with a negation such as ‘walang hiya’- having no shame. The term almost always appears in betwixt conflict and confrontation and is used accusatorily or in a disciplinary manner by the offended on the offender. In Heideggerian conceptualization of the Dasein and the call it feels, it summons it back to its ownmost potentiality. This paper argues for a call that does not originate in Dasein but from the socio-cultural, often in connection with the Dasein’s. In Tagalog culture, the Tagalog *Das Man* summons the Tagalog Dasein *back into conformity*. In calling itself, Dasein calls itself back from its they-self. (p. 60; 284) The Tagalog Das Man calls the individual back *to itself* rather than away from it, much like any other Das Man, but does so angrily, confrontationally. You can already see within this paradigm that the Das Man of the Tagalogs is not the everydayness of the Das Man of Heidegger’s Germans. It is a Tagalog Das Man that reacts- at least in this instance- violently to the phenomena of the Tagalog Dasein’s emergence from it as a reactive social conscience. Emergence to the Tagalogs is painful, almost as a trauma response from the Colonial Period, the bloody Philippine Revolution, and the oppressive regime of Marcos, of which the Tagalogs bore the brunt of. It is an unfortunate thrownness conditioned by the historicity of its past. (p. 74; 436-439) As such, their forefathers as Dasein- their ‘fore-Dasein’- emerged from that, threw themselves into potentiality, and therefore amidst each other manifested a Das Man amidst them that appropriately named itself as Heidegger writes, ‘*the Dasein that exists historically*’ *inherits its fate from the community into which it is thrown.*’ And

therefore, appropriately subjected that current generation into the present Das Man's manifestation.

This is seen amongst the Tagalogs in their use of 'walang hiya', in that hiya is both social sanction and interpersonal capacity. Even when Dagmang (1996) reframes hiya as a relational capability and therefore, a discussion of public/social feelings, it retains its punitive tone.¹³ However, this attitude of hiya as seen in the Tagalogs should be understood as a form of moral attunement- '*Ang hiya ay kakayahang makiramdam sa kapwa*' Dagmang writes (1996, pp. 6-8). Popularly it is punitive when it exists temporally with others, but it can be a source of early moral infrastructure for the independent Tagalog Dasein towards potentiality, developing the subject's moral sensorium when it comes to sensitivity and respect, at least if not independently at first: '*Ang pagkakaroon ng hiya ay tanda ng pagkakaroon ng pakikiramdam at paggalang sa kapwa.*' (p. 18) Therefore Dagmang characterizes hiya '*bilang panlipunang disiplina (at) panloob na tagapamagitan ng asal*' as a kind of internalized restraint as a result of the Tagalog Dasein being thrown into its respective Das Man. (pp. 12-13) All this valorizes hiya from popular negative connotations, but still maintains a punitive social function when used in the term 'walang hiya' as a '*paratang at panawagan sa pagpapanumbalik ng ugnayan*'- an accusational call and summon back into relational and social harmony. (p. 15) In sense, hiya truly is 'isang daan tungo sa pakikipagkapwa' the Das Man's principle call to being-with-others (*Mitsein*) (p. 18). Therefore, Tagalog hiya- as compared to Bisaya ulaw, does not rely heavily on utang-ng-loob, but rather relies on the call to social and moral conformity. There are no underlying implications of social or interpersonal debt, but merely temporality that seeks to maintain harmony. The loci of potentiality is therefore an existing tension between the suffixed Tagalog Dasein's place within the stability of his socio-cultural temporality and the consequent risks when it comes to facing his potentiality amidst that, and whether or not pursuing his potentiality may cause offense or threaten this harmony.

But this tension is of utmost importance to the transitory suffixed Tagalog Dasein, as the aggressive nature of the Tagalog Das Man manifestation of *hiya's* "accusational call" (*paratang at panawagan*) discloses Dasein *through* the they-self's conscience, not beyond it, much like how the '*call discloses Dasein in its uncanniness and brings it face to face with*

its ownmost potentiality-for-being.' (Heidegger, 2010, p. 284) Much like a nagging family, this accusational call becomes existentially unbearable, and so the Tagalog Dasein's call into its utmost potentiality becomes less of a realization, and more of a dire need to escape. It is not anymore the boredom of the everyday in which the stagnation and idle chatter reveals oneself to one's potentiality through angst, but a constancy of socio-moral expectation that pushes one towards the necessity of individualization- what Heidegger characterizes as *'the call (that) calls Dasein back from its lostness in the they.'* For when one's everyday is characterized by socio-moral conformity that equalizes and takes away the chance at consequence (and therefore choice) from him and unto the community, as Heidegger characterizes when he says *'in being-with-one-another, the 'they' maintains itself factually in the averageness of what is proper and what is not'* (p.38; p. 164), to be able to confront the potentiality of choice and therefore consequence becomes the tempting call that finally pulls the Tagalog Dasein to Dasein *in-and-of-itself*.

Similar valorizations of the concept of hiya can be found in the works of Lasquety-Reyes (2016), who against popular negative representations of the concept and in the same vein as Dagmang, sees 'hiya' as restraint. Most importantly, Lasquety-Reyes (2016) makes the distinction between hiya as the passion of shame and hiya as the virtue of restraint. The former he characterizes as the uncomfortable feeling of being put in a socially unacceptable position, and the latter being more akin to a conscious self-control (pp. 66-67). Whereas Dagmang reframes 'hiya' as a kind of social awareness and moral attunement, Lasquety-Reyes reimagines hiya- at least 'hiya' as the virtue of restraint- as a kind of temperance for the sake of 'kapwa', or other people, still within the dimensions of Dagmang's reframing (p. 72). In this distinction, we can propose as a base structure for the phenomenological 'hiya' of the suffixed Das Man and the hiya of the suffixed Dasein. 'Hiya' as the passion of shame is this accusational call that the Das Man summons to bring the Dasein back into itself, but 'hiya' as the virtue of restraint can be seen as the suffixed Dasein taking from the Das Man this same feeling, taking ownership over it, and carrying it along with him to its potentiality as an owned attunement. In this we see that socio-cultural aspects, attitude, traditions, customs, and most importantly virtues are not descriptive of either Dasein or Das Man, as both Heidegger and this paper's appropriation of its terms initially laid out. But rather, these are temporal objects that

transform as the subject transforms, which have as much potential as the subject's own potential. These can be seen as an ontology of which worthwhile traditions existing both in *das Man* and *Dasein*, in others and the subject, in temporality and in potentiality, endure historicity as they are carried by the suffixed *Dasein*'s second thrownness into the *Dasein* in-and-of-itself (Heidegger, 2010, pp. 68-76; 384-439).

The phenomenon of the Bisaya 'ulaw'

When it comes to the Bisaya conception of shame, as this paper maintains, it still subjects the *Dasein* to a moral attunement, but that attunement is more towards *utang-na-loob* in which the suffixed *Das Man* summons the subject through a call that sounds more like ingratitude. And so, whereas the Tagalog *hiya* exists within a moral framework, the Bisaya *ulaw* exists within a moral 'economy'. It is seen as obligation, which shares the characteristic constancy of Tagalog *hiya*, but is born out of an entirely different temporality.

One can fight back against oppressors, but one cannot necessarily take a *bolo* and strike back at poverty, much less starvation. Negros Island was one of many Visayan regions that bore the brunt of the economic downturn as a result of the Marcos regime's monopoly over the sugar industry. When the Visaya regions lost their place amongst the world's top four exporters of sugar, a glut of unsold stock resulted in a plummet in prices and the Negros Famine. Even before the famine, the way in which Negros sugar farmers were paid during periods between harvests called *teimpo Muerto*, often stretching from the months of May and September, made starvation and malnutrition an annual occurrence. The period was often synonymously known as '*tigkiliwi*', due to how starvation and a lack of nutrition deformed the mouths of those who went without in those months. Advances in rice were paid when milling season came, but despite these advances, the poor quality of food caused malnutrition and death amongst the workers and their children. Children were taught to differentiate from weeds and cane, men worked into the long hours, and women worked up until the last days of their pregnancies. When they were finally paid during the milling season, they would pay off their debt and- having little left after that- take rice advances again, perpetuating a debt cycle (Cherniguin, 1988, p.188).

The monopolization of the sugar industry under one of Marcos' crony and the collapse of sugar's price in the international market exacerbated the already egregious abovementioned circumstances and eventually led to the Negros Famine. As Cherniguin recalls in his report then:

"Philippine sugar production is only one third of what it used to be. This production only meets the country's domestic need plus some 120,000 metric tons which America is still buying, but this ceased too at the end of 1987. Of the sugarlands of Negros, which had reached 350,00 hectares when the Cuban sugar quota was given to the Philippines, nearly half are now vacant and idle and 85% of all the haciendas in Negros are heavily indebted to the banks and could be foreclosed any time. Out of the 439,000 sugar workers, only 40% are presently employed and the rest are unemployed or partially employed: When the 'tiempo muerto' comes, only 10-15% of them will find employment in the sugarcane plantation." (p. 190)

And so, the Bisaya *Das Man* manifests and names itself as urgency, as 'alwaysness.' From its inherited trauma of poverty, debt, malnutrition, and starvation- there so manifests this overarching urgency to fight back against an incorporeal foe: *want*. It engenders the Bisaya attitude towards society, education, ambition, and work. Even those older generations further down the Oriental of Negros- of which the sugar industry still exists in the municipalities of Bais, Jimalalud, Basay, Pamplona, and Mabinay- who may have forgotten the horror of the famine, still feel a need to protect themselves perpetually against the looming threat of poverty. Since this circumstance of temporality bled into the shared communal conscience, this perpetual struggle against poverty was seen therefore as a communal struggle, as a communal effort. *Ulaw* in this sense is not some mere social descriptor, but a product of historicity, a structure of temporality born out of material precarity. In the contrast demonstrated between the Tagalog 'hiya' and the Bisaya 'ulaw', the contrast is therefore not in values, but in moral temporalities. The Bisaya historical lifeworld in which the suffixed Bisaya *Dasein* finds that it is thrown into discloses unto it a lifeworld characterized by the urgent, perpetual, alwaysness of *kalisod* (difficulty) and *pagpaningkamot* (unceasing striving).

In this, the term 'walay ulaw' therefore finds itself accused against those who are not attuned to this communal struggle and are therefore ungrateful to the communal and often times familial sacrifice and labor to deter the foe of want. These therefore manifest in reciprocal norms amongst the Bisaya, often times concurrent and reciprocal to the concept of utang-na-loob, finds varying alternative expressions such as "walay ulaw," "walay ka-ikog," "walay ikabalus," and "walay batasan", all phrases in which the Bisaya Das Man calls to summon the subject to confront its ingratitude to community and family. Much like 'hiya', it also operates as a powerful social sanction (Quisumbing, 1976). If 'walay ulaw' are the words the Bisaya Das Man uses to call the Bisaya Dasein, then 'utang-na-loob' is the accent in which it calls it in. Quisumbing characterizes the relationship between 'ulaw' and 'utang-na-loob' as *"failure to observe the norms of utang-na-loob is identified with disloyalty, lack of consideration, negligence. 'Walay ulaw' ... are very strong terms referring to ingratitude. They operate as powerful sanctions."* (p. 266)

As previously mentioned, this also finds itself stretching into education, ambition, and work. Ilano's survey (2025) on the lived experiences of Bisaya speaking successful licensure examinees who had previously failed or had to retake their licensure examinations gives a concrete account of how 'ulaw' manifests and persists even after their successful re-examination. One respondent recounts how *'...considering pud gusto nako akong kauban, akong mga batchmates, kay sa ako na part murag ulaw kaayo na ma left behind, kapoyan nako makig uban sa ila...'* (considering how I wanted the same (to pass) for my group, my batchmates, on my part I felt shame and did not feel I could be around them). (p. 1097) In this, one can see how 'ulaw' often coincides with a kind of moral 'economy' that is in itself intertwined with how ulaw reaches into education, ambition, and work in the context of upward social mobility. But it is also in this that we see in play the two dimensions of ulaw in a similar way in which distinctions of the two kinds of 'hiya' were made by Lasquety-Reyes. (2016) We must consider that these are the responses of those who eventually passed the licensure exam. The fact that this 'ulaw' persists attests to the inheritability and transformability of these socio-cultural aspects. In this, I would like to distinguish the 'passion of ulaw' that belongs to the Bisaya Das Man calls the subject to embarrassment and anxiety in response to failure, and the 'virtue of ulaw' which belongs to the suffixed Bisaya Dasein that confront this failure

in anticipatory resoluteness to overcome it towards a potential pride in success- ‘*in resoluteness, Dasein still lets itself be called forth*’ (p. 62; 302). But even after that, there still exists this persistent ‘*ulaw*’ which checks this pride and keeps the Dasein humble into its second thrownness, now no longer in the form of the Bisaya Das Man’s call and summon, but transformed within the Bisaya Dasein, as Heidegger puts: ‘*the call discloses Dasein in its uncanniness and brings it face to face with its ownmost potentiality-for-being*’ (p. 68; 284-286). “This transformation of the passion of *ulaw*, which initially belonged to the Bisaya Das Man, from anxiety into humility that rightfully belongs in the suffixed Bisaya Dasein as he transitions towards Dasein in-and-of-itself is a prime example of how this attunement (*Befindlichkeit*) can be carried into new temporalities such as a second throwness, as Dasein brings its inherited moods into its owned historicity” (p. 68; 386)

In this, the paper finds issue in Bulloch’s definition of ‘*ulaw*’ (2013, p. 234), which she analyzes under an anthropology of power and effect as an infrastructural ‘*ulaw*’ that is ‘*performed principally through deference and avoidance, and in this way it assembles and confirms hierarchical order.*’ This view situates ‘*ulaw*’, and by extension ‘*hiya*’, along the lines of Foucault as a way to objectify it as a mechanism of social reproduction. In this, Bulloch’s treatment of ‘*ulaw*’ is not only a mere politicization of a much deeper Filipino characteristic, it ignores that phenomenological dimension of ‘*ulaw*’ as a temporal socio-cultural phenomenon that is carried by first the suffixed and then, by transformation, the unsuffixed Dasein and that it is not a mere descriptor of either Das Man or Dasein, but participates in mutable temporal structural ties of inheritance and transformation. The Heideggerian (along with the larger phenomenological) treatment of socio-cultural affects like ‘*ulaw*’ and ‘*hiya*’ resist it as a description of it but retains it, as this paper argues, as suffixable to it. It does not exist above the heads of the Filipino, nor is something beneath underlying their structures, but much like the Dasein’s thrownness into its historicity and temporality amidst the Das Man, it exists amidst it; it exists outside it, inside it, and through it. And so, the Bisaya phenomenon and socio-cultural affect of *ulaw* can neither be considered as mere sociological mechanism or even a transcendent moral law. It is better understood as a temporal attunement carried initially by the suffixed Bisaya Dasein in its transformation to Dasein in-and-of-itself

from its suffixed Bisaya *Das Man* summoning as a transformed inheritance that persists, transforms, and discloses being-in-the-world amidst its historicity.

CONCLUSION

In this discussion, we maintain that socio-cultural affects and phenomena of 'hiya' and 'ulaw' are not overarching definitions of their respective *das Man* and *Dasein*. Throughout the paper, Heidegger is cited and understood as having rejected this: *Das Man* and *Dasein* is what overarches above all definitions. The method of suffixation to *Das Man* and *Dasein* is suggested in order to not only participate in a kind of ethno-phenomenological study, but also to specify the instances within *Das Man* and *Dasein* analyzed and to indicate what is specific not to these instances of *Das Man* and *Dasein* (no such thing as a 'specific instance' of either is possible), but what is specific to the suffixed: the Tagalog and the Bisaya, through which the *Das Man* manifests, in which the suffixed *Dasein* is thrown, and from which the *Dasein* emerges to its second thrownness. It is in the suffixed *Das Man* and *Dasein*, the struggle which the former manifests in temporality and historicity in which the latter must emerge from but has not done so fully, that this paper identifies to be the loci of potentiality: in which it can be inherited and transformed.

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