

## Rehearsing Inclusive Participation Through Fishery Stakeholder Workshops in the Philippines

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### Abstract

Participatory methods in ‘conservation for development’ projects regularly fail to live up to expectations of social and environmental change. Stakeholder workshops are an ubiquitous example that can reproduce rather than challenge inequality and exclusion. Technical tools used in workshops, like maps, games, and computer models, are criticised for unjustly privileging expert/scientific viewpoints over other perspectives. Iris Marion Young’s theory of communicative democracy is an insightful and robust framework to examine how people interact in the workshop ‘contact zone’, and how to bring workshops closer to participatory ideals. Young identifies four communication modes critical for inclusive participation: greeting, rhetoric, narrative, and argument. We apply her framework to a case study of fisheries stakeholder workshops in the Philippines, demonstrating its utility and cultural applicability. The workshops used a game-based computer modelling tool to structure discussions about coastal management. Qualitative analysis of video data shows how stakeholders signalled resistance, garnered sympathy, influenced outcomes, and established relationships through Young’s modes of communication. Based on this analysis, and using concepts from Philippine psychology, we conclude that workshops have potential as ‘rehearsal spaces’ for inclusive deliberation, particularly when they encourage improvisation and humour, rather than rote adherence to standardised activities.

**Keywords:** games, conservation for development, alternative livelihoods, community-based coastal resource management, participatory modelling, inclusive participation, Marion Young, communicative democracy, Philippines

### INTRODUCTION

In 2010, I (the first author) was on an island in the Philippines, in a room decorated with posters brandishing marine conservation messages. A senior ecologist was presenting to about 30 people in ‘Taglish’, typical among educated Filipinos. His slides showed a line graph with a downward sloping regression line.

For those familiar with interpreting such images, the meaning was clear: with fish biodiversity and coral cover plummeting, the local reefs were in a poor state – and declining.

Most attendees were fishers, with only primary school education, and likely did not have these skills. None exhibited signs of impatience recognisable to me, the sole Western observer, but nor did they show comprehension. When the ecologist finished, he returned to us, the assistants and apprentices. “See”, he said, “it is very important to give their information back to them. You must not just do your surveys and leave”. I admire his sentiment, effort, and execution – perhaps it is not so important if some things are lost in translation.

In our two days of workshoping with the fishers our communications tools also included a game, computer models, maps and paper-based activities, all including the message that

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there are no longer many fish in the sea. The game had been particularly promising in its persuasive capacity – I recall how a senior manager from one of the international development banks (IDBs) excitedly summarised its potential, saying “I see what will happen. They will play the game. Their fish catches will drop. They will realise they can earn more money working in other areas and they will leave the fishery. Then the ocean will recover and everyone will be better off.” This was, of course, exactly what we had planned, albeit not so explicitly. One fisherman asked: “you want us to stop fishing, don’t you? Why don’t you just come out and say it?” It’s a question the second author has also asked, concerned about how honest our dealings with the fishers were.

However, workshops are never just ‘message sent, message received’. At the end of each event, we asked fishers what they had learnt and what could help their depleted fisheries. One participant said fishers should be given assistance to buy more efficient fishing gear. Another said to remove access restrictions due to shipping lanes, so the fishers could harvest a larger area. Still another said we had taught them how to catch more fish. Finally, one used our invitation to imagine alternative livelihoods as an opportunity for comedy, suggesting “a beer house with girls”, to great mirth from all in earshot.

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In this vignette, disappointment and cynicism coexist with appreciation of how ‘stakeholders’ upended our clumsy, yet typical, outreach. It also captures the ways in which the power relations between researchers, government, and those we wish to persuade and regulate are ambivalent and reconstituted in every (interpersonal) encounter. Through our case study of fishery stakeholder workshops in the Philippines, this paper explores this clash between attempted persuasion and resistance, and demonstrates how workshops present opportunities for both challenging and entrenching inequities, injustice, and narratives about the causes and solutions to environmental degradation.

Although workshops are often overlooked as a principal site of inquiry (Park 2014), they are pervasive features of conservation for development projects (Green 2003). Workshops are usually organised by metropole actors, such as research institutions or non-government organisations (NGOs), who invite a limited range of satellite and metropole actors to participate in face to face activities and discussion around a particular topic. Critics of participation have identified how workshops can entrench conflict (von Essen et al. 2015), structurally exclude particular social groups from effectively participating (Durand et al. 2014), and promote false consensus and silence marginalised voices (Kothari 2005).

Workshops often use scientific tools to help frame discussions and ‘educate’ participants, including models, maps, and presentations. Such tools can embody the more general criticism levelled at conservation for development projects: they favour a technical, scientific interpretation of environmental problems, crowding out alternative explanations, and reinforcing power inequalities. In this way, tools provide a voice for science and rationality, a voice that

is difficult to argue with or challenge (Hoofd 2007). Indeed, critics of so-called ‘neoliberal conservation’,<sup>1</sup> tend to view the technical discourse encompassed in such tools as legitimising, enclosing or privatising common resources and excluding local people from their livelihoods and subsistence activities, while hiding the powerful players that sanction these solutions (as in the IDB employee of the opening vignette) (Büscher et al. 2012; Cooke et al. 2001).

These critiques pay little attention to the continuing power that resource users have over their commons, and tend to downplay any capacity for meaningful participation within hierarchies. This can lead to paralysis: where presumably the ideals of democratic inclusion are still valued, but there is no way of creating a useful encounter between dominant and marginalised groups. At the same time, ‘conservation for development’ projects, and the workshops they engender, continue apace. Scientists, conservation workers, and government officials, like local dwellers, have legitimate responsibilities for, and knowledge about, natural resources. We believe that “inclusionary conservation represents the politically most feasible and socially most just form of conservation possible” (Nygren 2004: 189) and that face-to-face encounters are critical for inclusion (Agarwal 2001). Therefore we must find an analytic lens that offers conceptual and practical tools for both understanding what happens in hierarchical encounters, and how to make them more inclusive.

Mary Louise Pratt’s (1991) concept of a ‘contact zone’ offers such a lens to understand the role and potential of workshops, without the intractability of participation critiques discussed above or erasing the power relationships and the impact of heterogeneity among ‘stakeholders’. Contact zones are “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt 1991, p33). By emphasising interactions (meeting of cultures) and conflict (clash/grapple), contact zones offer a way of interpreting ‘what happens’ in workshops as both a performance, and a possible reordering, of power and control. This means even when workshops are not explicitly for policy or decision-making, they are an important part of democratic processes, through offering (uneven) opportunities for deliberation and engagement inside a ‘contact zone’ (Parkins et al. 2005).

By understanding workshops as ‘contact zones’, we can analyse them as incompletely inclusive spaces for practising participatory communication. In this view, workshops are not simply benign or coercive, but they do play important roles in negotiating how to ‘do’ participation, and in defining problems and acceptable solutions (Park 2014).

Pratt’s ‘contact zones’ characterise participatory workshops as spaces of potential disruption, but the concept offers little more in the way of understanding the specific norms of communication that maintain hierarchical interactions, or how dominant discourses can be upset by marginalised players. As indicated by the introductory vignette, and predicted by the critiques outlined above, in our workshops most activities

reflected the voices of a group of government representatives and scientists, rather than fishers. These dominant views on plausible and preferred solutions, in this case for depleted subsistence fisheries, remained largely unchallenged, at least superficially. Iris Marion Young (2002) argues this is ‘internal exclusion’ – where simply being present is not enough to ensure meaningful participation. She further suggests that this exclusion is at least partially a function of how ‘argument’ – rational, dispassionate persuasion – is unjustly privileged in deliberative processes.

Young argues that inclusive communication must pay attention to three further modes of communication: greeting, rhetoric, and narrative (see Table 1). With this, Young displaces rational argument (including positivist science), and emphasises the complementary importance of symbolic (greeting), emotional (rhetoric), and story-based (narrative) communication (Young 2002). Through accepting, encouraging, and listening to these other modes we can answer Pratt’s call for “ground rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy” (Pratt 1991: 6). The ground rules begin with greeting: acknowledging the shared humanity of those sharing a contact zone, in both ceremonial and ongoing ways. Argument, as “articulate, dispassionate and orderly” (Young 2002: 6-7) communication, helps persuade and inform but tends to be the voice of the powerful, as mentioned. Narrative, in contrast, uses retelling

personal or collective experiences to illustrate alternative perspectives and establish common ground. Finally, rhetoric includes the emotional, aesthetic, and symbolic means of communication that accompanies all interactions.

Young’s framework, known as her theory of communicative democracy, helps us provide a critical voice, that nevertheless offers hope for imperfect improvement, complementing Pratt’s call to make contact zones the “best site of learning [they] can be” (Pratt 1991: 6). It is a tool for deconstructing what ‘happens’ in workshops, by examining interactions at a micro-scale and looking for evidence of these alternative modes of communications to “pluralize (and) relativise hegemonic discourse” (Young 2002: 7) as well as orientating us to look for how to better meet the ideals of inclusive communication. Where other authors have used and expanded on Young’s insights for understanding exclusion (Durand et al. 2014; Parkins et al. 2005; Peterson 2011), our focus is on how we can activate her framework to search for and expand moments of inclusion. We want to acknowledge injustices, but also look for openings to rectify these, through what Young calls “possibilities glimmering” (2002: 10).

This orientation towards the ever-present potential of reconfiguring hierarchies through engagement and dialogue is strengthened through insights from Philippine psychology

**Table 1**  
*Identifying Young’s (2002) communication modes*

Communication mode (all quotes from Young 2002, page numbers in brackets)	Rhetorical characteristics	What we looked for in the data	Filipino resonance
<b>Greeting</b> “Greeting, or... public acknowledgement, is ... where a subject directly recognizes the subjectivity of others” (53)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Universal/ consensual language</li> <li>- Appeals to sameness (not difference)</li> <li>- Formality in one-to-many addresses and ceremonial interactions and informality in ad-hoc one-to-one interactions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explicit acknowledgement of each other in speech and body language</li> <li>Who spoke to whom?</li> <li>Second person statements (absence indicated by third person statements)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Kumustahan</b> A central aspect of Filipino etiquette, and associated with ethical and civil engagement with research subjects (Enriquez, 1990; Fernandez, 2002). <b>Pakikitungo</b> is a polite, transactional interaction you have with outsiders, as classified in Filipino research methods (Santiago and Enriquez 1976 in Pe-Pua, 2006)</p>
<b>Narrative</b> - Demonstrate, describe and justify a point of view - “Reveal...values, priorities and cultural meanings” (75) - “Relate a sense of wrong” (72)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First person statements</li> <li>- Vision/ imagination/ metaphor/ analogy</li> <li>- Character</li> <li>- Normative claims</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Descriptions of life histories</li> <li>- Justifications for decisions made</li> <li>- Details of customs, habits or experiences</li> </ul>	<p><b>Pakikipagkwentuhan</b> Aside from lay meanings, this is a key Filipino research method, referring to a gentle, reciprocal exchange of stories. (Pe-Pua, 2006; Enriquez, 1990) <b>Kasaysayan</b> is also a Filipino method, meaning extracting the meaning, sense, or relevance of happenings for a particular group (Mendoza, 2007)</p>
<b>Argument</b> “The making of assertions and proposals and providing reasons for them that they claim ought to be acceptable to others...” (p56)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Articulate</li> <li>- Dispassionate</li> <li>- Orderly</li> <li>- Persuasive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assertions</li> <li>- Proposals</li> <li>- Logic and reasoning</li> <li>- Causal connections</li> </ul>	<p><b>Pangangatwiran</b> Logical, scientific and rational argument, commonly used in academic Filipino (Barrios, 2012)</p>
<b>Rhetoric</b> “Rhetoric refers to the way claims and reasons are stated... include(d) in this category (are) the affective dimensions of communication” (p7)	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jokes, sarcasm, irony</li> <li>- Body language</li> <li>- Emotions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sayusay</b> The way things are said, used in Filipino linguistics and literature studies (Atienza, 2014)</p>

(*Sikolohiyang Pilipino*). Philippine psychology is a branch of “passionate and emotive” indigenous studies unique to the Philippines (Mendoza 2007: 4), a particularly appropriate source to deepen understanding of participatory projects held in that country. Maggay (2001) argues Filipinos have relational understandings of power and obligation, contested and created through each interaction, making workshop contact zones important sites of potential reconfiguration. Critically for our case study, Young’s Western communication categories find cognates in Filipino language and social theory, and in Filipino’s preferred communication modes (insofar as these can be generalised, see Table 1). Maggay (2001: 112-13) writes “[Filipinos] prefer concrete imagery, ...poetic utterances, rhetorical improvisations” over “abstraction, impersonality... and technical precision”. In turn, Filipino concepts of shared responsibility to humanity (particularly to those you know personally), the relational power of story exchange, and the central importance of the emotional content of speech enrich Young’s categories, and expose the tenuous hold that rational argument has in controlling a discourse, even where power disparities are marked.

This paper applies Young’s framework, grounded in Filipino understandings, to a series of workshops in the Philippines, using it to: 1) interrogate how participants interacted; and 2) distil lessons for improving workshops. First, we outline the Philippines case study. Data collection and analysis are then described, with further justification for applying Young’s ideas in the post-colonial context of the Philippines. Then we apply each element of Young’s framework to observed workshop interactions, teasing out the implications for inclusive participation. We conclude by offering some suggestions about what our findings imply for both critical analysis and workshop design.

### Case study

Our case study is an ecosystem-based management (EBM) tool demonstration project funded by a US-based foundation, but implemented largely by Filipino scientists and facilitators. EBM is a ‘scientific’ approach that nevertheless has a focus on integrating social and conservation values into environmental decision-making. Funds were granted to demonstrate tools and thus hopefully improve uptake of the freely available EBM tools on the internet. Our project demonstrated ReefGame, a computer-assisted board game. The game encourages fishery stakeholders to explore alternative livelihoods and marine conservation options, through scenario-based game rounds. It is supported by an underlying computer model that calculates catches, income, and environmental change (for more details, see Cleland 2017).

In the Philippines, local government units (LGUs) manage marine resources out to 15km at sea, which encompasses the fishing grounds of the approximately one million small-scale fishers. Most of these fisheries are considered overfished (Muallil et al. 2011). In response to declining catches and reef health, communities and local governments have declared

many thousands of small-scale ‘community’ marine protected areas (MPAs) since the 1970s. However, their overall effect on catches has been negligible, attributed to size, enforcement problems, and overall fishing pressure (Arceo et al. 2013). LGUs, often working with NGOs continue to implement ‘coastal management’, often in the form of MPAs, and/or environmental education; alongside alternative livelihood projects. Despite these interventions; overfishing, ecosystem degradation, and poverty in small-scale fisheries continues to climb, along with the number of fishers (Teh et al. 2013).

These characteristics hold true for the EBM project’s six sites in the Philippines, where two-day workshops were held in 2009-10 (see Figure 1, and for more site-specific details see Cleland 2017). Whilst the sites were chosen for having a range of socio-economic characteristics and differing access to livelihoods for local fishers, analysis showed far more intra-workshop than inter-workshop variation in interaction patterns, and this is the focus here.

At the workshops, between running ReefGame over four mini-sessions, facilitators spoke about the status of local fisheries and ran other group activities. Participants included local fishers, LGU and provincial environmental officers, volunteer coast guards, industry representatives (e.g. tourism/aquaculture), and environmental NGO workers. Project staff invited the LGU, who invited all other participants. The impact of this is explored further below. Each workshop had ~30-40 participants, comprising about 50% fishers, and around five people from every other group. They were ‘participatory’ in the sense that attendees played the game, rather than simply



**Figure 1**  
*Workshop locations*



hearing a lecture on what it was and how to use it, but the format and running of the workshops was not open for negotiation.

## METHODOLOGY

### Data collection and sampling

Four of the six workshops were videotaped, while the rest were observed with detailed note-taking. The first author ran the ReefGame computer model during sessions, as the game co-designer. In addition, she has participated in approximately 20 workshops held for other, similar projects. This provided additional context for ‘how’ these events typically take place in the Philippines, without forming part of the substantive data.

The amount of data, including ~200 hours of video, necessitated a pragmatic yet meaningful analysis strategy. We chose what to analyse in three ways: by activity, nodal moments, and unusual voices, explained in turn below. The second author then selectively transcribed/translated the videos in Transana (video analysis software), following these criteria.

Firstly, we concentrated on ReefGame and debriefing sessions. The game provided the most unstructured and lengthy opportunities for participant interaction. Most other activities had just one person talking (e.g. presentations) or broke participants up into their interest groups (fisher, NGO worker, etc). Further, the game was presented across four sessions, showing how group dynamics developed over the two days, and offered clear potential for observing all Young’s communication modes. Through offering a playful space, we had hoped to at least partially disrupt the one-way information flow characteristic of many workshops.

Secondly, eight project staff nominated ‘nodal moments’ (Henry 2012) of heightened emotion, tension or conflict, for each workshop. Guided by this, we identified instances where participants expressed opinions that were either explicitly or implicitly in conflict (per Pratt 1991), including when facilitators felt uncomfortable or disappointed with participant interactions. This follows recent ethnographic work highlighting the importance of dissonance in researchers to identify cultural and social structures underpinning social behaviour (Trigger et al. 2012).

Finally, with respect to unusual voices, we examined instances where fishers’ voices were dominant in conversations. These mark an exception to the usual balance in these workshops, and all others observed, as the voices of facilitators and government representatives tend to dominate, and fishers become “passive participants” (Agarwal 2001: 1628).

This data analysis process generated approximately 50 ‘scenes’, which were further analysed in depth for evidence of Young’s modes – greeting, rhetoric, narrative, and argument.

### Analysis

Instead of coding, we used detailed transcription notation, analytic memos, and vignette writing to link the action and dialogue of the scenes to each concept (Saldaña 2015). Table 1

explains each mode, and how they were identified. As rhetoric always accompanies the other modes (being style not content), it appears as a column as well as a row. The final column details how Young’s modes map onto Filipino concepts.

### Scope/limitations

We examine only the interactions that took place inside the workshops, guided by a sequential focus on each of Young’s communication modes. This results in a certain loss of context, as we concentrated on similarities/differences across workshops rather than specific characteristics of each site, and how that impacted results.

Further, as discussed extensively by Young herself and others (Agarwal 2001; Peterson 2011), external exclusion is a significant ongoing issue in participatory forums for conservation across the globe, and our project was no exception. Women fishers were almost entirely excluded. Similarly, despite direct instructions to the contrary, LGUs mostly invited fishers they had previous interactions with. The role of workshops in preserving episodic relationships formed through ‘events’ such as workshops is discussed further under ‘Greeting’. Prior contact may have made fishers more likely to speak up, although, as introduced, this was not universal. Indeed, as we shall see, resistance was overall as common as capitulation and commitment to the authoritative voices of scientists and government representatives (Braithwaite 2009). No less significantly, while industry members were invited (e.g. tourism/shipping), they tended to send representatives from their philanthropic arms, rather than those more likely to play roles in managing industrial impacts on the fishery (e.g. through pollution, employment, and access restrictions). These exclusions are not exceptional, rather they point to the continuing need for active attention to whose voices even have a chance to be heard, or who is considered the site of the problem. They are, however, not the focus here.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We now examine each of Young’s modes – greeting, argument, narrative, and rhetoric - in turn, paying attention to how and when they were deployed in the workshops.

### Greeting

If nothing else, workshops offer extended face-to-face time, with numerous opportunities for explicitly recognising “the subjectivity of others” (Young 2002: 53). We give examples and then consider where greeting did not meet expectations. Finally, we integrate Young’s conception of greeting with the Filipino cultural concept of *pakikipagkapwa* (shared humanity) (Enriquez 1990), and identify workshops as opportunities for cultivating this sensibility.

### Face-to-face acknowledgement

Workshops provide many formal and informal moments for mutual acknowledgement. From the beginning, following

Filipino custom, our workshops dedicated a good hour to *kumustahan* (greeting). Participants arrived and registered, while being greeted individually by project staff. Staff then conducted a general welcome, and each participant stood up and introduced themselves. Group activities then give multiple chances to solidify existing relationships and create new ones. In particular, the centrality of sharing food to bonding and community-making in Filipino culture and the requirement to have five meals/day multiplies the times in which people must encounter each other one-on-one – by waiting in line, sitting beside each other, making small talk and having eye contact.

Closing ceremonies offer a final formal opportunity for mutual acknowledgment. In the Philippines, each person is called to the front to receive a handshake and an attendance certificate. The certificate acts as both material gesture of appreciation for people's time and a symbolic reminder of the status conferred by being an invited participant to a formal, catered event. As the final interaction, closing ceremonies form part of the preparatory ground for future interactions and mutual commitments, extending the workshop's potential impact beyond its temporal existence.

### **Failures of greeting**

Critics accuse Young of “placing unreasonably high expectations” on what greeting can achieve (Melton 2009: 177). Young herself (2002) points to how ceremonial interactions can be insincere, superficial, and pro forma, and how inclusion and recognition are often not maintained throughout face-to-face interactions and beyond. Recognising where acknowledgment does not occur helps avoid overstating its role and power.

One signifier of ‘greeting failure’ is where subordinate groups are referred to in the third person (Young 2002). Conservation for development projects consistently establish fishers as the target of interventions: they are identified as ‘the problem’ in need of ‘fixing’, in a conversation not necessarily involving them (Peterson 2011). LGU representatives often remarked on fishers’ behaviour to each other and facilitators, rather than to the fishers themselves. For example, an LGU worker, mid-game: “From what I see, they will keep fishing until they die.” Similarly, in debriefs, LGU participants tended to emphasise how the game educated the fishers (“they learned”), rather than recognising any learning for themselves.

Further, as already introduced, workshops had marked asymmetry in interactions, in terms of who was empowered to direct comments and questions to whom, and whether those comments were responded to. When addressed as a group, fishers received judgments (about their lack of skill as fishers, or their stubbornness in continuing fishing) and rhetorical questions (for example, what were they going to do about the worsening environmental status), to which answers were often not expected nor forthcoming. Fishers initiated interactions far less, usually to ask procedural questions like “are we playing another round?” However, when facilitators addressed fishers one-on-one, using their names, a more equal verbal exchange would take place. This observation underscores the importance

of individual-specific acknowledgement and greeting, rather than vague, group-level interactions, in establishing trust and dialogue between unequal groups.

### ***Pakikipagkapwa: vulnerability, obligation, and a shared humanity***

A final aspect of Young's conception of greeting that resonates particularly strongly in the Philippines context, is that of the “unavoidable claim” on the other (Young 2002). Recognising shared humanity in face to face interaction is cognate to a key concept in Philippine psychology *pakikipagkapwa* or ‘shared identity’ (Pe-Pua 2006), and has two sides: vulnerability and obligation. The calling upon of an interpersonal relationship, especially between one who has (*meron*) and one who lacks (*kulang*), creates a moral claim of responsibility for the wellbeing of the disadvantaged other (Ransan-Cooper 2015). In this way, workshop invitations, here handled by LGUs, can act as recognition for past support as well as a promissory note for future benefits, should other projects choose the locale for their activities. In this way relationships are both created and preserved through invitations to, and participation in, workshops.

Fishers and LGU representatives explicitly referred to the potential conferred material and monetary advantages of creating relationships with externally sponsored project staff. Comments about the possibility of securing jobs and resources from ‘foundations’ and ‘NGOs’ were common. Fishers signalled allegiance by wearing branded clothing from international environmental NGOs – a kind of unspoken greeting about anticipated shared values, and evidence of (minor) material benefits of having been involved in past projects. These fishers’ overall (but not universal) greater enthusiasm for conservation lead us to dub them the ‘converted fishers’, discussed further below.

The flip side of greeting as shared recognition of humanity is the vulnerability inherent in bringing your body into a shared space. Here, one may compensate for vulnerability by deliberately adopting the values of a more powerful group. Fernandez (2002) points to the violence of Philippine's thrice-colonised past as a key to the Filipino's trademark hospitality and friendliness, spoken of in the Philippine psychology literature as *pakikisama* (“getting along” (Maggay 2001: 114)). Here, greeting risks merely being an opportunity for a weaker party to signal ‘I'm not a threat’ instead of genuinely establishing a contact zone where different communication modes, as well as different values, are welcomed and respected. Overall, the deference shown to facilitators and government representatives tends to suggest that the former was likely occurring in the workshops, at least sometimes.

However, the workshops did offer repeated moments for both fishers and their advocates to remind those taking decisions affecting fishers to consult them directly. One facilitator continuously emphasised obtaining the fishers’ permission for planned fishing restrictions during the game. Sometimes her requests were ignored, other times half-hearted acquiescence

or silence from the fishers was enough for government officials to proceed. Nevertheless, this is the first example of workshops as rehearsal spaces for practising interactions: each moment like this is an opportunity for fishers' agency to be recognised and power relationships to be reconfigured.

In this way, fishers and other participants alike are reminded that first comes greeting – saying to one another 'I am here' and 'I see you' (Young 2002), and then comes negotiation and dialogue. But without this first step, progress is unlikely. Failures of greeting in the workshop point to further work being needed to encourage and expand opportunities for one-on-one acknowledgement and moments of shared humanity, aside from any specific planned activities.

## **Argument**

The central arguments of the workshop were the propositions that 1) small-scale fisheries are key to the poverty/conservation problem; and 2) alternative (non-fishing) livelihoods and MPAs will lead to improved biodiversity and increased economic prosperity, both in and outside the fishery – the win-win argument. This "orderly, dispassionate and articulate" (Young 2002: 7) argument was upheld by the more powerful players – project staff, government and NGO representatives – as well as the framing and motivation of both the game itself and other workshop activities. The win-win argument is underpinned by a global, conservation science discourse, reinforcing its largely unquestioned dominance. A minority of fishers agreed but tended to violate argument norms and so remained marginalised. Overall, however, fishers were largely indifferent to the win-win argument, so it is questionable how much impact it has outside the contact zone.

### ***The win-win argument: who and what***

Project staff supported the win-win argument in several ways. Staff presentations outside game sessions emphasised overfishing and introduced policy ideas about reducing fishing pressure. In 'expert talks' during the game project, scientists would explain how players had caused reef degradation through overfishing. Further, the lapel microphones given to facilitators to assist recording conversations reinforced the overall dominance of these voices. Although unintended, facilitators often drowned out the fishers' muttered side conversations, which were generally not overly supportive or encouraging of either MPAs or other means of reducing fishing pressure. How these side conversations act to refute the win-win argument will be taken up further below.

The exclusionary power of argument not only rests in *who* can skilfully argue, but also in *who* shapes the terms of the arguments being made. In this way, the game seamlessly set up and privileged the win-win argument, as it made alternative livelihoods an easy and attractive option for players, while presenting it as a neutral 'scientific' tool. The game, then, plays the role of an anonymous, one-sided argument, whose authority is not bodily present to question or challenge. This is perhaps of particular significance in the Philippines, where

all things 'science' are explicitly linked in public discourse with ideas of modernity, progress, and responsible citizenry (Anderson 2007).

NGO and LGU participants also made the win-win argument at regular intervals, and the content was largely the same across all workshops. A typical example is the following:

NGO: "But the catch will improve because there'll be many coast guards (guarding the MPA)...Our reefs will improve"

LGU: "Destruction will decrease, tourism will increase."

These claims verbalise the logic behind conservation for development projects: win-win for both marine conservation and human wellbeing, ignoring that these expectations are frequently not met and benefits are often inequitably distributed (Chaigneau et al. 2016). Across sites the MPA-centred conservation discourse was very similar, despite aforementioned differences in socio-economic contexts. As argued by Gray and colleagues (2014), MPAs have become the 'primary tool' of global conservation actors to pursue marine conservation. As established in the introduction, the Philippines has played a long and central role in gathering 'evidence' for MPAs, largely through 'community-based natural resource management' projects that have established small-scale MPAs throughout the country (Muallil et al. 2011). Apparently exemplary outcomes for fisheries and conservation, like those reported on Apo Island, become part of the global logic supporting MPAs (Arceo et al. 2013). These arguments are reiterated across scales, from global conferences to these local workshops. What is taken up and repeated by local intermediaries, such as the NGO and LGU representatives here, then carries the weight not only of local elites, but also of a global network of conservation authorities.

This does not, however, make MPAs 'merely' a tool to exclude small-scale fishers in a process of privatising the commons, although that also occurs (Cabral et al. 2011). Rather, as Grey et al (2014) argue, the MPA discourse is continually negotiated and adapted to fit local realities. We now turn to how fishers adopted, adapted, and resisted the win-win argument.

### ***Disorderly, inarticulate, passionate arguments?***

Some of the fishers vocally supported MPAs. These tended to be the 'converted' fishers, who were flagged earlier as wearing conservation branding. However, they did tend to violate argument norms, and were not often supported by other participants. Each workshop had 2-3 fishers that fit this description. These participants would mix calls to establish sanctuaries with a range of different issues, for example, urging "organising" to form collectives to petition the government about conservation. These demands were accompanied by passionate exclaiming about the moral worth and importance of such measures, but certain confusion about who would be responsible, or how it would come about. In general, these commentaries received similar reception to those of the 'articulate and orderly' arguments discussed above: silence and dismissal by most.



When people do not follow the norm of articulateness, internal exclusion often follows. For example, a fisher gave a long speech involving various assertions, including that a particular ethnic group killed all the coral, and a long description of how he had learned that coral could be replanted. When transcribing, the second author wrote: *Sorry to say this, but [the fisher] goes on at great length, but in a very circular manner*, expressing our joint frustration in trying to follow the ‘sense’ of what was being said. When someone’s meaning is not easily accessed by those facilitating, recording, and reporting, their perspective is lost. As it happened, a facilitator responded by explaining artificial reef restoration, and then the workshop broke for lunch. Awareness of argument norms, and patience with their violation, may have resulted in greater mutual understanding at this moment. Overall, however, these examples demonstrate how attempting to argue, without being orderly, articulate and dispassionate, tends to result in internal exclusion of marginalised participants in workshops.

### ***But was it convincing?***

Argument, as the rational, logical stance of experts, does not hold universal weight. Indeed, non-experts (everyone else) tend to dismiss argument as irrelevant to their particular contexts and situations (Brown 2004). Further, whilst an unwillingness or inability to ‘argue’ may mean not influencing discussions inside a contact zone, it may have limited material impact outside that space. If fishers encroach on MPAs and ignore encouragement to leave fishing in ‘real life’, then they cannot be easily or efficiently controlled by officials – their numbers are too great and their activities too dispersed (Fabinyi 2012). Their indifference to the win-win argument is critical.

In all the workshops fishers did resist the top-down MPA argument, sometimes actively, sometimes passively. In four of the six workshops, most fishers were silent on the LGU representatives’ unilateral implementation of no-take zones, even as facilitators asked them repeatedly to voice either support or dissent. As noted by Jackson (2012), silence can be used strategically, to mark an unwillingness to participate, or a refusal to join in on the grounds offered. Participants’ refusal to voice an opinion should therefore not be taken as capitulation, but rather as a marker of resistance.

In the other workshops resistance played out more actively. In one, the idea of an effective MPA was laughed at, with participants claiming nepotism, corruption, and bribery would negate all conservation efforts. In another, fishers took the temporary absence of their LGU representative as an opportunity to wrest control, raising (play) money amongst themselves to pay for buoys to mark an MPA where they would have exclusive access to the boundaries reportedly rich in fish. This latter example demonstrates that it may not be the idea of a protected area that is resisted, but rather *who* gets to decide, on what grounds.

Further, the workshop ‘learnings’ referred to in the opening vignette (access to better gear, the need to harvest a larger area, and ‘how to catch more fish’) refuted the LGU/scientist arguments for restricting access to the fishery. Instead, they

were calls to the government and other better-resourced participants to support the fishers’ right to their livelihood.

And, so, the persuasive powers of rational argument did not play out even within the workshop contact zone. As Green (2009) argues, people participate in workshops as a performance of citizenship, and as a marker of their right to access resources, but tend to refuse to take on responsibility they believe lies elsewhere. This strategic deflection of blame and responsibility is taken up further below.

Overall, then, arguments were relatively one-sided, and showed the kind of exclusionary tendencies predicted by Young (2002). However, they did not have the persuasive power that may be first assumed. The fishers dismissed and mediated the win-win argument through their understandings about their right to access and benefit from their coastal resources. How fishers further disarmed these arguments through rhetoric and narrative is the subject of the next two sections.

### **Narrative**

Stories help bridge and explain divides in norms and understanding, while challenging the underlying assumptions of the dominant arguments described above. The difference between argument and narrative here lies in semantics. Where an argument would be a declaration of an overall stance, for example ‘alternative livelihoods are not viable or attractive options for us’; story is using personal experiences to let the listener draw their own conclusion. Fishers commonly used the latter mode to explain their rejection of alternative livelihoods. At the same time, they wove additional narratives that deflected blame for overfishing and environmental degradation; claimed morality of their own practices; and established their need for material and other resources. Fabinyi (2012) has called this combination the “discourse of the poor moral fisher”, highlighting how legality, morality, and poverty are intertwined in an identity that is both blameless and deserving of help. This story makes its claim on others, through appeals to values of equity, justice, and the ‘right to survive’ (Blanc-Szanton 1972). Finally, improvised stories through game-play lent opportunities to further undermine the MPA/alternative livelihood arguments, incorporating different ideas about whose behaviour should be the target of external interventions.

### ***Rejecting alternative livelihoods***

Fishers rejected the argument that alternative livelihoods were available and accessible with personal anecdotes. For example, in a discussion about the availability and remuneration of different jobs, a fisher exclaims: ‘My child, just join a poultry business. You can go and clean up the poo there.’ The statement has its fair share of both pathos and ridicule: the implied comparison here between cleaning chicken manure for a pittance in someone else’s business and the relative freedom and fresh air of fishing on the open ocean is clear. In another area, fishers told facilitators that the local factory did not employ ‘old’ people like them, and that they had been rejected



for any roles past the construction phase. They also pointed out that low catches and associated poverty was not only connected with overfishing, but also with structural exclusion from local fishing grounds, by the very industries that were refusing to employ them.

### ***Claiming morality and establishing need***

As discussed, one of the workshops' central arguments was that small-scale fishers have a role to play in reducing overfishing and coral reef degradation. However, fishers commonly provide the counter narrative that 'illegal' gear is to blame, while their legal gear cannot and does not cause damage. Fishers reiterated this through gameplay. ReefGame has 'illegal fishers', automated entities in the game's supporting computer model, originally intended to elicit discussion around enforcement without accusing individuals of illegal practises. However, in the workshops they became scapegoats for poor economic and environmental results. Participants also conflated 'illegal' with anyone 'not from here' (*'di taga-rito*), where 'from here' is a flexible and evolving concept, which shifts with migration patterns, economic fortunes, political alliances, and kin ties (Fabinyi 2012). Despite facilitators' earlier normative commitment to trying to 'transmit' a feeling of collective responsibility for overfishing, during gameplay they tended to reinforce the 'blamelessness' story, repeating the cry of "they (the illegal fishers) are not from here" and encouraging fishers to work out ways of stopping 'them' from encroaching. In this way, fishers managed to recruit facilitators to their perspective, through reinforcing their story: marine degradation was not their fault.

Blaming 'illegal fishers' for environmental problems is central to the fishers' self-narrative as 'good'. Fishers also communicated the close association of their own livelihoods with moral behaviour through references to 'other' ways that they could be earning money that would not measure up to the moral standards they expect of themselves. This was most often done through reference to either money-lending or drug trafficking, both professions seen as both inherently morally questionable and seeking to profit from the hard lives of the poor. They did this through hypothetical statements such as "(if) we go into drugs just once, ah, (we'll be) millionaires." In choosing to eschew 'dirty money', fishers were reminding facilitators that any 'alternative livelihoods' may not be as benign as their current one. The idea of giving up fishing was regularly presented as involving great personal sacrifice – both in the Christian sense (for the good of the collective, to become a coast guard to watch over the fishery, for example), and as personal moral compromise (to do something that was less ethical than legal fishing).

Closely related to this moral discourse, is the small-scale fishers' perpetual poverty, and recurring need to ask for material support for basic survival. As argued by Cannell (1999: 228), the Filipino poor must "spend a great deal of time" persuading others they deserve help. The intertwining of the fishers' moral livelihood with persistent poverty becomes part of this story. Within the workshops, fishers did not tend to

make direct appeals. Rather, the fact of their 'game' poverty, described as being in debt or bankrupt, was the subject of constant commentary. The examples above of how alternative livelihoods were not accessible, how fishers are excluded from their fishing grounds, and how they are not responsible for falling catches, all become part of a story which has only one possible conclusion: the fishers need help from those with more power and resources – all other participants. The workshops, then, are an opportunity for the fishers to relate this story to people they do not normally encounter, establishing at least a temporary relationship, in which persuasion and recognition of obligation may occur.

Not all the fishers' stories implied deficits. Rather, resilience, optimism and inventiveness in the face of scarcity were also consistent themes. Luck is an ever-present possibility in a life of fishing – and a 'jackpot' catch can up-end the economic hierarchy, if only temporarily (Mangahas 2004). As one player said: "[The fishery] won't go under... tomorrow's a new day". Showing less hope and more resigned determination, after several rounds of poor catches, another fisher opted out of the game entirely, stating he would "just stay home and eat cassava". Cassava is a low-status, but easy-to-grow carbohydrate for poor families. The statement represents the fishers' ability to survive with their skills and resources at hand and rejecting the rules of the game we offered. We take up this alternative self-presentation further in the next section.

### ***Going off-script***

Facilitators used the game structure as a chance to improvise, telling stories that tapped into culturally salient ideas of government complicity in bribery and corruption, and personal resilience and entrepreneurship. These alternative stories extend and give nuance to the competing tropes of the destructive/moral fisher. Other participants enthusiastically engaged with, and elaborated on, these 'off-script' moments, creating a collective story to challenge and add local colour and complexity to the win-win argument discussed earlier.

Nepotism, bribery, and corruption came up consistently across workshops. This is illustrated particularly well on the occasion the facilitator took the capture of an 'illegal fisher' as an opportunity to probe the local process for dealing with encroachers on fishing grounds. Spontaneously taking on the role of 'mayor', the facilitator declared an election. She further announced that she's open to leniency because it might give her a boost in the polling booths. Chuckles followed; tellingly, no participants showed signs of shock or disbelief. Fishers joined in, saying: yes, the mayor is open to persuasion, especially for first offenders, especially for people from big families with lots of registered voters (paraphrased). The LGU representative concurred initially, laughing and confirming that (voting) first offenders may well be able to 'get away' with not paying a fine. Banter and exchange continued, but some fishers also began to question the fairness of such secret deals. At this moment, the LGU representative started to backtrack, saying "maybe you'll get the wrong impression. It's not like that just because there is an election. The mayor

doesn't give special consideration to those types". The fishers fell silent: none offered dissent (or assent), but the story lost traction. Soon after, a break was called and the conversation was lost. The example demonstrates how the game facilitated broaching a challenging topic (corruption), but also how that this discussion does not necessarily lead to meaningful change. It stands as tantalising evidence of the necessity, difficulty, and means of broaching difficult topics – and how stories can point to alternative configurations of who is the source of problems in Filipino coastal communities – but not how to broker a resolution.

In another example, the facilitator decided that the fishers had done 'too well' and were getting complacent. She told them that their 'children' (who function in the game as a way of looking at household livelihood diversity) had 'died' in an epidemic. The reaction was instant: mock wails, and loud recriminations from the fishers. Almost immediately someone suggested that they should set up a funeral parlour. In previous rounds the fishers had been setting up micro-businesses (including the 'beer house with girls' mentioned in the opening vignette). Several players now clubbed together and asked if they could open a parlour together. It is black comedy, but one that has important implications for the way the fishers self-present in mixed company. Here, instead of presenting the poor, moral fisher, object of pity, and deserving of charity, the fishers presented a very different character, one who is wily and resourceful even in the face of great challenges.

These contrasting examples offer insight into how paying attention to Young's communication modes helps understand workshop interactions. By embellishing the facilitator's suggestions with details and jokes, fishers endorsed and adopted her stories, confirming their cultural salience, alongside their own stories of rights to livelihood, ethical behaviour, and collective responsibility. This is an advantage that game play has that other activities may not. The same facilitator claimed participation was much higher in game sessions than what she observed in more 'usual' workshop activities, where you often got "blank faces". Her willingness and ability to go 'off-script' also encouraged an unruliness, creating discussions that are much more difficult in more controlled activities.

As Green (2003) points out, unexpected outcomes from workshops become increasingly less likely the more standardised the activity. Opportunities for exchanging stories - or in Filipino terms, for explaining significance and relevance across different groups (*kasaysayan*) (Mendoza 2007) - demonstrate how marginalised groups mediate and adapt the stories of the powerful to meet their own needs (Sundberg 2006). However, without a means of furthering the discussion beyond the workshop contact zone, these stand as moments of unrealised potential, rather than examples of democratic deliberation and resolution.

### **Rhetoric**

Throughout this paper we have called attention to the rhetorical attributes of the different modes of communication presented. Through greeting, we argued that friendly, superficial

exchanges help establish the recognition and obligations of a common humanity among participants, setting up the possibilities for relationships extending beyond the workshops themselves. In argument, we concluded the fishers' silence and withdrawal was an important message of resistance and dissent. Under narrative, 'serious' issues like corruption were canvassed through jokes and laughter, if not resolved.

Joking about the 'ugly' side of life, poverty, inequality, and the immoral behaviour of those with both power and resources, is a constant companion in the Philippines (Cannell 1999). In this sense, the workshop contact zone offered a chance to make those jokes in the hearing of at least some of those to whom admonishments and claims are directed. One of the rhetorical functions of joking and ridicule, after all, is drawing attention to undesirable practices (Grabosky 2016). The fact that certain discussions were shut down with the refrain "it's just a game" suggests that the link between 'calling out' and efficacious reform is uncertain, but public discussion at least lets those in authority know that they are being watched.

Finally, Young's call to pay attention to how rhetoric provokes emotion drew us to reflect on our own responses to participants' communication modes. Where they were lively, we were pleased: the workshops were serving their purpose of 'bringing people together'. When they were silent, we felt frustrated and disappointed. Note that the critical mass of fishers, versus other participants, meant that their emotional reactions were dominant in a way their voices rarely were. This shows how workshop contact zones can become "outbursts of emotional labour" and "projections of desire and hope" (Packendorff et al. 2014), rather than spaces of an exclusionary, rational discourse. If we privilege workshops' role in forging emotional connections among different groups of people rather than imposing particular understandings of the world – which, as we have seen, is provisional and uneven at best – then they cease to be mere vehicles for dominant and exclusionary conservation narratives. Whilst the workshop contact zone is temporary, and offers limited ability to solve long-term problems, relationships forged through episodic encounters could provide the seedbank for collective action and learning.

### **CONCLUSION**

This article began with a vignette that attempted to capture the messy, often disappointing, experiences of participating in stakeholder workshops. Our hope was the story would resonate with others who had similar experiences, and who are looking for fruitful methods to both describe these experiences and explore means of improving them. Understanding workshops as 'contact zones' gave us an avenue to unpack the uneven performance of both workshops and the tools used in them, in a way that could grapple with the power disparities and frustrations but also the "mutual understanding, ... new wisdom. ... [and] joys" (Pratt 1991: 6).

Young's aspirational framework, then, helps us to delve deeper into workshop micro-interactions, and why these often fall short of participatory ideals of inclusion and justice, while

expanding opportunities to see ambiguities, compromises, and resistance. We augmented her theory of communicative democracy with insights from Philippine psychology's sensitivity to the cultural context, and the contingent and partial nature of power relationships. Applied to our case study, we saw how although fishers' voices were often dominated by the rational arguments of other participants, these arguments did not have the discursive or practical power one may first assume.

Instead, analysing the other communication modes revealed how the fishers' mediated the conservation win-win narrative. This points to how 'unruly' activities, like games, can disturb attempts to create consensus, albeit in temporary and contingent ways, while helping participants practise self-representation that moves beyond the trope of the 'poor, moral fisher'. The fishers and facilitators wove collective stories that told of structural exclusion, blocked opportunities, and resilience in the face of oppression that deflected blame from the fishers for the poor state of the fishery. Instead, responsibility was framed collectively, with the fishers as ethical and capable citizens, who could nevertheless benefit from a helping hand from better-resourced others. Along with stories, rhetorical devices, including both laughter and silence were signals of resistance. Jokes also helped introduce usually taboo topics, and negate the terms of the arguments presented by authority figures. While our game assisted to strengthen these often less-valued communication modes, other activities may be equally effective – role-play, story-telling, and improvised theatre, for example.

Much of the limited critique specifically directed at workshops references the suite of 'standardised' activities, such as those associated with creating log frames and participatory rural appraisal (Green 2003). Perhaps disturbing those templates with activities that were playful and encouraged improvisation increased opportunities for the non-argumentative modes of storytelling and rhetoric. Further, we noted that opportunities for cross-sector one-on-one interaction within groups may be particularly important for facilitating more equal interactions. This practise at speaking up, is a "necessary intermediate step...to influence decisions" (Agarwal 2001).

Finally, Young's concept of greeting, together with Filipino concepts of 'shared humanity' and the obligation and vulnerability that brings, allows us to see how workshops help create the pre-conditions for inclusive participation. The co-presence of citizens through face-to-face meetings is a minimum necessary first step for conservation for development projects: first, we must create a 'contact zone'. Without co-presence, the ability to create inclusive spaces for democratic processes that will work for both humans and the ecosystems that support them is lost. Even when workshop outcomes do not immediately appear to bring us any closer to either justice or sustainability, we believe they are helpful 'rehearsal spaces', helpful for learning how to reconfigure social and environmental relationships.

Perhaps, then, the most important aspect of Young's communicative democracy framework is the sensitivity it brings to both practise and analysis. To this end, Table 1 could

serve as both planning document and evaluation schema. Understanding the communication modes helps researchers and facilitators watch for and create opportunities to enhance the voice and influence of those who are often excluded, even when they are 'in the room'.

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## NOTE

1. We agree with Braithwaite (2008), who argues that 'neoliberalism' is a misnomer, preferring 'regulatory capitalism' to describe the burgeoning avenues/agencies for regulation, which are sometimes, but not always, conducive to private interests. 'Neoliberal conservation' has, however, emerged as an umbrella term to refer to activities perceived as such (Büscher et al. 2012).

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