

Connecting With Older Queer Filipinos Through *Kuwento*: Toward an Intergenerational Queer and Decolonial Qualitative Research Methods

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Abstract

This article draws from my research with the older queer Filipinos where I used *kuwento* during data collection. *Kuwento* is the cultural mode of communication among Filipinos in the diaspora. As a first-generation Filipino, I am fluent in *kuwento*. *Kuwento* enables genuine connection with the older queers in my community. This article provides an example of how I applied *kuwento* in participant observation and in individual face-to-face interviews. *Kuwento* enabled both myself and the participants to explicitly embody our social locations, thereby disengaging with the dominant positivist Western values of neutrality, objectivity, and non-emotionality. Through *kuwento*, participants' intimate stories of queer sexualities were expressed rather than concealed by expectations of respectability and civility. Consequently, the interaction became an intergenerational queer conversation: it created an intimate space of connection among diasporic queers of varying generations. I consider this intergenerational queer conversation as a decolonial move because it challenges the normative epistemologies embedded in doing interviews and participant observation, allowing racialized queer stories to counter the dominant narratives of aging and migration.

Keywords: *kuwento*, older queer Filipinos, intergenerational, immigrants, decolonial

Introduction

The dominant scientific values that are embedded in Western positivist research, such as objectivity, neutrality, rationality, and non-emotionality, constitute epistemic violence against historically marginalized bodies and communities (Spivak, 2006; Strega, 2015). Critical Indigenous, Black, feminist, queer, and anti-racist scholars have challenged these values and revealed how they are genealogically traceable to White, hetero-cis-male subjectivity that gained prominence during the Enlightenment (Dei, 2005; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999). However, given these subjectivities and the accompanying perspectives and sensibilities continue to be held as the universal knowledge and standard against which all knowledge is measured (Bordo, 1986), the need to challenge this universalization of knowledge continues. The values in positivist knowledge production coalesce with respectability and civility. Emerged since colonial contact, respectability and civility reflected the demeanor, characteristics, and practices of elite White British colonial settlers who were deemed the model citizen-subjects for the civilized and modern world. Fundamentally, respectability and civility are racial discourses that are embedded in whiteness, constructing those who are non-White and non-British as uncivilized, savage, and not modern (Mayo, 2002).

Positivist values program researchers to be culturally and emotionally disconnected from participants in their research, producing an impersonal relationship that constitutes what it means to be a professional, respectable, and more “civilized” researcher. In other words, adhering to positivist values reinforces unequal power and colonial relations between researcher and participant in mainstream research. The cultural, social, and linguistic knowledges, values, and practices of those who do not fit within such standards continue to be erased, dismissed, marginalized, or constructed as unscientific, low, backward, and dangerous within normative scientific knowledge (Coloma, 2017; Dei, 2005).

In this article, I showcase how older queer Filipinos, who identify as bakla (Filipino term for queer individual; see Manalansan, 2003), resisted the colonial logics and dominant positivist values in mainstream qualitative research by mobilizing their cultural mode of communication called *kuwento* [pronounced as “qwen-to”]. As I discuss in this article, the bakla sexual and gender identities, demeanor, performances, and gestures, including their use of *kuwento*, did not necessarily cohere with heteronormative relationality and “white civility” (see Mayo, 2002). Their maneuverings of *kuwento*, their departing from the more formal ways of communication, helped them voice non-normative contents and scenes of their life experiences, transgressing the more socially acceptable and respectable standard ways of communicating. For example, one of the participants I discuss in this article shared a non-linear narration of events, thereby challenging normative, mainstream ways of storytelling marked by linear coherence and developmental chronology.

As a first-generation Filipino, I am fluent and well-versed in using *kuwento*. *Kuwento* is rooted in Philippine folk and oral storytelling traditions and continues to be used by Filipinos in the diaspora to communicate and converse with one another (Francisco, 2014; Jocson, 2008, 2009). In this article,¹ I illustrate the power of *kuwento* using two research methods, participant observation and face-to-face interviews, to allow racialized queer epistemologies and stories to flow, rather than being constricted and concealed by dominant epistemologies and ideologies of mainstream qualitative research practices. In these two methods, the researcher and research participants met to establish rapport and trust. *Kuwento* made the establishment of such rapport and trust possible between myself and the older queers in my community in the research context.

I argue that *kuwento* as a cultural socio-linguistic practice enabled older queer Filipinos to resist the dominant norms and values embedded in Western research. In both participant observations and interviews, *kuwento* offered opportunities for older queer Filipinos to openly express their personal and intimate stories of everyday life with confidence, ease, and comfort. Older queer Filipinos had stories and experiences that were difficult to openly share due to the dominant heteronormative practices and expectations within their community and mainstream society. With *kuwento*, however, older queer Filipinos were able to tell their stories in a space where their queer cultural expressions such as being animated, effeminate, and campy could be celebrated and validated. *Kuwento*, therefore, offered older queer Filipinos the opportunity to embody their own cultural identities, and challenge heteronormative formality, respectability, and civility that often dictate and police queer mode of speaking across mainstream contexts.

¹ This article is derived from the methodology section of my doctoral thesis, which is based on the study referenced herein. The narratives of the participants presented in this article came from my field notes that were not published in the thesis (see Pino, 2019).

Consequently, my use of *kuwento* in participant observation and interviews engendered intergenerational queer connection. This connection addressed the generational gap that widened between younger and older racialized immigrant queer populations. As I discuss in the subsequent sections, this gap was due to ageism and generational differences in the queer community that resulted in a lack of intergenerational communication (see Wight et al., 2015; Woody, 2004). This intergenerational queer conversation, made possible through *kuwento*, altered the normative ways of conducting participant observation and interviews often imbued with impersonal relationships that de-historicize the embodied social location of the researcher and participant. My use of *kuwento* enabled me to deviate from the normative practices of these methods that often demand qualitative researchers to follow a rigid structure that may dismiss the banal ways participants communicate and perform in the everyday.

In social work, older racialized queers' acts of resistance towards hegemonic practices of Western academic research methods are yet to be fully documented. Most studies on racialized queers within social work in Canada have focused on racialized queers' experiences of interpersonal and structural oppression, exclusion, discrimination against their race and sexuality, and how they have resisted them (Giwa & Greensmith, 2012; Poon, 2004; Poon & Ho, 2008). This article adds to the existing literature by examining how older racialized diasporic queers, such as the older queer Filipinos in my study, enacted forms of resistance against dominant, colonial knowledge systems in the context of research.

Situating This Work: Centering Epistemologies of the Below in Critical Qualitative Research

My subject position shapes the intellectual and political directions of my research. As a racialized trans woman of Filipino descent, I continue to see, witness, and experience how the dominant norms of whiteness, heteronormativity, and cisnormativity productively create violent discourses and experiences on racialized, immigrant, queer, and trans bodies and subjectivities. Carrying such consciousness to my research work, I continue to build ways to center marginalized knowledge, practices, and voices to promote anti-oppressive research practices and approaches.

I situate this work within critical qualitative research approaches. Building from Gayatri Gopinath's work (2005), I foreground a queer diasporic lens to foster an intersectional approach to pay attention to the ways in which racialized queer diasporic subjects continue to experience marginalization both in their own community and in mainstream society (Pino, 2017). A queer diasporic lens expands mainstream queer critique by examining the impact of globalization, transnationalism, migration, and neoliberal capitalism (Eng et al., 2005). Methodologically, applying a queer diasporic lens to understand queer Filipinos' experiences in Canada helps us to carefully consider queer Filipinos' cultural practices, knowledge, and epistemologies that are shaped by their transnational connections between their country of birth (i.e. Philippines) and their current host country (i.e. Canada). Older queer Filipinos' cultural knowledge and epistemologies, however, may not necessarily cohere with mainstream queer stories of intimacies that are only based on North American realities, relegating queer Filipinos' knowledges as not part of the dominant queer discourse of the nation-state (Pino, 2017).

By attending to subjugated cultural knowledge and practices, I follow what feminist post-colonial scholar Gayatri Spivak (2006) considered as the epistemologies or knowledge of the below. In her ground-breaking essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak revealed the condition

of epistemic violence: an imperialistic move where critical and political discourses are still caught within the frames of Western epistemology. For Spivak, the subaltern subject—a person without lines of social mobility—could not speak because she was not heard (Ahmed, 2000). The framework for hearing was still always from and for the dominant voice (Ahmed, 2000). Such was a form of violence rooted in the practices of knowing because it removed the agency, the power, and the history of the speaking subject. Under these conditions, the subaltern remained displaced, and the processes and practices of marginalization, colonial relations, and oppressions continued to replicate. Among older queer Filipinos in the study, however, agency was enacted through their use of *kuwento* that I intentionally supported and allowed to happen. *Kuwento* enabled them to demonstrate their sense of agency to speak against the colonial norms that silenced them.

Spivak's ideas inspired me to reveal how *kuwento*, as a cultural knowledge “of the below,” may not necessarily be seen as legitimate or valid within dominant research practices, which have been shaped by Eurocentric values and epistemologies that critical qualitative scholars continued to resist (Kovach, 2009; Strega & Brown, 2015). As demonstrated by the participants in the subsequent section, *kuwento* did not necessarily cohere with formal ways of speaking governed by positivist values of scientific research; their use of *kuwento* revealed their diasporic cultural ways of knowing and worldviews that did not easily and neatly fit within Western epistemological framework. Unless using *kuwento*, their subaltern voices continued to be silenced because they could only speak from Eurocentric Western frameworks. As I situated this work within critical qualitative research traditions, I drew from Spivak by carefully paying attention to the mechanisms through which the *kuwento* of older queer Filipinos was being regulated or silenced by the dominant norms and expectations embedded within dominant Western research traditions. Deliberately using *kuwento*, I pushed for a possibility in which a qualitative research paradigm could be cognizant of, and confidently be opened to, cultural practices that would offer critique of the existing dominant procedures in research. This move would open new ways of thinking and approaches to the production of social work knowledge that would refuse to embody the silencing practices of White Eurocentric epistemologies, thereby allowing for other kinds of epistemologies outside of the Western paradigm to exist, thrive, and (re)generate (Coloma, 2017; Dei, 2005).

Older Queer Filipinos in Canada: The Bakla Subjectivities

Studies on older queer Filipinos in Canada have been situated within the field of ethnogerontology, which examined the intersection of aging and ethnicity (Ferrer, 2015, 2017). The critical emphasis of these studies was on the racialized and classed subjectivities of older Filipinos (Coloma & Pino, 2016; Ferrer, 2015, 2017; Ferrer et al., 2017). These studies emphasized how the frameworks of political economy and critical race theory were generative when exploring older Filipinos' experiences in Canada. For example, Ferrer (2015, 2017) indicated how older Filipinos, specifically those who came to Canada through precarious immigration programs (i.e., temporary foreign worker programs such as the Live-In-Caregiver program), continued to experience financial hardships in late life, impacting their intergenerational, transnational, and community relationships (Ferrer et al., 2017). Significantly, the existing studies demonstrated the interconnection of political economy and critical race theory, such as, for example, the critical examination of the impact of pension and immigration systems in Canada, revealing how older Filipinos' economic insecurity, class and gender hierarchy, and poverty were historically produced and shaped by their experiences of racialization within the Canadian nation-state's policies and

organizing structures (Coloma & Pino, 2016; Ferrer et al., 2017). In sum, this growing body of literature offered a nuanced understanding of the significant life-long effects of racialization.

Indeed, racialization is an important theme as well as the condition that propels the mechanisms of the nation-state to situate older Filipinos into the margins of society. This article expands this conversation on racialization by highlighting the transnational genders and sexualities of older queer Filipinos. Older queer Filipinos embodied unique cultural knowledge and ways of knowing in terms of gender and sexuality (Pino, 2017). Such cultural knowledge did not necessarily align with the dominant North American concepts of gender and sexuality (Pino, 2017). As bakla, older queer Filipinos followed the feminine gender and sexuality scripts, names, and terminologies (Manalansan, 2003; Pino, 2017). For example, their normative partner was not another bakla, but a cis-gender man: a masculine man who fully identified as “straight” (Manalansan, 2003). In terms of gender presentation or expression, they were indeed male-bodied but sometimes did dress as female (Manalansan, 2003; Pino, 2017). These expressions and practices rendered them unintelligible within the normative Filipino sexuality and gender configuration, as well as within the normative queer practices in North American LGBTQ+ communities (Manalansan, 2003). By outlining the queer subject position of older queer Filipinos and recognizing that such subject positions were also the sites of their marginalization and oppression that they experienced not only from the mainstream society, but also from their own communities (Pino, 2017), this article enriches and expands the discussion on racialization, marginalization, and the effects of political economic structures that currently shape the discussion on older Filipinos’ experiences in the country.

My use of kuwento in both participant observations and interviews allowed for this transnational, culturally grounded script and subjectivities of the bakla to be revealed. Kuwento showcased a critical stance as the dominant ideologies and discourses of gender, sexuality, and queerness were decentered. The cultural scripts of older queer Filipinos (i.e., the bakla scripts) were exposed and honoured so as to consider their transnational queer subjectivities and realities.

Older Queer Filipinos’ Kuwento

In the practice of kuwento among Filipinos in general, the speaker openly shares or relays a particular story, experience, or thought from their life or from other people’s lives to another person such as their peers, comrade, friend, or family member. This style of communication has been influenced by Philippine folk and oral storytelling traditions whereby the speaker narrates a particular event or experience in their life with explicit details of the situation, including themes that emerge from the cultural or local region in the Philippines where the speaker lives (Jocson, 2008, 2009).

However, the kuwento of the older queer Filipinos in my study depicted a particular performance that was not necessarily linear or chronological as commonly seen in mainstream story-telling narratives. Rather, their kuwento was performative and quite animated, and had varying themes in one storyline or narrative. As they performed it, they deviated from the original topic and then would go back to it. Their performance of kuwento showed acts of diverting from or twisting and breaking the more formal and dominant linguistic form and style of communicating. This style of performing kuwento allowed them to articulate their stories and experiences that have been silenced due to the normative structures and discourses of gender and sexuality in the community.

Older queer Filipinos' performances of *kuwento* refused to adhere to the normative practice of formal communication and conversation that control their queer modes of speaking and storytelling. Older queer Filipinos' *kuwento* was anti-normative because it did not necessarily adhere to the grammar and rules of formality, chronology, and coherence usually enacted by someone considered a "respectable" and "proper" citizen-subject of the nation-state. The production of respectable and normative citizen-subjects of the nation was part of the colonization process, made possible by promoting and circulating the discourse and norms of heterosexuality and heteropatriarchy (Stoler, 1995). Colonialism privileged such heterosexual and hetero-patriarchal norms so that non-normative gender and sexuality became targets of violence, erasure, policing, and regulation (Rubin, 1984). Older queer Filipinos' use of *kuwento* was an anti-colonial move because it allowed them to echo and amplify their queer stories of intimacies that were never allowed to be expressed to begin with in their own community. This resonated with George Dei's (2005) anti-colonial framework whereby participants' sense of agency and resistance were centered in the analysis made possible by the researcher's efforts of problematizing the "imperial structures on processes of knowledge production" (p. 5). Older queer Filipinos' *kuwento* helped break the normative colonial discourses of gender and sexuality that privileged heterosexual and heteropatriarchal subjectivities in scientific research.

Older queer Filipinos' versions of *kuwento* revealed the significance of language as that which carries cultural knowledge. As Margaret Kovach (2009) described: "language bridges gaps by acting as a mechanism to express divergent worldviews. Like inward knowing, language is so powerful because it reminds us of who we are; it is deeply entwined with personal and cultural identity" (p. 59). Languages, indeed, are repositories of knowledge about ourselves and the cultural affiliations to which we are intimately tied. *Kuwento* is an ontological product of a language in the context of Filipino cultural practices.

Kuwento in Participant Observation and Face-to-Face Interviews: An Intergenerational Queer Connection

As I have discussed, my deliberate use of *kuwento* created an atmosphere of trust and confidence within participant observation and face-to-face interviews. Older queer Filipinos were able to bring in their marginalized stories and queer practices to the research. *Kuwento* also became their medium through which they shared their strategies of navigating and negotiating their queer gender and sexual identity expressions and actions within their own family, community, and mainstream society. Such sharing of stories and experiences during the research established an intimate intergenerational queer connection.

This intergenerational queer connection allowed queer diasporic Filipinos (i.e., my participants and me) of varying generations and histories but of similar cultural, racial, and transnational affiliations to be proximate to each other. Through this connection, queer-oriented Filipino stories were honoured, (re)told, remembered, and recited, especially those moments and scenes of older queer Filipino lives that disrupted normative ideas and practices of gender, sexuality, intimacy, and sociality.

Ageism within the queer community greatly impacted LGBTQ older adults' sense of social connection and community with each other (Wight et al., 2015; Woody, 2004). Fostering intergenerational connection was one of the important interventions that addressed ageism (Chazan & Baldwin, 2021). Studies indicated how programs that focused on building intergenerational

connection between younger and older LGBTQ addressed age stereotypes and social isolation while building community connection among younger and older LGBTQ (Hayashi, 2019; Houseal et al., 2013). Intergenerational connection implied a sense of (re)engagement, (re)connection, and intimacy between younger and older generations (Chazan & Baldwin, 2021). The intergenerational connection that I built through this work with older queer Filipinos, however, foregrounded aspects of transnationalism, migration, and diaspora, thereby expanding our understanding of intergenerational gaps often understood as being caused only by ageism (Ferrer et al., 2017).

I considered this intergenerational connection with older queer Filipinos as itself “queer,” not only because the connection was enacted by queer bodies, but also the stories that flowed within the conversations were non-heteronormative. The ways in which the stories were presented to others deviate from the normative ways of conversing and communicating, which oftentimes demand formality and objectivity to make the connection appear respectable, civil, and even deliberately impersonal, specifically within the Filipino community. Under these conventions and norms, non-normative stories around sexuality, gender, and intimacy were being regulated, policed, and invalidated. Whereas, from a queer intergenerational conversation, racialized older queers were able to articulate and express their stories. Simply put, intergenerational queer connection referred to both the content and the delivery of the stories that deviated from normative mode of connection.

In the section below, I illustrate how *kuwento*, which allowed for an intergenerational queer conversation and connection, demonstrated a different way of doing participant observation and interview. *Kuwento* was the instrument through which participant observation and face-to-face interviewing could be done in a way that brought out cultural nuances, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the participant. Consequently, this ultimately produced anti-colonial knowledges that centred marginalized voices within the discipline.

Participant Observation

Researching older queer Filipinos’ performance of *kuwento* brought me to settings deemed non-normative for older adults. Most of the research on older adults were done in formal and institutionalized settings such as nursing homes, community centres, hospitals, and private homes (Brotman et al., 2003; Hulko, 2011). Instead, my participant observations were mostly conducted in an open, public space—such as the food court—where most of my participants usually congregate and perform their *kuwento*. They spent the majority of their time at the food court; thus, I considered the food court as their hub. It was their point of departure where they would initially meet and then would go to personal appointments, cultural events, or to funerals. They also used the food court to celebrate birthday parties, anniversaries, and holidays. They went there to socialize, to relax, and to mingle with other Filipinos who worked as security guards, cleaners, bus boys, vendors, and food service workers. The food court connected and held them together, and served as an intimate venue for performing *kuwento* with others.

Kuwentohan (i.e., verb form of *kuwento*) at the food court was generally unsolicited. Certain topics deliberately opened up even if one did not necessarily inquire or ask about them. The informal atmosphere of this setting enabled conversations to flow openly without fear of being regulated. *Kuwentohan* in the food court allowed me to clearly see my participants’ actions, gestures, and expressions of intimacies with one another. Guided by a long-time friend, I was first

introduced to Mama Riva,² who at 88 at the time of the study, was considered by his peers as Toronto's oldest *bakla*. Here, using *kuwento* actively enlivened the introduction, allowing us to openly reveal our embodied Filipino queer identities.

Long-time friend: Kumusta po? Ito pala 'yong kaibigan ko na sinasabi sa inyo na nasa university [How are you? This is my friend from the university whom I told you about].

Researcher: Kumusta po [How are you]?

Mama Riva: Ayy, *hija*, tagasaan ka sa atin [Ayy, my daughter, which province are you in the Philippines]?

Researcher: Sa Cebu po. Doon po ako lumaki [I'm from Cebu. That's where I grew up].

Mama Riva: Ayy Cebuana ka pala ! Magkapitbahay lang pala tayu. Sa Visayas area din ako. Ang daming guwapo sa Cebu ha! Noong umuwi ako sa Pilipinas, pumunta kami doon at may marami kaming nakikilalang mga guwapo, hahaha [Ayyy, you are Cebuana! We are just neighbors. I am from the Visayas region too. There are so many good looking men in Cebu! When I went back to the Philippines, we went to Cebu and we got to know so many gorgeous men, hahaha]!

In this encounter, Mama Riva's performance of *kuwento* indicated his sense of agency, control, and voice. Since Mama Riva knew that I was from the university and carried certain norms and expectations of how to behave and perform in a formal conversation, especially in the conduct of research, he then gauged my response to see if he would have the space to express his queer self during our initial encounter. To do this, he performed *kuwento* by explicitly showcasing to me his embodied queer identity. By doing so, he was extending an invitation to allow me to express my embodied Filipino queer identity while being with him. This invitation was reflected in his intentional act of feminizing the conversation such as the deliberate use of the term *hija* (which means daughter) and of *Cebuana* (which means a girl from Cebu) that both represented female/feminized terms of endearment. Such feminized terms, demeanors, and performances were indicative of the cultural expressions of the *bakla* or Filipino queers (Manalansan, 2003).

Through his performance of *kuwento*, Mama Riva explicitly exposed the contradictions attached to the identity that I carried during our encounter: my being an "insider" and "outsider" of the community. This "insider-outsider" persona was based on my affiliations to the two kinds of worlds: my researcher/academic persona that was ever-present and collided with my embodied trans Filipina persona. A point of contradiction existed because I was neither fully an outsider nor an insider of these two worlds (Pino, 2021). Mama Riva's performance of *kuwento*, however, brought us together in a space of communication and connection by highlighting or making use of our embodied and shared cultural ways of knowing to come to terms with such contradictions.

Since I responded to his performance of *kuwento* without hesitation and with utmost spontaneity, especially the feminized terms of endearment he had towards me, our *kuwento* continued to flow and intensify. It gave Mama Riva a sense of comfort that he could clearly express

² While I used the 'he' pronoun based on the participant's chosen pronoun, the participant chose a female name as a pseudonym to signal his queer/*bakla* persona (see Manalansan, 2003). The name Mama Riva was intentionally chosen by the participant as he wanted to explain the significance of such a name to his life. The author has published elsewhere other narratives of Mama Riva (see Pino, 2017, 2019).

his stories with me. While our shared cultural location had initially connected us, our mutual performance of *kuwento* made the connection even more possible. By performing *kuwento* together, the content and contexts of his personal stories and background histories were validated, paving the way to the opening up of other storylines related to his queer desires and experiences from his country of birth. Such a performance of *kuwento* then facilitated Mama Riva's immediate sharing of his intimate stories. This situation would not necessarily have happened had he articulated his experience through a normative style of conversation—one where the rules of formality, civility, and impersonality are rigidly expected and demanded.

In the above experience, Mama Riva's performance of *kuwento* was not merely a communication tool that indicated a simple exchange of information with others. Rather, his performance of *kuwento* revealed a politics that explicitly showcased how a shared Filipino queer cultural practice enabled intergenerational connection. Mama Riva's performance of *kuwento* allowed us to recite and articulate statements, words, and dialogues that showcased our displaced queer locations from the homeland. For example, the immediate inquiry of Mama Riva of my place of origin in the Philippines was not necessarily a stereotypical act that was informed by essentialist logic of considering Filipinos in Canada as all born and raised in the Philippines. Rather, this was an invitation and a gesture of community belonging or even a welcoming act. By performing *kuwento*, Mama Riva and I rendered visible the nuanced cultural meanings of our encounter, allowing us to constantly and consciously consider and attend to the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which our conversation and interaction was situated. While the sharing of common identities helped build the rapport, our explicit practice of our embodied knowledge and shared cultural queer nuances worked to dissolve adherence to dominant research approaches which concealed and detached the researcher from one's embodied identities and social and political histories in the name of an "unbiased" research stance (Dei, 2005). Indeed, this 'unbiased research stance' shaped by the positivist values and norms of scientific research de-historicized and de-emphasized the social and cultural connection of the researcher and participant, thereby, pushing them to dis-identify from their shared racial and sexual identities and diasporic connection to project neutrality and objectivity in research.

As we continued our *kuwento*, I inquired more about his chosen name Mama Riva. He then explained that Mama, which means mother, was more of a description of his age than a role. He reported that he was one of the oldest *bakla* that he knew of in Canada. He made this clarification because of the added name Riva after Mama. According to him, Riva came from the name of an early Filipino actress Maggie dela Riva who was a sexy celebrity icon during Mama Riva's time.

It was through Mama Riva's style of delivering *kuwento* that he successfully re-created himself to mark his queer Filipino and elderly identity. In the telling of his personal identities, Mama Riva was able to integrate the shifting identities of his past and present selves through his idolization of and identification with a local female celebrity icon in the Philippines where he grew up. He inserted the local celebrity icon to the content of his *kuwento* to be able to describe his self and personhood. Through effeminate, dramatic, animated body language, gestures, and tone, his way of performing *kuwento* enabled him to emphasize the significant ideas that he wanted to convey and voice such as his queer subjectivities in late life.

In this participant observation with *kuwento*, I was able to connect with Mama Riva and he was able to showcase his queer self without fear of being reprimanded and regulated by the norms of formality and respectability. This generative connection allowed Mama Riva to be comfortable

with my presence. Tapping into our cultural linguistic practice of *kuwento* made such a process of participant observation more intimate and reciprocal, rather than distant and indifferent from each other. *Kuwento* allowed both myself and Mama Riva to embrace our embodied queer Filipino personas, resulting in a sense of trust and intergenerational connection.

Face-to-Face Individual Interviews

Kuwento, when used during research interviews, became more than a re-narration of a personal life story. Rather, *kuwento* in personal interviews invoked cultural practices, including queer memories that were silenced and concealed. In this context, I referred to queer sexualities, a topic that older *bakla* did not necessarily articulate because this was concealed by heteronormative discourses that regulated queer identities and practices in the Filipino community and in mainstream Canadian society. By using *kuwento* in semi-structured, open-ended interviews, older *bakla* could express themselves with ease, comfort, and confidence. Moreover, their intimate queer stories, especially around their non-normative relationships, were conveyed, re-narrated, and remembered. *Kuwento* in face-to-face interviews made room for non-normative conversations to flow, allowing what was constructed as a “taboo story,” due to its queer sexual theme, be re-told and heard, thereby de-bunking the notion that they were non-sexual beings due to their age and race.

To illustrate, I turned to my interview with Rosana,³ a 70-year-old participant. The interview took place at his own home where he lived alone. He invited me there after several meetings at the food court. The interview was more of an engagement of his thoughts and ideas on his current situation as an older queer Filipino in Canada. As we talked about his migration history, he spontaneously infused and incorporated a scene from his life during his early thirties in the Philippines. The story narrated his sexual experiences with a “straight-identified” man (i.e., *lalake* in Filipino language) who was in prison. He claimed that it had been a long time since he had been able to retell and re-narrate such a scene from his past because his peers had already heard and were already familiar with it. Nobody had engaged with him again about this story until his participation in this research project. With *kuwento*, an atmosphere of trust was created that allowed Rosana to share such a story with me without him feeling fearful of being judged or misunderstood. He felt his voice and agency were validated, seen, and heard.

Researcher: How did you arrive in Canada?

Rosana: I was sponsored by a family member. On that time, *ayaw ko talagang pumunta dahil masaya ako doon sa amin kasama ang mga kaibigan ko. Ay naku, may jowa pa ako doon sa kulungan* [I was sponsored by a family member. I really didn't want to migrate at that time because I was so happy with my friends in the Philippines. Oh my, I even had a boyfriend who was in prison].

Researcher: What do you mean sa *kulungan* [What do you mean “in prison”]?

Rosana: On that time *kasi, ang jowa sa bakla kong kaibigan ay nakulong. Hindi ko alam kung anong kaso niya. One time, sinama niya ako noong bumisita siya sa kulungan. Tapos, pagdating namin, yong jowa niya ay bigla nalang akong ipinakilala sa kaibigan niya na priso den. Nagustuhan ko yong lalake so naging boyfriend ko siya* [At that time,

³ This is a pseudonym chosen by the participant.

the boyfriend of my best friend was in prison. I did not know the reason why. One time, my best friend asked me to come with him to visit his boyfriend in prison. And then, when we arrived, his boyfriend randomly introduced me to his friend who is also one of the prisoners there. I liked the guy so he became my boyfriend, too].

Rosana immediately emphasized again:

And yes, naging boyfriend ko siya. Kaya, dalawa na kaming pumupunta sa kulungan para kitain ang aming mga jowa. Nagdadala kami ng pagkain. Halos araw-araw kami doon. Ang saya-saya talaga [And yes, he became my boyfriend too. So now, there were two of us who went to prison to visit our boyfriends. We brought them food. We visited them almost every day. It was so much fun]!

In our kuwentohan, we started on the topic of migration history and then immediately grew into a conversation of intimacy, sexuality, love, and relationships. In this context, Rosana maneuvered kuwento with flexibility, fluidity, and openness to interruptions, accounting for the seemingly messy narrations of events or scenes. These narrations enabled Rosana to be himself and be comfortable in expressing his queer self. Using kuwento in the interview gave Rosana the capacity to control and take ownership of his stories. The interview provided the opportunity to re-tell specific stories deemed important to him, and the freedom to relay such stories in a specific way. In this context, interruption, which occurred at the moment when Rosana deviated from the opening topic/theme of the conversation, was generative: it allowed Rosana to reveal the complexities of his life as an older racialized queer migrant in the diaspora.

In mainstream, traditional approaches to interviews, researchers are asked to rigidly follow through the structure in the interview agenda, and to expect participant responses to immediately address or cohere to the topic embedded in the interview question. Such typical interviews regulate thoughts and feelings in terms of what can be said or not said by the participant, who also is being demanded to perform in a certain “coherent” manner of speaking. In these conditions, deviation would be then treated as unnecessary and incoherent.

However, kuwento offered Rosana a narrative space in the interview to articulate and be attuned to his queer cultural practices of intimacies. Rosana was able to foreground and present an important story in his life: the intimate and the non-normative one that he wanted to voice and articulate but that had been relegated to his memory for a long time due to a lack of space and opportunity to re-tell it. The re-telling of such a culturally and historically taboo, intimate story during his interview countered the notions of older adults as de-sexualized subjects. It also exposed non-normative sexual practices that had been historically policed by nation-states to privilege heteronormative sexual practices. The kuwento of Rosana in the interview format brought out seemingly hidden conversations and queer memories that have been sites of oppression and violence by colonial and heteronormative institutions and frameworks. Such queer memories were potential sites of resistance that challenged oppressive norms.

The content of Rosana’s kuwento enriched the connections between migration and sexuality (Manalansan, 2006). Rosana allowed us to consider how pleasurable moments in one’s home country could become the “pull” factor that could prevent one from participating in the global migration flows, thereby, influencing an individual’s decision to stay in the homeland. As these pleasurable moments invoked from his memory were being re-articulated into the present during a kuwento form of interview, Rosana gestured to the needs and struggles related to his intimacy that he faced at present. In our subsequent kuwentohan, Rosana shared how he struggled with

building intimacy in the Canadian context due to his particular queer sexual desire while embodying the “aged” persona. The theme of sexuality was part of his migration narratives and experiences from past to present, illuminating the intersection of sexuality and migration (Manalansan 2006; Pino, 2017). This intersection was significant because, as I have mentioned earlier, the dominant narrative of older Filipinos’ migration to Canada did not necessarily engage with sexuality. Rather, it had largely focused on political economy framework (see Ferrer et al., 2017). The narrative of Rosana addressed this gap as he pointed to the role of sexual intimacies that impacted his migration desires and aspirations.

Through *kuwento*, the interview became a queer intergenerational conversation and dialogue between me and the older queer in my community. *Kuwento* opened up a story of queer intimacies that was rendered invisible or took for granted within normative migration and aging studies, while at the same time allowing queer migrants to re-live the pleasurable memories they have had in their life. Conveying such a particular story to another queer from a different generation, such as myself, brought pleasurable memories to life, validating and recognizing them. *Kuwento* enabled queer memories and moments to flow among queer subjects of varying generations, exposing seemingly disconnected histories, foregrounding queer epistemologies and intimacies that were not necessarily “acceptable” within normative discussions of sexuality or even of queerness in the everyday mainstream life. Hence, this intergenerational interview through *kuwento* not only narrowed the age-graded communication gaps among queer subjects, but also allowed for queer subjectivities and realities from the global south to be discussed, rather than dismissed in the global north context of queer conversation.

Implications for Critical Social Work Research: Intergenerational Queer Connection as a Decolonial Move

In the study, traditional qualitative research methods were critically transformed by centering marginalized cultural practices and epistemologies (i.e., *kuwento*) of a particular racialized queer community (i.e. queer Filipinos in Canada). This implies that researchers can create spaces of possibilities for marginalized voices to be expressed, creating a context for empowerment and disrupting the dominant practices of research in social work that continue to privilege those dominant subjects and voices as the normative subjects for research inquiry.

The resulting research practice illustrates a decolonial move in critical social work research. Colonialism, as an ongoing project, is made possible not just by racial violence but also by gendered and sexual violence. *Kuwento* dismantles the hegemonic researcher-participant relations forged by heteronormative and patriarchal values. The dismantling of such hegemonic relations allows the stories of queer sexualities by older queer Filipinos to flow rather than be silenced, dismissed, and deemed irrelevant and low. Their queer stories unsettle “respectable” stories of normative subjects that are often performed in a “civil” way (see Mayo, 2002).

The intergenerational queer conversation, which has emerged through the intentional use of queer Filipinos’ *kuwento* in participant observations and interviews, is a particular example whereby such colonial relations in research can be disrupted. Within intergenerational queer conversation, the embodied cultural identities and relationships between the researcher and the participants are intimately acknowledged, valued, embraced, named, and historicized rather than concealed, dismissed, and dis-embodied. I contend that such an intergenerational queer conversation cannot exist if participant observation and face-to-face interviews are carried out

based on the traditional mainstream epistemology anchored in dominant positivist scientific values that maintain expectations of respectability and civility. Such values, indeed, had invalidated the queer, racialized, and diasporic stories of older queer Filipinos in the study. As I have discussed, positivist values coalesced with respectability and civility to silence the older bakla whose queer diasporic stories of intimacies deviated from the common and dominant stories of aging and intimacies that relied on the logics of heteronormativity and whiteness. Therefore, researchers should continue to be mindful of the dominant norms and values embedded in research, and engage in ways to challenge them. By doing so, diverse and transnational epistemologies of queer sexualities can continue to thrive, be honoured, and unveiled.

Finally, the decolonial possibility of intergenerational queer conversation also lies in the very moment of connection among racialized queer subjects from different generations. The connection unveils racialized, queer, and immigrant stories. In such a moment, the stories are being celebrated, listened to, and exchanged. Intergenerational queer conversation resists the silencing, forgetting, and dismissal by dominant research approaches and frameworks, particularly when the heteronormativity of such frameworks is not being scrutinized and questioned. The intergenerational queer conversation in this context not only addresses communication gaps based on generational differences of racialized migrant queer subjects, but also engages in queer talk that defies the rigid narrative and communication practices of the normative, mainstream society.

In sum, this move of using racialized cultural practices to undo traditional mainstream research methods to allow space for marginalized subjects to speak makes up a strategy of resistance whereby mainstream institutional tools are unsettled and redirected to reclaim the voices and stories of the below. This move offers insights to social workers committed to building and honoring the knowledge and cultural practices of the margins. As social workers continue to resist and decenter settler colonial systems, practices, projects, and thinking, the need to pay attention to other ways of knowing and relating stands out. The undoing of traditional mainstream research methods by using *kuwento* offers a possibility for social workers to go deeper, to unearth the other ways of constructing knowledge attentive to the historical experiences, transnationality, and autonomy of marginalized subjects.

Conclusion

In this article, I demonstrate how a racialized queer and diasporic community's cultural practice of *kuwento* was mobilized to unsettle positivist values in research, including the given discourses of civility and respectability that shaped the norms of social relationship and positionality of both researcher and participants. My use of *kuwento* in the study allowed me to embody my subject position, including my transnational queer subjectivity, to deviate from the positivist and heteronormative values embedded in research. Consequently, engaging in *kuwento* with the participants depicted an intergenerational queer conversation in participant observations and research interviews.

Within this intergenerational queer conversation, racialized queer immigrant stories of identities, local scripts, locations, and memories were invoked, relieved, and remembered, allowing them to flow into the conversation and be honoured, validated, and recognized. This intergenerational queer conversation was decolonial since it deviated from the racial, sexual, and gender norms that structured the usual standard of participant engagement and only worked to silence and conceal queer intimacies and stories. The intergenerational queer conversation

achieved through kuwento addressed the intergenerational gaps that existed in Filipino queer communities due to varying and yet shared histories and experiences of migration to Canada along generational lines.

Given the significance of kuwento as well as the queer epistemologies of older queer Filipinos that have been highlighted, this article asks social work researchers to pay attention to diverse cultural knowledges and practices of racialized queer diasporic communities, to honour and recognize how they use these knowledges and practices to make sense of their lives in the diaspora, and to resist (hetero)normativities that exist in everyday discourses and social relations including within our research practices. Rather than embracing a universal understanding of queerness, social work researchers must find ways to deeply examine the nuances of queerness by going beyond normative methods of research and participant engagement. In doing so, we may be able to redirect our gaze to foreground the epistemologies of the subaltern that have been buried and suppressed by mainstream research practices.

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