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GEMMA TULUD CRUZ

BRILL

# An Intercultural Theology of Migration

# Studies in Systematic Theology

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# An Intercultural Theology of Migration

Pilgrims in the Wilderness

*By*

Gemma Tulud Cruz



BRILL

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In loving memory of  
Rogelio de Guzman Cruz Sr.  
(1938–2007)



## CONTENTS

Abbreviations .....	xi
Introduction .....	1

### I. THE LANDSCAPE

Chapter One Geographies of Domestication: Mapping the Oppression of the Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong .....	13
Introduction .....	13
The Exodus: Filipino Migration and the DHs in Hong Kong .....	14
Experience of Oppression of the DHs in Hong Kong .....	18
As Migrant Filipinos .....	19
Geographical Differences .....	19
Cultural and Religious Differences .....	21
Racial and Ethnic Discrimination .....	27
As Migrant Filipino Women .....	31
Gendered Socialization, Gendered Migration .....	32
Gendered Transitions .....	36
Gendered Violence .....	41
As Migrant Domestic Workers .....	46
Job Discrimination .....	47
Exploitation .....	50
Summary and Conclusion .....	63
Chapter Two Frontiers of Struggle: Negotiating Filipina Hong Kong DHs' Ways of Dealing with Domestication .....	65
Introduction .....	65
DHs' Ways of Dealing with Domestication .....	66
Submission .....	67
Based on Gender .....	67
Based on Class .....	73
Based on Culture and Religion .....	77
Resistance .....	81



Political .....	82
Religio-Cultural .....	93
Economic .....	101
Accommodation .....	103
Cultural .....	103
Religious .....	109
Political-Economic .....	111
Summary and Conclusion .....	114

## II. THE MARKERS

Chapter Three Expanding the Boundaries: Theological Challenges and Perspectives Arising from the Struggle of the Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong .....	119
Introduction .....	119
Theological Challenges and Perspectives .....	120
A New Context: Migration as a Locus for Theological Reflection .....	121
The Challenge of Borders and Strangers .....	121
The Call to Hospitality .....	127
The Implications of Migrant Religion .....	129
A Gendered Subject: Integration of Women's Experience and Perspective in Theological Reflection .....	134
Gendering the Quest for Global Economic Justice .....	135
Em-Body-ing Theology .....	142
Re-thinking Suffering .....	145
An Expanded Category: Shifting Identity and Subjectivity as Challenges for 21st Century Theology .....	152
From Fixed and Specific to Multiple and Dynamic Identities .....	153
From the Power of the Powerful to the Power of the Power-less .....	161
From <i>Multicultural</i> to <i>Intercultural</i> Theology .....	166
Summary and Conclusion .....	170
Chapter Four Exploring Theological Markers: Delores Williams' Theory of Survival Quality of Life and Jung Young Lee's Theory of Marginality .....	173
Introduction .....	173

Delores Williams: A Theological Profile .....	175
Basic Features of Williams' Theological Method .....	176
<i>Leit Motif</i> in Williams' Theological Thought .....	177
Delores Williams' Theology of Survival Quality of Life .....	182
Key Themes .....	182
Surrogacy .....	183
Survival Strategies .....	187
The Cross and Atonement .....	190
Wilderness .....	193
The Black Church .....	194
Appreciation .....	197
General Appreciation .....	197
Personal Appreciation .....	200
Jung Young Lee: A Theological Profile .....	202
Basic Features of Lee's Theological Method .....	204
<i>Leit Motif</i> in Lee's Theological Thought .....	206
Jung Young Lee's Theology of Marginality .....	209
Key Themes .....	210
The Marginal Person .....	210
Jesus-Christ as the Margin of Marginality .....	213
The Church and Marginal Discipleship .....	216
Appreciation .....	219
General Appreciation .....	220
Personal Appreciation .....	222
Summary and Conclusion .....	226

### III. THE ROAD AHEAD

Chapter Five A Different Cartography: Mapping the God-Talk of a Feminist Theology of Struggle of Filipino Women Domestic Workers in the Context of Migration .....	231
Introduction .....	231
Life on the Edge as God-Talk: A Conversation between Williams' Survival Quality of Life, Lee's Marginality, and the Struggle of the Filipina DHs in Hong Kong .....	232
Triadic Conversation .....	233
Race as Heuristic Lens .....	233
Wilderness and Marginality as Space .....	235
The Role and Meaning of Suffering .....	238

Dealing with Oppression .....	242
Church and Community .....	245
Dyadic Conversation .....	249
With Williams: Surrogacy as Oppression .....	249
With Lee: Migration as Marginalization .....	252
<i>Pakikibaka</i> (Struggle) as God-Talk: Features of A Theology of Filipino Women Domestic Workers in the Context of Migration .....	257
Domestication as Oppression .....	257
Dutiful Daughters and Sisters, Devoted Wives and Mothers .....	257
“Shared Resources,” “Modern-Day Slaves” .....	262
<i>Pakikibaka</i> (Struggle) as <i>Bahala Na</i> (Hopeful Risk-Taking) .....	266
In the Name of the Body .....	270
God of the Struggle .....	272
Church of the Stranger .....	279
Summary and Conclusion .....	287
 Chapter Six Expanding the View: The Challenges of a Feminist Theology of Struggle of Filipino Women Domestic Workers in the Context of Migration to the Theology of Struggle in the Philippines .....	289
Introduction .....	289
Contextualization .....	291
The Gender Issue .....	291
Emerging Themes for a Gender-Sensitive ToS .....	297
The Challenge of Migration .....	305
Emerging Themes for a Migration-Conscious Contextualization .....	308
Biblical Hermeneutics .....	310
Religious and Cultural Critique .....	318
Summary and Conclusion .....	322
 Conclusion .....	325
Bibliography .....	331
Index .....	355

## ABBREVIATIONS

AMC	Asian Migrant Center
AMCB	Asian Migrant Coordinating Body
APMM	Asia-Pacific Mission for Migrants
APMMF	Asia-Pacific Mission for Migrant Filipinos
BEC	Basic Ecclesial Community
CBCP	Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines
CMR	Coalition for Migrants' Rights
DH	Domestic Helper
DPCF	Diocesan Pastoral Center for Filipinos
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
ECMI	Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People
FABC	Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
FToS	Feminist Theology of Struggle
FDH	Foreign Domestic Helper
DW	Domestic Worker
EO	Employment Ordinance
FDW	Foreign Domestic Worker
FToS	Feminist Theology of Struggle
GO	Government organization
G.R.O.	Guest Relations Officer
H.K.	Hong Kong
JIL	Jesus is Lord (Movement)
LEP	Labor Export Policy
MFMW	Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers
NBI	National Bureau of Investigation
NCS	New Conditions of Stay
NGO	Non-Government Organization
OEC	Overseas Employment Certificate
OEIA	Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs
OCW	Overseas Contract Worker
OFW	Overseas Filipino Worker
OHD	Office of Human Development
OWWA	Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration
PDOS	Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar

POEA	Philippine Overseas Employment Administration
SAR	Special Administrative Region
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SCMP	South China Morning Post
TF	Tinig Filipino (Filipino Voice)
TNT	Tulay ng Tagumpay (Bridge to Success)
ToS	Theology of Struggle
UNCHR	United Nations Commission for Human Rights
UNIFIL	United Filipinos in Hong Kong
WCC	World Council of Churches

## INTRODUCTION

Migration has always been part of the fabric of humanity's story. People have moved from one place to another since ancient times for much of the same reasons that encourage or compel people to move today, namely economics, politics, or religio-cultural conflicts. The current phase of migration, however, is profound and distinct in that it is more massive, its "pull factors" more attractive, and its "push factors" more repulsive. Moreover, its ripple effects are more comprehensive. No individual, family, community, or society is left untouched by it.

Indeed, when one puts contemporary migration under closer scrutiny one can see that its current density, velocity, and multi-directionality present complexities. The United Nation's 2006 International Migration Report, for instance, says that the number of people living outside their country of origin increased from 155 million in 1990 to more than 191 million in 2005. Worldwide, migrants now account for approximately 3% of the world population and that if they were to constitute a country, theirs would be the world's sixth most populous. Not surprisingly more than 60% of them are in developed countries. In fact about 75% of all migrants live only in 28 countries.<sup>1</sup>

With its concomitant misery migration is clearly emerging as one of the critical components of what is laid out in *Gaudium et Spes* as the "grief and anguish of people of our time" (GS,1).<sup>2</sup> But there's more that we can learn from migration from a theological perspective aside from the tragic for it is, ultimately, a pilgrimage in the wilderness.

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<sup>1</sup> This volume of migration is also responsible for two-thirds of the population growth in industrial countries. See Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division "International Migration Report 2006: A Global Assessment," <[http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/2006\\_MigrationRep/part\\_one.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/2006_MigrationRep/part_one.pdf)> accessed October 18, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Carmem Lussi explicitly points this out in "Human Mobility as a Theological Consideration" in *Migration in a Global World*, ed., Solange Lefebvre and Luis Carlos Susin, Concilium 2008/5 (London: SCM Press, 2008): 50. One could speak of migration, in other words, as a "signs of the times" or those events of history through which God continues to speak to us and summon us to respond for the sake of the reign of God's love and justice throughout the whole of creation. Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 95.

The journeys that migrants undertake are, indeed, more than a trip. It is more than an adventure, more than a vacation or a sojourn. As a people who travel across deserts and seas in search of “greener pastures” and of their own “promised land” migrants’ journeys are like a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage unites the seeker and the traveler and insofar as migrants’ journeys force them to struggle to survive and, to a certain extent, thrive in strange places their journeys are a pilgrimage in the wilderness. They are also a pilgrimage in the wilderness in that they are journeys of hope rooted in courage which is nurtured by a strong and creative will to resist and empowered by a steadfast faith.

“Wilderness,” as concept, has a negative (as wildland or a place that is beyond the control of humans) and a positive meaning (as a place that nurtures the human spirit).<sup>3</sup> This puts the former as a place to be conquered and the latter as a place to be preserved. Whatever the case may be the idea of the wilderness arguably carries a spiritual and, consequently, theological value. Using the experience of struggle and hope by the Israelites in the wilderness as heuristic lens, for instance, Rev. Chad Rimmer contends: “In the wilderness, nations are recreated, people are renamed, sacrifices are made, callings are discerned, spiritual acumen is honed, God’s grace is revealed, and God’s people are renewed.”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus himself was led and entered into the wilderness where he struggled physically, psychologically, and spiritually. There he was tempted and wrestled with himself after which he began to proclaim about the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 4:1–17).<sup>5</sup> Whatever and which-

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<sup>3</sup> David Backes, “The Land Beyond the Rim: Sigurd Olson’s Wilderness Theology,” <[http://www4.uwm.edu/lets/research/sigurd\\_olson/theology.htm](http://www4.uwm.edu/lets/research/sigurd_olson/theology.htm)> accessed October 18, 2009 traces the historical roots of these meanings in American discourse. Peter N. Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness: The Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier, 1629–1700* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969) meanwhile illustrates more clearly the historical interrelatedness of these contrasting interpretation by exploring the Puritans’ experience of the wilderness as “a sorrowful estate”, “a place of safety” and as the “pleasant gardens of Christ.” Carroll argues that while it has its “sad storms” and “wearisome days” this wilderness, that is, the “new world” for the Puritans is still a “good land” which, at the same time, needs further improvement.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. Chad M. Rimmer, “Prospects for Ecumenism in the 21st Century: Towards an Ecumenical Theology of the Wilderness,” <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/the-wcc-and-the-ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/relationships-with-member-churches/60th-anniversary/contest/essay-towards-an-ecumenical-theology-of-the-wilderness.html> accessed Oct 18, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> All biblical quotations from hereon are taken from the *Christian Community Bible* 27th ed. (Quezon City, Phils.: Claretian Publications, 1999).

ever way it is used the wilderness connotes mystery, dangerous beauty, and a rich human experience. To enter into the wilderness is to plumb the depths of human experience, and to penetrate it is to find clues for articulating how human beings forge a relationship with the sacred.

Migration as a pilgrimage in the wilderness is not something that is strange to me. I myself am a migrant for about twenty years now. The first time I migrated was a rich experience in itself. No one in my family wanted me to go to Manila for a job interview. Even when I got the job they tried to dissuade me from leaving my small hometown in order to go and work in a metropolitan city. But, in the end, the promise and possibility that the journey offered was too strong to ignore. So it turned out my father was the one who helped me move to the city for good. And the following years would be like one roller coaster ride after another with its highs and lows. I had my share of successes, my bouts of home-sickness, and the occasional travails of adjusting from the tranquil life of the countryside to the madness of city life. The journey has become a pilgrimage in the wilderness.

My personal experiences as a migrant, however, are mere glimpses when compared to the struggle Filipino women migrant domestic workers have to endure. Theirs is truly a pilgrimage into the wilderness and this experience of theirs deserves theological attention as it offers paths into human liberation.

STRUGGLE AS A FACE OF FAITH:  
FILIPINO WOMEN MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS'  
PILGRIMAGE INTO THE WILDERNESS

Journeying into the wilderness entails some kind of struggle. It involves dealing with unforeseen circumstances and grappling with personal and social difficulties. The journey (into the wilderness) itself, in other words, is struggle. And since journeying into the wilderness means entering into the heart of the human experience in relation to the sacred, it is important that we begin by understanding the struggle that is basic "in the wilderness," particularly in the context of the lives of Filipino women.

Struggle is not a strange experience in the Filipino context. Neither is it a strange word. In 2005 hundreds of Filipinos chanted the familiar 1970s' chant "*Makibaka, huwag matakot!*" (Struggle, do not be afraid) in protest against then president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who has



been hounded by calls to step down on account of questions about the legitimacy of her administration. The world witnessed this same spirit of struggle among Filipinos in 2009 during the burial of former Philippine president Corazon Aquino—the icon of the Filipinos’ struggle against the dictatorship of former president Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s—when many of the thousands of Filipinos who attended the burial flashed the familiar *Laban* (fight) sign.

Noted Filipino psychologist Virgilio Enriquez defines its (struggle) well-known *Tagalog* counterpart *pakikibaka* as “resistance through cooperative action,” while Filipino theologians speak of it as “cooperative resistance,” or simply “struggle” or “resistance.” This notion of struggle is a value among Filipinos that Filipino theologians say is “very much alive at the center of the Filipino spirit, indigenous and lowlander, lower class and elite, male and female,” and “manifested itself in different ways and emerged at various periods of Philippine history.”<sup>6</sup> All the more so for Filipino women.

Indeed, there is a Filipino *herstory* of resistance.<sup>7</sup> In the 1970s, for example, women actively participated and played key roles in the struggle for freedom and national sovereignty. Lorena Barros even founded a women’s organization called *Makibaka*, which had to go underground at the time of the Martial Law.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, despite and in the midst of historical subjugation and contemporary subordination, there exists a long tradition of *pakikibaka* by and among Filipino women.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Virginia Fabella et al., “Dugo-Duga ng Buhay: A Philippine Experience in Spirituality,” *Voices from the Third World* Vol. XVIII, No. 2 (December 1995): 225. Contrary to the traditional and/or colonial image of the Filipino as passive most contemporary Filipino theologians insist on this tradition of resistance among the Filipinos as a colonized people. See, for example, Mary John Mananzan, “Five Hundred Years of Colonial History: A Theological Reflection on the Philippine Experience,” *Voices from the Third World* Vol. XX, no. 1 (June 1998): 238 for a historical mapping on this.

<sup>7</sup> The year 2005, for instance, marks the centennial of the feminist movement in the Philippines, as the first feminist group, *La Asociacion Feminista*, was founded in 1905. That notwithstanding, women’s contributions have not fully received due recognition until fairly recently as can be seen in a related project during the centennial celebration of Philippine independence in 1998 named “Herstory: Making Present 100 Years of Absence.” Moreover, the struggle goes on. See Rowena Guanzon, “Filipino women a century after,” [http://news.inq7.net/viewpoints/index.php?index=2&story\\_id=51495](http://news.inq7.net/viewpoints/index.php?index=2&story_id=51495), accessed September 27, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Proclaimed by former dictator Ferdinand Marcos in September 21, 1972, Martial Law suspended a number of political rights of Filipinos, and has since become the icon of the violent political repression of the turbulent 1970s in Philippine his/herstory.

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly this *pakikibaka* has deep roots in *pananampalataya* (faith). See the prayer aptly titled “*Panalangin ng Pakikibaka*” (Prayer of Struggle) in Mary Jane

This same spirit of struggle marks the life of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration as they contest kyriarchy<sup>10</sup> in general and domestication in particular. These women have much to struggle against. They are the “items” auctioned in the internet in Canada;<sup>11</sup> the “status symbol,” part of the décor, and “products,” that come with warranties/replacements put on sale by recruiters in Hong Kong; the helpers in Malaysia who “work day and night following orders and just frown when tired”<sup>12</sup> and; the clowns in Los Angeles who have to be adept at following the “emotional script,” that is, to be “always happy.”<sup>13</sup> They are the marginalized “resident aliens” of Italy, who have to worry about the opinion of their Italian neighbors who complain about their noise and their ‘smelly’ Filipino food.<sup>14</sup> They are the religiously-repressed foreign workers in Saudi Arabia, where non-Islamic religious articles like the Bible, rosary, and prayer books are prohibited and a strict and puritanical brand of Islam (that even a Filipino Muslim may find difficult to understand and cope with) is advocated. Moreover, they are the foreign domestic workers, whose religious difference (especially in Muslim countries) affects not just the way they are treated in terms of religious matters, but even in political-economic affairs.<sup>15</sup> They are also the foreign women workers,

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Rodriguez, *Ang Kababaihan sa Himagsikang Pilipino* (Quezon City: Palimbagan ng Lahi, 1999), 35–41.

<sup>10</sup> This means “the rule of the father/lord/master/husband” or elite male-defined relationships of ruling in socio-cultural, religious, and political systems. This is a re-naming of patriarchy, i.e., “rule of the father,” done by Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza. According to Schüssler-Fiorenza, kyriarchy does not just tackle sexism and heterosexism, but also other structures of women oppression like racism, poverty, colonialism, and religious exclusivism. See her “Introduction: Feminist Liberation Theology as Critical Sophialogy,” in *The Power of Naming: A Concilium Reader in Feminist Liberation Theology*, ed., Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (New York: Orbis Books, 1996): xxi to more fully investigate the complex interstructuring of systemic oppression of women.

<sup>11</sup> Migrant Watch, “Filipino Women in Canada Denounce Auction of Filipino Domestic Workers,” <http://www.bulatlat.com/news/3-10-migrantauktion.html>, accessed February 9, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> See “Awit ni Marilyn” (Song of Marilyn) in Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences-Office of Human Development, *Pilgrims of Progress: A Primer on Filipino Migrant Workers in Asia* (Manila: FABC-OHD, 1994): 21.

<sup>13</sup> Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work* (California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 190.

<sup>14</sup> Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, 206–10.

<sup>15</sup> In Malaysia, for example, there is a two-tier security bond for Indonesian and Filipina “maids.” The Indonesians, who are mostly Muslims, like most Malaysians, pay only RM500 while the Filipinas, who are mostly Christians, are made to pay RM5000 (a difference of RM4500!). Noleen Heyzer and Vivienne Wee, “Domes-

whose sexuality is feared hence racially stigmatized (read: cheap, loose, promiscuous, prostitutes) and controlled with the imposition of gender (women only) and class (migrant domestic worker only)-specific policies, e.g. pregnancy test. Last but, definitely, not the least, they are the foreign women workers, whose work holds them “captive” in their workplace (employer’s home) where they are third class citizens hence highly vulnerable to all kinds of abuses.

But still domestic workers travel across deserts and seas to go these places, to go into the wilderness with its lure of mystery, its promise of adventure and possibility of social mobility, all of which are grafted into the likelihood of danger. Indeed, some good experiences come out of it. On top of the travel and adventure involved positive internal changes such as becoming more independent, having a broader perspective in life, developing a greater capacity for intercultural relations, and improved economic conditions are articulated by domestic workers themselves. All the more so for those who migrate to escape from family and other gender-related problems or difficulties at home. All of them, however, would have to deal with the difficulties inherent in venturing into the wilderness. And deal with these difficulties, they do. They struggle daily against their domestication through the various political-economic and religio-cultural strategies they devise that directly and indirectly resist their domestication as migrant Filipino women domestic workers.

At the heart of this struggle is religion as it is imbricated in the Filipino culture. Religious discourse and religious means provide the domestic workers the much-needed courage, hope, and faith in the struggle. Religious services, for instance, provide spiritual strength, solace, and a link to the homeland. Religious groups and/or fellowships are established as instruments for forming ties between old and new societies, and to help them (domestic workers) deal with and/or resist the ambiguities, discontinuities, and difficulties, that arise from being Filipino women migrant domestic workers. Their faith in a God, who provides strength for the struggle, is a constant force that carries them through crisis after crisis.

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tic Workers in Transient Overseas Employment: Who Benefits, Who Profits,” in *The Trade in Domestic Workers: Causes, Mechanisms, and Consequences of International Migration*, eds., Geertje Lycklama à Nijeholt and Nedra Weerakom (Kuala Lumpur: APDC, 1994): 64.

For migrant domestic workers life is, indeed, a struggle. But, strengthened by their faith, they continue to struggle because, for them, to struggle is to live. There is no liberation...yet. There is only struggle...towards liberation. And since faith influences, is employed, and is consciously worked out, within the context of this struggle, which has a woman-face, I cannot but reckon, that the theology of migrant Filipina domestic workers is a feminist theology of struggle.

### *About This Book*

This book explores the dynamics of an intercultural theology of migration as illustrated in the theological possibilities, relevance, and challenges of the struggle of the Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong.<sup>16</sup> The life of the Filipina domestic workers or DHs<sup>17</sup> (as they are more popularly called) in H.K. is a constant (re)negotiation of the gamut of problematic situations they go through, as Filipino women working as domestic workers in H.K. Religion plays a central and double-edged role in this everyday struggle. Moreover, this struggle not just provides windows into contemporary forms of oppression but also offers paths towards liberation, particularly in the context of the emerging field for theological reflection, that is, migration. This book then aims to detect, describe, and explore the theological relevance of this salient role of religion that is woven into the dialectic between oppression and liberation in the struggle of the Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong in view of identifying the features of a theology that arises from their struggle. Accordingly this book also endeavors to explore how or to what extent this theology might help the Theology of Struggle in the Philippines move forward given the fact that the context of the Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong significantly differs from the Philippine context.

As Filipino women who move to a more pluriform from a more uniform society, adjust to being a minority from being the majority,

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<sup>16</sup> From hereon Hong Kong will also be referred to as H.K.

<sup>17</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, DHs (domestic helpers) will be used in this book from hereon to refer to Filipina domestic helpers. Moreover, unless explicitly stated, the usage of FDW (Foreign Domestic Worker) and FDH (Foreign Domestic Helpers) will be inclusive of the Filipina domestic helper. Although there are Filipino male domestic helpers included in statistical records, 90% of Filipino DHs in H.K. are women. And since most of the data available is also on female DHs this book focuses on Filipino women domestic workers. MFMW, "...Till Labor Export Do Us Part" *Migrant Focus Magazine* Vol. 1 Issue 3 (January-March 2001), 12.

and shift from being citizens to aliens (not to mention the challenge of being global not just local citizens) the context of the Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong, indeed, contains situations that could offer a new agenda for Christian theology in general, and feminist, as well as Filipino theology in particular. To more fully mine then the possibilities that their context offers I employ as hermeneutical framework the theology of survival quality of life of womanist theologian Delores Williams and the theology of marginality of Korean-American theologian Jung Young Lee. Williams' theology of survival quality of life is rooted in her investigation of the religious nature of Black women's struggle for survival, particularly in terms of how it is informed by women's faith, women's ritual practices, and women's thoughts about God. Also embedded in experience, particularly Asian-Americans' experience of migration in the United States, Lee's theology of marginality interrogates the religious dimension of the struggle in transforming marginality in the context of migration. Williams' and Lee's theological method and the key themes of their respective hermeneutical frameworks are what guides and informs the appreciative analysis and reflection with which I engage the struggle of the Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong as I employ a theological methodology that traverses the relational poles of experience and liberation from a feminist perspective.

This book comes in three parts. Part I, as suggested by its title, "The Landscape," is a two-tiered presentation of the starting point or the terrain for the theological reflection. Here, I outline the limits, thresholds, tensions, discontinuities, and contradictions that form part of the Hong Kong domestic workers' domestication and give an account of their constant arbitration of it. The two chapters contain a single but substantial discussion. Chapter 1 probes the various ways in which the domestic workers experience domestication. In this chapter I seek out the forms in which race, gender, and class, as woven into their migrant status and/or identity, are deployed to tame and control or domesticate the domestic workers. In Chapter 2, meanwhile, I look at the different ways in which the domestic workers negotiate their domestication. I show how, as a response to their domestication, the life of the domestic workers in Hong Kong is characterized by struggle.

Part II, titled "The Markers," centers on the theological tools for interrogating the domestic workers' experience of struggle. The two chapters in this part of the book set the hermeneutical parameters in

which this theological task will be engaged. Chapter 3, which serves as some kind of an intermezzo, sketches the trajectories for the ensuing theological conversation. In this chapter, where I investigate the themes arising from the domestic workers' experience that call for (further) theological reflection, I begin to move into the theological aspect of the book. Chapter 4 focuses on the critical theological principle, the theological framework which guides, informs, and "midwives" the constructive part of this book in the succeeding chapter. This critical theological principle is constituted here by Delores Williams' theology of survival quality of life, and Jung Young Lee's theology of marginality. The chapter explores the said hermeneutical frameworks, particularly their key themes, and provisionally concludes that these frameworks show the way towards articulating a theology of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration.

Part III, which bears the title "The Road Ahead," picks up the trail set in Part II that flows into the central project of this book. Chapter 5 necessarily pinpoints and scrutinizes the conjunctural themes between Williams' survival quality of life, Lee's marginality, and the struggle of the Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong. I explore the points of convergence as well as divergence between and among the three using a two-tiered method. First, I look into the theological themes that cut across the three. Then I probe the theme which strongly aligns the Hong Kong domestic workers' struggle with Williams and Lee respectively and vice-versa. From this triadic and dyadic conversation I draw the features of a theology of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration which I call a feminist theology of struggle. In Chapter 6 this theology is what is then brought into dialogical engagement with the Theology of Struggle in the Philippines in the hope of clearing a path towards an inclusive and more relevant theology for women in the Philippine context.



## I. THE LANDSCAPE





## CHAPTER ONE

# GEOGRAPHIES OF DOMESTICATION: MAPPING THE OPPRESSION OF THE FILIPINA DOMESTIC WORKERS IN HONG KONG

Migration is a one-way ticket. There is no 'home'  
to go back to.

—Stuart Hall—<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as the first of the two interconnected chapters that primarily constitute the context from which the ensuing theological conversation and reflections will be situated. My intention is to describe the oppression of the Filipina DHs in H.K. and set the attendant conditions of/for their struggle that will be elaborated in the succeeding chapter. Thus, this chapter contains a single but substantial discussion, that is, domestication as the experience of oppression of the DHs in Hong Kong.

To set the stage, however, the chapter begins with an overview of Filipino migration to shed light on the place of the migration of Filipino women as DHs in Hong Kong and the dynamics that inform it within the over-all history of Filipino migration, particularly labor migration. This is then followed by the actual mapping of the geographies of DHs' domestication which begins with a discussion of the effects of the maintenance and regulation of difference (brought by the DHs' dislocation) in a way that puts them in problematic situations.

When people migrate they are uprooted and difference comes to the surface or becomes more apparent. In the case of the DHs their difference works against them or is made to work against them. It is this that the first section of the discussion, which focuses on the DHs' experience of oppression as migrant Filipinos, elaborates on.

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves," in L. Appignanesi, ed., *Identity: The Real Me: Post-modernism and the Question of Identity*, ICA Documents 6, London, ICA, 1987 quoted in Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 9.

What follows is a sketch of the DHs' oppression as migrant Filipino women. The taming and control of the DHs' sexuality and nurturing functions as Filipino women mold them into dutiful daughters and sisters as well as devoted wives and mothers who are experts at care work including domestic work. This patriarchal socialization not only prepares and segregates them for migrant domestic work but also plagues them across borders and renders them vulnerable to abuse by recruiters, employers, transnational financial institutions, the Philippine society, and H.K. society. Here, domestication as the DHs' oppression becomes even more apparent, especially since the fashioning of their identity as Filipino women informs their migration as Filipinos and their oppression as migrant domestic workers.

The discussion then ends with the equally critical point in the DHs' domestication, that is, their oppression as migrant domestic workers. "DH" is the abbreviation of the new vocabulary invented in the Filipino colloquial dictionary to refer to the most prominent occupation of Filipinas in labor migration. These two letters, which stand for "domestic helpers," are like an inscription on the person of the DHs in H.K. that gives birth to a host of death-dealing situations. The repressive conditions and the exploitation that this inscription brings in the context of labor migration are painted in broad strokes in this last section of the discussion.

#### THE EXODUS: FILIPINO MIGRATION AND THE DHs IN HONG KONG

Without a doubt the presence of Filipino women in Hong Kong as domestic workers is part of a larger phenomenon of considerable Filipino labor migration.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, truly and fully understanding their migration as DHs to Hong Kong entails getting a grasp of the origins or, at the very least, the place of their (DHs) migration within the landscape of Filipino labor migration.

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<sup>2</sup> The Philippines' current out-migration profile is striking. 10% of the Philippine population lives outside of the Philippines and 70% is affected by migration. In 2006 and 2007, for instance, the number of workers deployed overseas respectively breached the 1 million mark set by the government. See Maruja Asis, "The Philippines," *Asia and Pacific Migration Journal* Vol. 17, Nos. 3-4 (2008): 349-378 especially 361, 367, 371. See also Patricia Sto. Tomas, "Managing the Overseas Migration Program: Lessons Learned and New Directives," *Asian Migrant* Vol. 15, No. 2 (2002): 94-98.

Labor migration is not a strange phenomenon among Filipinos. As a matter of fact the distinct patterns of movements of this historical and continued outflow of Filipino migrant workers are enshrined in what is called as the four waves of Filipino labor migration.<sup>3</sup> The first wave (1900–early 1940s)<sup>4</sup> saw Filipino men migrating for cheap labor in sugar and pineapple plantations in Hawaii and later to the US mainland as apple pickers.<sup>5</sup> This first batch of Filipino migrants originated mostly from Northern Luzon and the Visayas which have a history of migration to other parts of the country due to land problems.<sup>6</sup>

The second wave (late 1940s–early 1970s) brought the movement of thousands of Filipinos to the United States, Canada, and Europe as war brides, professionals, and highly—skilled workers as a result of more open immigration policies in the host countries. This new batch, however, has a distinct characteristic. Most of them were better—educated and skilled marking this period as the “brain drain” period of Filipino migration. The batch included a variety of professionals from doctors, accountants, nutritionists, physical therapists, etc. Moreover, it included women who worked mostly as nurses and/or hospital staff.

Much of the second wave of migration arose mainly out of the deteriorating political and economic situation in the Philippines which was under the former dictator Ferdinand Marcos. The oppressive conditions Martial Law brought also pushed more Filipinos to seek ‘greener pastures’ abroad with the thought that it was better to leave their families and work abroad than to see them die of hunger in the Philippines.

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed and comprehensive account see Catholic Institute for International Relations. *The Labour Trade: Filipino Migrant Workers Around the World* (London: CIIR, 1987) and Joaquin L. Gonzalez, *The Philippine Labor Migration: Critical Dimensions of Public Policy* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998): 25–55.

<sup>4</sup> For purposes of a more systematic approach only the commonly-discussed four waves of Filipino migration is presented here. It must be noted, however, that some scholars also point to a much earlier “batch” of Filipino labor migrants namely the Filipino natives forced by the Spanish colonizers to leave their families to work in royal dockyards and on board ships that plied the famous *galleon* trade routes across the Pacific Ocean to Mexico and the New World from 1565–1815. See Joaquin L. Gonzalez, *The Philippine Labor Migration*, 25–26.

<sup>5</sup> Kanlungan Centre Foundation, Inc. *Destination: Middle East: A Handbook for Filipino Women Domestic Workers*, (Quezon City: KCFI, 1997), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers, *The Filipino Maids in Hong Kong: MFMW Documentation Series No. 1* (Hong Kong: MFMW, March 1983), 3.

Labor migration as a state policy, in the meantime, was the most powerful driving factor for the third wave of Filipino labor migration (mid 1970s–early 1990s).<sup>7</sup> Believing in a foreign policy he called “development diplomacy”<sup>8</sup> and seeing a gold mine in the remittances of the OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) then President Marcos institutionalized labor migration through the Labor Export Program (LEP). The “trade” then covered almost all occupational groups from doctors, engineers, teachers and nurses, to seamen, combo singers, domestic helpers, chambermaids, and construction workers. This period even saw the expansion of sea—based work from the shipping industry to the fishing industry. If the second wave is marked by “brain drain” or the migration of the skilled and the intellectuals of the Philippines, the third wave went a little further. It exported both the “brains” and the “brawns” of Filipino society with the latter largely represented by the massive recruitment of men for construction work in the petro—dollar rich Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia.

Globalization, however, ushered not only new areas or shifts in destination, i.e., from Europe and America to the tiger economies (Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong) in Asia. With its concomitant international division of labor and the expansion of the service sector, globalization also created areas of job concentration and “gendered” Filipino migration. This resulted to an unprecedented out-migration of Filipino women mainly as nurses, entertainers, and domestic workers which led to the fourth wave in the 1990s. This period is arguably known as the feminization of Philippine labor migration.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The debilitating effects of the 1973 and 1978 increases in crude oil price which affected almost all sectors of the economy and led to the loss of thousands of jobs due to cutbacks, restructuring and closure of companies also propelled this wave.

<sup>8</sup> For Marcos development diplomacy is simply about recognizing the changed world situation where there emerged less developed countries. He believed that by using the country’s surplus human resources and responding to the high demand for labor, especially in the oil-rich Middle East, he is just showing to other developing nations the virtues of interdependent development. See Joaquin L. Gonzalez, *The Philippine Labor Migration*, 34.

<sup>9</sup> Based on the record of the Department of Labor and Employment (in the Philippines) males made up an overwhelming 70% of overseas Filipino workers in 1975. The gender gap narrowed in 1987 with women making up 47% but the notable pattern of change showed in 1994 when female migrants made up 60% as opposed to males at 40%. See Joaquin L. Gonzalez, *The Philippine Labor Migration*, 40. See also Ruby Beltran and Aurora Javate de Dios, eds., *Filipino Women OCW’s...At What Cost* (Manila: Women in Development Foundation, 1992), vii and ECMI-CBCP, *Feminization of Migration* (Manila: ECMI-CBCP, 1997), 9–10.

With domestic work being the most prominent face of this migration this is when the migration of Filipinas to Hong Kong as domestic workers, which began in the 1970s, reached high proportions.

Filipinas, indeed, began migrating to Hong Kong as DHs in the early 1970s when Hong Kong was experiencing economic boom and the Philippine economy was beginning to hit rock bottom. When the British government which was still exercising authority over H.K. as a colony at that time liberalized the DHs' entry their number rose significantly and steadily. From the early 1970s to the 1990s Hong Kong was the consistent destination of Filipina DHs, who were favored because of their facility with the English language. Their earliest employers were mostly expatriate diplomats and businessmen. But with Hong Kong's further industrialization, the attendant exodus of local women from the homes into the workforce, the increase in status associated with having a maid, and the increasingly expensive wage of local domestic workers, the practice of hiring an FDH, particularly a Filipina, caught on with the dominant Chinese population.<sup>10</sup> Today majority of the employers of the DHs are middle class Chinese.

For many of the DHs Hong Kong is a good place for labor migration for various reasons.<sup>11</sup> Although there has recently been a downward trend the DHs, who now number to more or less 120,000, still compose the majority of Hong Kong's close to 250,000 FDHs.<sup>12</sup> Their sheer number makes them not only the dominant FDH. They, together with the other Filipinos working in H.K., also make up the largest ethnic migrant group. But despite all the seeming advantages life for these itinerant Filipinas is still marked by oppression.

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<sup>10</sup> See Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers, *The Filipina Maids in Hong Kong*: MFMW Documentation Series No. 1 (March 1983), 5 for a historical discussion on the DHs' migration to H.K.

<sup>11</sup> First, H.K. offers long service leave and one of the higher wages for DHs in the Asian region. Second, most DHs have friends and relatives who are already in H.K. Third, it is the nearest and the cheapest by air travel. Fourth, H.K.'s policies for domestic workers, especially in theory, are supposedly still better than most Asian countries. Rita Raj Hashim "A Review of Labor Migration Policies in Asia," in *The Trade in Domestic Workers: Causes, Mechanisms and Consequences of International Migration*, eds., Geertje Lycklama à Nijeholt and Nedra Weerakom (Kuala Lumpur: APDC, 1994): 125 elucidates on the fourth.

<sup>12</sup> Rev. Michael Yeung, "Some Insights Into The Development Work for Deprived Migrant Groups In Hong Kong," in *The Migrant Family in Asia: Reaching Out and Touching Them*, ed., Anthony Rogers, FSC (Manila: Office for Human Development, 2007): 155.

EXPERIENCE OF OPPRESSION OF THE  
DHs IN HONG KONG

This section puts a very specific face and takes us to the uncharted territories of the canvass on Filipino migration that was sketched in the preceding section by delving into the inner dynamics of the experience of the Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong. Let us begin by exploring some basic concepts and operational definitions for our reflections. Marilyn Frye defines oppression as a broad system of interconnected forces which (1) organizes people into privileged groups and groups which are deprived, exploited, marginalized (e.g. genders, races) and (2) restrains and contains members of the oppressed group, by systematically blocking or penalizing their choices and actions.<sup>13</sup> Class has been established by Marxist analyses as a central concept in investigating systems of oppression. Feminist analyses, particularly analyses done by feminists of color and lesbian feminists, add to class the concept of race, gender, and sexuality as categories for unpacking systems of oppression. Chicana and other feminists of color, notably Gloria Anzaldua,<sup>14</sup> enrich and nuance these concepts by theorizing about their class, gender, and racial position using fragmentation as a metaphor for the complicated borderland between identities that women of color inhabit.<sup>15</sup> Ethnic minority theologians further enrich these concepts, by identifying an emerging fourth concept, that is, culture, hence coming up with what they call the quadrilateral of oppression namely, gender, class, culture, and race.<sup>16</sup>

The DHs in Hong Kong experience these concepts in a broad system of interwoven forces that stratifies, devalues, and controls their difference, distorts and fashions their sense of self as women, regulates their sexuality, and exploits their labor and nurturing functions. Migration is woven into this system of oppression that amounts to domestication. Hence, “migrant” is used as a qualifying word before the classic concepts of race, gender, and class that this chapter utilizes to map the oppression of the DHs.

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<sup>13</sup> Marilyn Frye, “Oppression,” in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*, ed., Lorraine Code (London: Routledge, 2002): 370.

<sup>14</sup> See, in particular, Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> Chelsea Starr, “Class Analysis,” in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*, 93–4.

<sup>16</sup> Justo L. González, *Out of Every Tribe and Nation: Christian Theology at the Ethnic Roundtable* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 104.

*As Migrant Filipinos*

When Filipinos migrate to Hong Kong to work as DHs, problems arise out of the difference in physical, social, and human geography as well as the political and religio-cultural beliefs and practices tied up with racial and ethnic identity in Hong Kong and the Philippines. Whether direct or indirect, by force or natural circumstances, the maintenance of these differences, limitations of choices, and closing up of possibilities for the DHs to continue to live their difference as Filipinos in Chinese-dominated H.K., domesticate them (DHs), thereby oppressing and/or keeping them in their oppressed place.

*Geographical Differences*

As migrants the difference in human geography is the first thing that impinges on the DHs' well-being. All around them are strange faces. Their loved ones are not around. Hence, they suffer from "home-sickness," or the loneliness that is born out of a longing for home. This is, then, intensified by the difficulties imposed by the difference in the physical geography. The weather alone creates adjustment problems. Being used to only two seasons (wet and dry) DHs have to acclimatize themselves to four. Although many of them look forward to experiencing winter and seeing snow for the first time, they still express problems regarding weather adjustment, especially during winter.

The highly urbanized landscape of H.K. also presents constraints on the DHs. The congestion in living and breathing spaces, particularly in housing, that is so much a part of H.K. counts as one of these constraints. Most DHs were born, raised, and live(d) in the countryside with its wide open spaces. Though poor they are used to living in houses that have ample space. Hence, the cramped space that characterizes most of their workplace, which the DHs compare to an "ice-box," "prison,"<sup>17</sup> or to one of the incommensurate tenement buildings in

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<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Apuya, "Money or a Day Off", *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 2 (March 1996): 5, for instance says: "It's okay for the employers. They were born in a flat. We Filipinos are different. We're used to a much different style of life. Our home is not halfway to heaven. It's right there on the ground. It's fully air-conditioned 24 hours a day. When we want to know what's happening in the community, we just open the window and let all the news blow in. Filipinos live in freedom. Living on the 44th floor of an apartment is like being in a prison....After spending 144 hours a week trapped inside an icebox I need to get out, to spread my wings, to meet my friends. Otherwise, I'll go crazy".



poor urban areas in the Philippines, create feelings of claustrophobia and forced confinement among them.

As rural-born and bred Filipinos, who are largely unexposed or not used to high-tech life, the DHs also find it problematic to learn to live with the modern structures, facilities, and forms of interactions in H.K. Its airport alone is enough to scare the wits out of the *probinsiyana* (one who was born and lived most of her life in the countryside) DH. Virgenia's experience illustrates this. Upon her arrival at the huge and utterly modern H.K. airport she was so confused that she spent three hours waiting. In her own words: "*Pa-trolley-trolley lang ako. Hindi ako marunong gumamit ng telepono. May lumapit na Pilipina at tinanong kong kumain na 'ko. Binigyan nya ako ng pera. 'Pwede ka nang mag-McDonalds.' Hindi rin ako kumain dahil hindi ko alam kung paano umorder*" (I just went around with the trolley. I don't know how to use the telephone. A Filipina approached me and asked me if I have already eaten. She gave me money and told me I can already go and eat at McDonalds. I still did not eat because I do not know how to order).<sup>18</sup>

The transport system, with its sophisticated double-decker bus, can also fluster a DH who will be using it for the first time. In fact one of the jokes on "Maria the stupid DH"<sup>19</sup> is very much reflective of this form of problem. The story goes that Maria has just arrived in H.K. and was asked to accompany her employer on the bus. They went up the upper deck. When the bus started moving, Maria stood up abruptly:

Employer: What's the matter?  
 Maria: Ma'am we have to go down.  
 Employer: Why? (with astonishment)  
 Maria: Ma'am there's no driver here!<sup>20</sup>

Hong Kong's "octopus card"—an automated credit-debit card that can be used for buses and trains—can also intimidate the largely unex-

<sup>18</sup> Rica Arevalo, "Documentary on Filipino migrants to be screened," <[http://www.inq7.net/ent/2003/oct/29/text/ent\\_5-1-p.htm](http://www.inq7.net/ent/2003/oct/29/text/ent_5-1-p.htm)>, accessed November 3, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> "Maria the stupid DH" is a caricature the DHs have created of/for themselves (especially those who are largely uninitiated to city life) for their jokes on their travails, adventures, and misadventures in H.K.

<sup>20</sup> Mariano Jocelyn, "No Driver," in *Sapang Pagyuko Kawayan: A Collection of Jokes from Filipino Overseas Workers*, ed., Linda R. Layosa and Laura P. Luminarias (HK: Asia-Pacific, 1992): 23 quoted in Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 175–6.

posed *probinsiyana* DHs. Other “strange” or “overwhelming” sights in H.K. include: 1) numerous streets and side-streets; 2) multitudinous shops with names written in a “strange” language; 3) cosmopolitan crowds and people of various nationalities with different languages; 4) many luxury shops; 5) complex automated machines and electronic/digital gadgets; and 6) high-tech facilities like a modern train.

Indeed, this sense of not knowing where to go, what to do, how to do things, who to run to, or having limited places, people, and options on their hands isolate the DHs in a way that diminishes their agency. This is very true for the new or “just-arrived” DHs and those who have few acquaintances and friends in H.K.

### *Cultural and Religious Differences*

Cultural and religious differences also limit the DHs’ subjectivity. Take, for instance, the difference in language (Cantonese for the mostly Chinese H.K. residents and employers and Tagalog for the DHs). Many cases of miscommunication occur between the DHs and their employers because of it. Inability to speak Cantonese also severely delimits the DHs in their daily interaction with the local people, especially in places where they have to inevitably go to, e.g. markets and shops. It intensifies, as well, their vulnerability to abuses as they are sometimes made the butt of jokes and objects of insults and malicious talk without their knowledge. All in all the DHs’ socio-cultural, economic, and political power is reduced by the language difference<sup>21</sup> because it is not taken into account in H.K. society<sup>22</sup> and sometimes taken advantage of by unscrupulous employers, insensitive public officials, and other locals.

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<sup>21</sup> The Chinese way of speaking English adds to the DHs’ problems. First, English spoken with a Cantonese accent can be hard to decipher. Second, most Chinese have a problem pronouncing the letter “r” which often becomes “l” as in “fry” becomes “fly.” Third, some employers have problems with correct grammar or sentence construction.

<sup>22</sup> In the case of new arrivals from China who are not familiar with the more ‘complicated’ Chinese characters used in Hong Kong as well as the social systems, policies, formal and informal institutions, and even basic information related to daily life like transport, postage, banking services, etc. H.K. government provides various types of “adaptation courses” or programs to facilitate Chinese immigrants’ integration into Hong Kong society, e.g. language courses (both written and spoken Chinese and English), information about various kinds of services, and “round-Hong Kong tours” to familiarize Chinese immigrants. See Ernest Chui, “Housing and Welfare Services in Hong Kong for New Immigrants from China: Inclusion or Exclusion?” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* Vol. 11, No. 2 (2002): 237–238.

The purported abrasiveness<sup>23</sup> of the Chinese in H.K. is another cultural problem for the DHs. Like most Filipinos, DHs value politeness, courtesy, and diplomacy when talking to other people. In Philippine society shouting or speaking loudly when talking to someone (even in public) is frowned upon and is usually reprimanded. Moreover, public humiliation is avoided such that scolding, mocking, and insulting someone in public is an unwritten taboo for social graces. It is an act many Filipinos take exception to and consider uncouth. That is why when Chinese Hong Kongers bluntly speak to DHs, they (DHs) feel offended.<sup>24</sup> All the more so when their employers shout at them. In fact many DHs, especially the first-timers, who are themselves educated and come from families which are not altogether poor, confess to feeling hurt and humiliated when their employer shouts at them. A lot of them cry because:

The average Filipino is a very courteous person with a deep sense of his [her] own self-worth. The Filipino language is steeped in courtesy, in circumlocution and time-consuming pleasantries. To talk loudly (*'sini-sigawan ako'*) and rudely (*'sinasampal ako'*) is a sign of low self-esteem. A Filipino is very conscious of *'hiya'* (shame) since dignity and honour are everything to him [her].<sup>25</sup>

Finger wagging, finger pointing, or pressing fingers, especially the forefinger, on the forehead or chest also constitutes a bone of contention. Even if the employers are not conscious of it, or do not find anything offensive with it, it has an insulting and derogatory connotation to Filipinos. It is patronizing, rude, and humiliating for most Filipinos to be finger-pointed or wagged at. To them, it is an act that is done only to animals or someone very inferior.

On the more practical side, food and eating practices present restrictions on the DHs. First of all, Filipinos usually use spoon and

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<sup>23</sup> Isabel Taylor Escoda, *Letters from Hong Kong: Viewing the Colony through Philippine Eyes* (Manila: Bookmark, 1989): 33, 50 observes that the H.K. Chinese tend to be "too serious, purposeful and rather grim" while the Filipinos are "gayer and more laidback." She also claims whereas Filipinos would tend to smile more often, Chinese Hong Kongers can be stone-faced and surly.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Jho Dagupon "Racial Discrimination", *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 3, No. 3 (June 1997), 23.

<sup>25</sup> Rev. G. Arotcarena et al. *The Maid Tangle: A Guide to Better Employer-Employee Relationship* (Singapore: Katong Catholic Book Centre, Pte. Ltd.), 71 quoted in Jose S. Brillantes, "Addressing the Problems of Filipino Women Migrant Workers" in Ateneo Human Rights Center, *OCWs in Crisis: Protecting Filipino Migrant Workers*, (Makati City, Philippines: Ateneo Human Rights Center, 1995): 44.

fork and not chopsticks. In H.K., however, they are often made to use chopsticks. More significantly, they find difficulty in adjusting to Chinese food, which can be very minimal and composed mostly of noodles, bread, and meat, which is usually chicken. Besides the limitation on “what is eaten,” restrictions are also imposed with regard to “how much should be eaten.” While the Chinese regard Filipinas as “overweight,” “fat” and “eat too much,” DHs think of the Chinese as “too thin.” Chinese, in the eyes of the DHs, “eat very little.”<sup>26</sup> A lot of employers are often satisfied with just a cup of tea or coffee for breakfast or not eat breakfast at all. But breakfast is supposed to be the heaviest meal in the Filipino mindset. That is why, DHs often regard the measly meal they are given for breakfast (either a slice of bread/toast or a bowl of congee) and lunch (can be just a bowl of noodles) as inadequate. Some who are less lucky end up worse. One DH was provided with only three dry packets of instant noodles as her food for the whole day, which meant that each meal consisted of only one bowl of noodles.

Cultural practices and superstitions also make their life with the employer difficult. Bathing is an example of this. For the Chinese, the usual time for bathing is in the evening. Filipinos, on the other hand, usually take a bath in the morning. Hence, many DHs balk at employers’ rules for bathing in the evening. This rule becomes more problematic since DHs iron clothes in the evenings. In the Philippines, it is considered unhealthy to take a bath after ironing, or after doing physically strenuous work, that involves the hands. Filipinos believe that one can get colds, rheumatism, arthritis, bronchitis, pneumonia and, most of all, *pasma* and permanent varicose veins.<sup>27</sup> Employers, however, set the said rule for economic (saving money)<sup>28</sup> and political reasons, (controlling the body of the DH) and make it more difficult with added stipulations like dictating how many times a week and how long DHs could take a bath.

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<sup>26</sup> They also have problems with the way the Chinese cook their popular dish, i.e., chicken, which is usually steamed. DHs see this as being “undercooked.” Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 99–101, 107.

<sup>27</sup> *Pasma* is an illness where the hands tremble. Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 98–9.

<sup>28</sup> Some DHs also complain how they feel offended at employers who count even the grapes in the refrigerator—an act which could be attributed to the frugality of the Chinese.

Superstitions also get in the way. Some employers do not want their DH to take a bath in the morning or wear long faces (even if it is a reaction to an abusive situation), because these are considered bad luck for the business. Lastly, the difference in the Chinese's and Filipinos' idea of a domestic worker, especially an FDH, is also a cultural issue. Wealth, financial independence, and education, which a few highly-educated DHs fit into,<sup>29</sup> are antithetical to Chinese ideas about domestic workers. Moreover, most Chinese employers adhere to the traditional master-servant relationship. As such a domestic worker is not a professional nanny or housekeeper as most of the predominantly educated DHs tend to think of themselves or want themselves to be treated.<sup>30</sup> For the Chinese employers a domestic worker, especially a foreign domestic worker, is more of a *muijai*, an indentured unskilled, inferior servant or a young girl who can never be an equal and has minimal rights. The DHs (especially the educated ones), on the other hand, expect more just relations, if not more personal and relational employer-employee relationship. Hence, problems arise when their employers make them feel so low.

Differences in religious affiliation, reinforced by class differences, also spawn difficulties and tensions. DHs have to learn to adjust to the reality that they are in a non-Christian-dominated country. The ignorance of Buddhist employers about Christianity, for example, hinders DHs from practicing the religion they were used to, e.g., going to Mass on Sundays.<sup>31</sup> Class issues also make the local Christian community dissociate from a Filipina DH church. This dissociation is affirmed by the following excerpt from the report on H.K., presented at the FABC-sponsored Symposium on Filipino Migrant Workers in Asia:

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<sup>29</sup> Studies show the dominant profile of the DHs as young, single, educated women, mostly in their twenties to thirties, with rural origin or background, and come from extended families that belong to simple town folks. These also reveal DHs do not come from the poorest sector of Philippine society and even suggest some have middle class backgrounds. See Carolyn French, *Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong: A Preliminary Survey* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1986), 7–15; Barbara Lane, "Filipino Domestic Workers in Hong Kong," *Asian Migrant* Vol. V, No. 1 (January–March 1992): 24–32; Noel Vasquez et al. *Tracer Study on Filipina Domestic Helpers Abroad: The Socio-Economic Conditions of Filipina Domestic Workers from Pre-Departure Until the End of their First Two-Year Contract in Hong Kong*, (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 1995), 20–7.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, F.J. Pidgeon, "Surrogate Parent?" *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 2 (March 1996): 1.

<sup>31</sup> F.J. Pidgeon, "Knocking on Heaven's Door," *TNT Hong Kong*, Vol. 5, No. 9 (September 1999): 24.

As we appreciate the contribution of our Filipino brethren to the Church of Hong Kong, we also recognize the difficulties in establishing a Church that is both Filipino and Chinese. We are aware that we still need to inculcate among our Chinese people that the Church is universal and that two cultures can proclaim the same faith in the same Church, in different ways and languages. The Diocese of Hong Kong would like to see the Chinese and the Filipinos join one another at Mass and gatherings, as equals and as friends. We may still be a long way from the reality of our dream but we hold this reality as our best dream and with the cooperation of the jolly and forgiving Filipinos, this will surely come true in God's own time.<sup>32</sup>

Eliseo Tellez Jr. alleges, that the strong reliance on religion for comfort among DHs, also lays them open to tensions with the local people, who frown at the crowds they create in church grounds and consider their presence as "nuisance." He reveals:

the church is a sanctuary to them.... Anyone who utters the name of Jesus is their friend. This makes them easy prey for charismatic groups which do not ordinarily concern themselves with things mundane like the migrants' almost slave-like conditions. The growing number of commercialized charismatic groups is one of the current challenges to the churches in Hong Kong.<sup>33</sup>

Fr. Frank Pidgeon, a Redemptorist (C.Ss.R.) priest, even goes so far as to say that "the indifference of the local church at the grassroots level, leads to the proliferation of myriad and assorted [religious] groups" many of whom "do their members more damage than good." He also pointed out how the DHs' hunger for religion or deep desire to experience the comfort of religion as migrants are taken advantage of by religious groups which, Fr. Pidgeon alleges, do not have sound leadership.<sup>34</sup> The Tracer study reports one concrete case where the consulate traced the insanity of a few migrant workers to their membership in a church group. Although the group's name was not revealed the study

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in "Filipino Migrant Workers in Hong Kong," *Asian Migrant* Vol. 7, No. 1 (January-March 1994): 7.

<sup>33</sup> Eliseo Tellez Jr. "An Overview of Filipino Migrant Workers in Hong Kong," in Christian Conference of Asia, *Serving One Another* (Kowloon, H.K.: CCA Urban Rural Mission), 82.

<sup>34</sup> F.J. Pidgeon, "Challenging the Christian Community," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 4 (April 1999): 6-7. This is especially true for commercialized charismatic groups, which preach a religion that does not talk about nor does something about the DHs' oppressive conditions but instead lulls them into a false sense of security.

reports that the group allegedly placed too much pressure on their members causing unfortunate events.<sup>35</sup>

The problematic experiences DHs get out of their strong tendency to draw upon their Christian (especially Catholic) religion is not only external but also internal. A Filipino pastor in H.K. maintains, the DHs' oppression is rooted in "centuries of the misuse of religion... [which] has created a people that are susceptible to blackmail." "Filipino Christianity," he says, is "a brand of Christianity that is more enslaving rather than liberating."<sup>36</sup> The "unshakeable belief, that all that happens in life is God's will,"<sup>37</sup> for example, takes the sting out of suffering and weakens the desire or quest for justice. It can leave DHs complacent or passive. The problem lies not only in the interpretation of Christian teachings but also the interpretation DHs themselves put on biblical personalities. An interpretation of Mary focused on her Annunciation and how she unwaveringly said YES to God as the "the Servant of the Lord,"<sup>38</sup> for instance, most likely will not be able to offer much help in resisting oppressive situations.

Hence it is not surprising why many DHs become captive victims of charismatic groups, which emphasize the non-liberating concepts of the Divine, especially those which tap into the Filipino Christians' romanticized notion of suffering and sacrifice. This religious notion of suffering as good and acceptable is reflected in the following advice by a DH:

Keep in mind that you are not alone. Always be shielded with constant prayers and remember the promise of victory which will brighten your way and make your burden light. What appears to us as human tragedy can urge us to revive our family ties—especially for broken homes to be united, for husband and wives to make a house a home... Acknowledge that these trials may be part of God's plan for us, He knows what is best.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Noel Vasquez et al. *Tracer Study on Filipina Domestic Helpers Abroad*, 68.

<sup>36</sup> See Profile # 6, "Ministry Alongside Migrant Workers," <http://www.migrants.net/resources/magazine/issue1/profiles6.htm>, accessed February 12, 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Frank Pidgeon, "I Really Loved My Father," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 7 (September 1996): 4.

<sup>38</sup> "Pag-aralan ang Biblia: *Totus Tuus*—I am completely yours, O Mary," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 1 (January 1999): 31.

<sup>39</sup> Miriam Becasen, "Are You Dealing with Agonizing Burdens," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 4 (April 1999): 14.

Indeed, Filipino Christianity, especially as handed down by the Spaniards to Filipino women,<sup>40</sup> and how it continues to be interpreted by conservative religious leaders makes suffering a reasonable part of life and Christian witness. Fr. Pidgeon's observation, based on his years of ministry (to the DHs), captures this very well: "Like so many of her companions the easy blend of religion and culture has taught her the value of suffering. As Christ suffered it is but natural that she should suffer. Without hard work and sacrifice, life just does not appear to be normal. 'No pain, no gain.' That's what life is all about."<sup>41</sup>

### *Racial and Ethnic Discrimination*

The generally low regard for Filipinos, especially for DHs,<sup>42</sup> by the Chinese in H.K.<sup>43</sup> further diminishes alternatives for the DHs. Because of this discrimination based on race (non-Chinese) and ethnicity (non-Western) is an axis of oppression for the DHs. First, the Chinese associate them with discriminatory racialized stereotypes, like "stupid," "lazy," "immoral," "dirty," etc. The AMC (Asian Migrant Center) research mentions very specific discriminatory stereotypes and statements directed against DHs. These include "just a DH/maid," "just a Filipino," "from Third World," "Filipinos are bad," "Filipinos are only DH," "maid in the Philippines," "no good Filipinos," "poor country

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<sup>40</sup> See Mary John Mananzan, "The Filipino Woman: A Historical Perspective," in *Culture, Women, and Theology*, ed., John S. Pobee (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994): 49–64.

<sup>41</sup> F.J. Pidgeon, "Knocking on Heaven's Door," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 9 (September 1999): 25. Fr. Pidgeon, however, could also possibly be guilty of reinforcing this notion of redemptive suffering. Writing on a DH whose hands were burned with an iron by an employer he says that one could make sense of the DHs' ordeal through the Christian belief that "all suffering, no matter how hideous, is redemptive." F.J. Pidgeon, "Hands of Shame," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 6, No. 5 (August–September 2000): 5.

<sup>42</sup> This is explicitly stated in Commission for Filipinos Overseas, *Handbook for Filipinos Overseas*, 4th ed. (Manila: Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 1998), 78–81.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew Lee, for example, points at what he calls as the "racism and abuse of process being perpetrated by immigration agents at the Hong Kong International Airport against Philippine citizens." Lee, an American citizen, found out from Chinese desk agents that work for two major airlines that service the Philippines and Hong Kong that Filipinos, especially young women, are routinely singled out by immigration agents and detained for fear that these women want to stay illegally in Hong Kong. He also found this out from his fiancé who flew to Hong Kong in 2008 to meet him only to be detained for 16 hours with three other Filipino women (one had been there for three days) interrogated and subjected to a harrowing experience (strip search for drugs, no food, and no phone call) then sent back to the Philippines on the airline that brought her to Hong Kong. See Andrew Lee "Hong Kong's racism against Philippine citizens," <<http://www.abs-cbnnews.com>> accessed June 25, 2009.



people,” “alien,” “ambitious people,” “nothing to eat in the Philippines,” etc.<sup>44</sup>

The most insidious of all these stereotypes, however, is the branding of Filipinos, especially Filipino women, as “DH” or “maid.” This inscription is enshrined in the demeaning name for the Filipina in H.K. as “*banmui*.” *Ban* is the final Cantonese syllable term for Philippines and *mui* is from *muijai*.<sup>45</sup> This racialized discrimination, which also contributes to the reinforcement of the pervasive notion of Filipinas as domestic helpers,<sup>46</sup> has placed the DHs at the receiving end of stigmatization and alienation, from various sectors within Hong Kong society. This discrimination with racial undertones was recently exposed in a column by a well known H.K. Chinese journalist that labeled the Philippines as “a nation of servants”.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> AMC, *Baseline Research on Racial and Gender Discrimination Towards Filipino, Indonesian and Thai Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: AMC, 2000), 48.

<sup>45</sup> *Muijai* may mean “younger sister” or “girl.” But as older mature women being called a “girl” is insulting for DHs as a “girl” is someone who is perpetually immature, inferior, and one who has to submit herself. But a *muijai* is actually an old Chinese version of slavery of young girls who were usually sold with or without their parents’ consent. They are indentured unpaid laborers at the mercy of their masters who often subject them to verbal and rigorous physical discipline. It is a bit different from the other extreme forms of slavery because *muijais* get their freedom when their masters marry them off. But then again since it is the employers who arrange the marriage, *muijais* often end up being concubines rather than wives. See Maria Jaschok, *Concubines and Bondservants: The Social History of a Chinese Custom* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1988) as cited in Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 45–8.

<sup>46</sup> AMC, *Baseline Research on Racial and Gender Discrimination*, 48. See also Riza Faith Ybanez, *Conditions in Labor Migration that Contribute to the HIV Vulnerability of Migrant Domestic Workers: A Case Study of Filipino Domestic Workers in Hong Kong* <[http://caramasia.gn.apc.org/Ritchie\\_HK\\_cdtm.htm](http://caramasia.gn.apc.org/Ritchie_HK_cdtm.htm)> accessed January 22, 2003; Zenaida Lumba, “Their Story... Our Story: The Agony and Hope of the Filipina Migrant Workers” in *Doing Theology with Asian Resources*. eds., John England and Archie Lee (Auckland: Pace Publishing, 1993): 105; and Johanna Son, “Introduction” in *Risks and Rewards: Stories from the Philippine Migration Trail* (Bangkok: Inter-Press Service Asia-Pacific, 2002): vii.

<sup>47</sup> The article sparked local and international furor that the publisher apologized and took it down from its online edition. See the story in Jerome Aning, “Hong Kong Magazine regrets columnist’s racial slur,” <<http://globalnation.inquirer.net/news/breakingnews/view/20090330>> accessed June 25, 2009. This is not the first time that a controversy of this kind, albeit not involving Hong Kong, has erupted. Maruja Asis, “Caring for the World: Filipino Domestic Workers Gone Global,” in *Asian Women as Transnational Domestic Workers*, eds., Shirlena Huang, Brenda S.A. Yeoh, and Noor Abdul Rahman (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005): 23 points to two other instances where the word “Filipino” has come to mean domestic worker largely due to the ubiquity of Filipino domestic workers in many parts of the world. Asis says that this is a development that has rued the Philippines as one of the social costs of exporting poverty.

Collective stigmatization is the lot, indeed, of Filipinas in H.K. One concrete and well-known manifestation of this was the issue on the Filipino Helper Dolls in 1986. Created by a North American company, the “Filipino domestic helper” dolls were garbed in a black and white uniform complete with a Philippine passport. With a price tag of HK\$ 230 each, the dolls were marketed in trendy tourist shopping areas, with the derisive promotional banner “Will you sign my contract?” As expected, this outraged the Filipino community including then Philippine Consul Jesus Yabes, who condemned the dolls as a contemptuous branding of Filipinos as a whole as domestic helpers. What incensed the DHs and the other Filipinos in H.K. even more are the false ideas conveyed in the doll’s contract. These include “The Helper shall be employed for a lifetime” and “The Helper shall receive monthly wages as the Employer wishes.”<sup>48</sup> It made the “cute,” “immature,” and “helpless” dolls and the persons they represent, appear as things that are bought not hired, and whose identity is tied to the occupation of being a DH.

The most famous experience of racial and ethnic discrimination of the DHs in H.K., however, is the “Battle of Chater Road” in 1992.<sup>49</sup> Turned off and resentful of the “invasion” of Filipinas of Chater Road and Statue Square during Sunday, shop owners instigated a discriminatory attack on the DHs, by proposing to ban them from congregating and staying in the said public places. The proposal naturally drew flak from the DHs, who fought against it, until the Executive Council mediated and allowed them to use the said public park and road again.

The Battle of Chater Road is a significant event because it brought into the open the low regard for the Filipina, especially for the DH, that Filipinas have been experiencing all along in the hands of the Chinese. Hong Kong Land, Central District’s most powerful landlord, started the conflict by proposing the re-opening of Chater Road to public traffic on Sundays, amidst the very public knowledge, that the

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<sup>48</sup> Nicole Constable, “Dolls, T-Birds, and Ideal Workers: The Negotiation of Filipino Identity in Hong Kong” in *Home and Hegemony: Domestic Service and Identity Politics in South and Southeast Asia*. ed. Kathleen Adams and Sara Dickey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000): 232–3.

<sup>49</sup> Commission for Filipinos Overseas, *Handbook for Filipinos Overseas*, 30–1 quoted in Episcopal Commission for Migrants and Itinerant People-Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (ECMI-CBCP), *Character Formation Program on Migration* (Makati City, Philippines: St. Paul’s, 2002), 3.

road is a “haven” of Filipina DHs on Sundays, which is the common and “cherished” day-off. Hong Kong Land’s justifications for the said suggestion included: 1) the “environmental problems” posed by the crowding of domestic workers in the area; 2) “undesirable activities” like gambling and hawking and; 3) the “continual complaints” about “restricted access,” crowds, and noise which they get from their tenants. The company further reasoned out, that re-opening Chater Road would allow another “class” of people to come there. The derogatory insinuations did not end with these. Within the report that the company submitted, were complaints from tenants, who accused the off-duty DHs of defacing the place and turning it into a “slum,” a “nightmare with the atmosphere of a third-rate amusement park.” Some tenants made no qualms, and directly said that they want “yuppies” or “quality families,” and “not Filipinos loitering around and creating all kinds of nuisance.”<sup>50</sup>

Hong Kong Land’s suggestion, indeed, opened a Pandora’s box of the ill-feelings the Chinese have on the DHs. Sentiments declaring that the Filipinas are “guest workers” with “no divine right to commandeer Central for their own use” came out in the open.<sup>51</sup> Labels like “dirty” and “messy,” because of the six tons of litter they allegedly leave every Sunday, also arose. Most of all, a number of the locals expressed their outrage, at how the maids have “displaced” them right in their own territory. These locals lambasted the “ridiculous arrangement which the majority [Chinese]...have had to put up with for the past ten years,” i.e., “deprivation” of the use of Statue Square. The worse was yet to come though, with Hong Kong Land’s suggestion to allocate the underground car parks for the DHs instead. Seen as the height of persecution, segregation, and of rendering them thoroughly invis-

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<sup>50</sup> Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 4, 36.

<sup>51</sup> One could find parallels in the reasons that Ernest Chui identifies in explaining the experience of exclusion in Hong Kong by new immigrants from China. Chui says that one factor is the vulnerability of Hong Kong’s economy which breeds a sense of insecurity, e.g. economic crisis of 1997 and the 1997 handover. Apparently the local people also become defensive when they perceive their interests are threatened. Another factor, according to Chui, is cultural. He says that there exists among the Chinese a sense of familism and parochial tendencies to care only for their immediate familial interests, e.g. when inflows of Vietnamese boat people and recent Chinese immigrants were perceived as taking something away from the local population. Ernest Chui, “Housing and Welfare Services in Hong Kong for New Immigrants from China: Inclusion or Exclusion?” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* Vol. 11, No. 2 (2002): 238–239.

ible, the Filipinos condemned the suggestion. The DHs decried it as another maneuvering to keep them “out of sight,” in the same way that existing rules force them to use back entrances to buildings, and confine them to certain waiting areas in elite clubs. Some residents, who came to the defense of the Filipinas, even labeled the suggestion as “ethnic cleansing.”<sup>52</sup>

DHs have also been subjected to racial discrimination, with class and gender undertones, through the label “prostitutes” and related derogatory descriptions, like “dirty,” “immoral,” and “sexually promiscuous.” The stereotype as “prostitutes” became strong in H.K. bars, in the late 1980s, when Filipinas, especially DHs, were dubbed as “LBFM” or Little Brown Fucking Machines.<sup>53</sup> This discourse on the Filipina as prostitute, Kimberly Chang and Julian Mc Allister Groves claim, pervades public discourse in H.K., and is usually constructed in relation to Western men. In *The Great Hong Kong Sex Novel*, for example, one H.K. writer devoted a whole chapter of his book detailing in overtly sexualized and racialized terms the sexual escapades of DHs—referred to as “little brown Eskimos”—as seen through the eyes of two Western businessmen.<sup>54</sup> Such racial images are then perpetuated in the media and in public debates in H.K., particularly among employers.<sup>55</sup>

### *As Migrant Filipino Women*

Another source of oppression of the DHs has to do with their gender identity, especially as Filipino women. In particular, the conditioning,

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<sup>52</sup> Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 4–6.

<sup>53</sup> Isabel Escoda says this title was concocted by expatriate playboys who frequent the brothel circuit and engage the “services” of DHs moonlighting as sex workers or GROs. It was perceived as racist since the Filipinas were obviously singled out for such censure and ridicule. There were also, at that time, Chinese, European, and Australian call girls. But it was to the Filipina that the image of lasciviousness was attached. Isabel Taylor Escoda, *Letters from Hong Kong: Viewing the Colony through Philippine Eyes*, 35.

<sup>54</sup> George Adams, *The Great Hong Kong Sex Novel* (H.K.: AIP Publications, 1993) as cited in Kimberly Chang and Julian Mc Allister Groves, “Neither ‘Saints’ Nor ‘Prostitutes’: Sexual Discourse in the Filipina Domestic Worker Community in Hong Kong,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* Vol. 23, No. 1 (2000): 77. Chang and Groves maintain this image of the sexually subservient Filipina is rooted in a long history of colonialism, sexism, and poverty in the Philippines, which intensified during the more than 40 years of American colonization when sex industry thrived around the US military bases.

<sup>55</sup> See Kimberly Chang and Julian Mc Allister Groves, “Neither ‘Saints’ Nor ‘Prostitutes,’” 74, 78.

taming, and circumscription of the DHs' sexuality and nurturing functions, both in H.K. and the Philippines, give rise to gendered migration, gendered transitions, and gendered violence.

*Gendered Socialization, Gendered Migration*

Gendered socialization, which heavily accounts for the DHs' migration as DHs, is basic to the oppression of the DHs, as migrant Filipino women. The following conclusion, from a comprehensive library search and analysis, of both published and unpublished local primary sources from the 1970s to 2002, on child-rearing and gender socialization in the Philippines, vividly paints this systematic (de)formation that gives rise to the DHs' gendered migration:

the family continues to be a major site of gender socialization of children....in the Philippines, sons and daughters are raised and treated differently within the family, in accordance with parents' gender expectation that mirror society's own prescriptions for what is appropriately masculine and feminine. In particular, the literature reveals some of the disadvantages experienced by the girl child stemming from the restrictions she has to contend with compared to the boy-child. She is (also) given more responsibilities inside the house because of the expectation that women should learn how to do household work [which] society view[s] as inferior work...the girl-child is [then] socialized to be limited in her future options...On the other hand, the boy-child is also trained, but for a different set of responsibilities, as in work outside the home that prepares and conditions them for a wider range of future vocations.<sup>56</sup>

Migrant DHs' domestication starts, indeed, in their growing-up years as a daughter, in the Philippines.<sup>57</sup> A Filipino daughter, once she is able, is expected to assist her mother in fulfilling the shared tasks of womanhood—the work of the household, the work of nurturance. Through gendered responsibility training—a hallmark of Filipino child-rearing practices, which begins early and accomplished systematically, especially when it comes to girls—daughters are trained to be domestic, indoor, and nurturant by being assigned to various tasks that

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<sup>56</sup> Ma. Emma Concepcion D. Liwag et al., "How We Raise Our Daughters and Sons: Child Rearing and Gender Socialization in the Philippines," *Philippine Journal of Psychology* Vol. 35, Nos. 1–2 (June–December 2002): 163–4.

<sup>57</sup> Mary John Mananzan, OSB, *The Woman Question in the Philippines* (Manila: Institute of Women's Studies, 1997), 5.

are stereotypically feminine.<sup>58</sup> Idealized traits for raising Filipino girls include industry, thrift, modesty, obedience, and love for the home or the family. As they get older, greater responsibility for household chores is transferred to them, particularly the eldest daughter, who often becomes the *tagasalo* (surrogate). One can obtain a glimpse of such socialization to service from Salvador Ilad's reflections in what he regards as "in a class of its own":

The Filipina Domestic Help discovers early on what genuine service is all about. Since infancy, their life has been a hands-on preparation for a life dedicated to others. Growing up with six or seven or even more brothers and sisters, they receive their primary education in service. From almost the time they could walk, they take responsibility for a younger sibling.<sup>59</sup>

From the perspective of migrant DH daughters familial obligations or filial duty is a priority. This strong sense of duty towards family and relatives and, in particular, towards parents permeates Philippine familial ideology and acts as a powerful constraint in individual (even personal) decisions by migrant DHs, especially the young and unmarried. Cecilia Tacoli's study contends that even the decision to migrate may be largely motivated by the feeling that they should "look after the family."<sup>60</sup> She maintains that daughters

have stronger commitments and obligations to their households in the Philippines than their male counterparts. Women send higher proportions of their earnings and their remittances, on average, represent a larger percentage of total household income in areas of origin than is the case among men.... Moreover, their savings are affected by familial expectations of receiving financial help.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> They are trained and expected to be *matulungin sa bahay* (helpful in the house), *masinop sa gamit* (orderly with possessions), *malinis sa katawan* (neat and clean with their body), and *mahilig magsimba* (loves going to Mass). Even games that girls play or made to play are gendered. *Bahay-bahayan* (playing house) is the most popular, followed by *lutu-lutuan* (cooking). In these favorite role-playing games girls enact mother-and-baby scenarios.

<sup>59</sup> Salvador Ilad, "Service with a Style," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 4, No. 6 (November 1998): 4.

<sup>60</sup> Breaking away from this restrictive "family first" ideology comes with a heavy price through guilt (on the part of the DHs) and the conflict that is bound to arise and which could even alienate them from the family.

<sup>61</sup> Cecilia Tacoli, "Migrating 'For the Sake of the Family'?: Gender, Life Course and Intra-Household Relations Among Filipino Migrants in Rome," *Philippine Sociological Review* Vol. 44 (1996): 17, 27.

Carolyn Israel-Sobritchea, in “The Ideology of Female Domesticity: Its Impact on the Status of Filipino Women,” sheds light on how this socialization into care work and control of the DHs’ nurturing functions is systematically achieved:

A popular belief [among Filipinos] is that the sexes differ in their biological make-up hence they must have differing roles and positions in society. Filipino women are perceived to be physically weaker, shorter, and smaller than men. As such they are expected to do “light work” or engage in less “risky” occupations. But what are commonly regarded as light work and, therefore, feminine work, largely consist of such domestic chores as cooking, laundering, ironing, dusting of furnitures, childcare, and the like. The popular expression that a woman “is good only for the home” underscores the view that she is indeed biologically suited for childcare and housekeeping. For reason of physical weakness, her rightful place is in the home where she can perform “lighter tasks” and be better protected from harm and danger by the male species.... Cultural beliefs that regulate the physical mobility of females also find justification in women’s physical weakness.... They are expected to stay in the house most of the time and limit their social activities to those held close to home.... As girls are taught early in life to value staying home, many grow up believing that such is the most natural thing to do, developing in the process an ambivalent attitude about active involvement in non-domestic activities. Philippine society nurtures other beliefs that tend to bind women to their traditional roles as housekeeper and child-carer. These include the belief in the primacy of the female reproductive role over her other roles, the perceived contradictions between family and public life and the need, especially of a woman, to put family interest above all her other concerns.<sup>62</sup>

With domestic work a demand in H.K. this sexual division of labor comes into play and the highly ingrained sense of responsibility among women is taken advantage of by the DHs’ families. Most Filipino families choose or agree for the daughter, sister, or wife to apply as DH, because they think it is a “woman’s work,” and a “responsible” daughter, sister, or mother is supposed to consent to this.<sup>63</sup> Because many

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<sup>62</sup> Carolyn Israel-Sobritchea, “The Ideology of Female Domesticity: Its Impact on the Status of Filipino Women,” *Review of Women’s Studies* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1990): 30–1. Constable, “Dolls, T-Birds, and Ideal Workers,” 237–40 citing a DH’s appeal to find ways to “help lesbians turn over a new leaf” points at how this gendered socialization also becomes a basis for attacks against lesbian DHs, who call themselves, *tomboys*.

<sup>63</sup> Rosanna Luz F. Valerio, “Iisang Pisa: Clans in Chain Migration,” in *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration*, eds., Estrella Dizon Añonuevo and Augustus Añonuevo (Quezon City, Philippines: Balikbayani Foundation, Inc. and ATIKHA Overseas Workers and Communities Initiative, Inc., 2002), 34 asserts

of their families are also poor; because they are viewed as economic dependents; because no better-paying job (or no job at all) is available for them in the Philippines; because the most available job for Third World/Filipino women like them is domestic work; and because recruiters for domestic workers abound, many Filipino women are more or less forced to migrate as DHs.

Nora's case is symptomatic of this. She has worked in H.K. for seven years and most of her salary was spent on the education of a younger sister, whom she hoped would replace her after graduation. Her sister did come to work as a DH in H.K. But lacking Nora's determination and courage the sister returned to the Philippines after only a few months and got married. Asked whether she felt that she is being "used by her family," Nora's answer, loaded with meaning, is this: "Not really, but... It is my willingness to help... I'm going home... As for my family, *gusto ko silang matuto!* [I want them to learn to be independent]... I have my own life to lead. I want to get married and have a family of my own."<sup>64</sup> Nora's plight exposes the inner tension, common to many other young DHs, who have become sole breadwinners of the family. She is "stranded" and "torn between her devotion to her family and a girl's wish to be free to live her own life."<sup>65</sup>

DHs then become the females in their own families—daughters, sisters, wives, mothers—whose education and career are not family priorities. They become the women, whom their own families, communities, and countrywo/men, perceive as doing the work they best know how to do and trained for, that is, domestic work. They become the (literally) "other" half of humanity in a local, national, regional, and global society that marginalizes them in terms of political, economic, and socio-cultural participation and advancement by constructing and treating them as second-class human beings hence second-class citizens because they are women. As such, even the work they do or are

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that other studies have also shown that the family plays a key role in the gendering of migration in the Philippines. She cites here the studies done by J. Lauby and O. Stark, "Individual migration as a family strategy: Young Women in the Philippines," *Population Studies* 42 (1988): 473–86 and J. Young, *Migration and education in the Philippines: An anthropological study of an Ilocano community* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1980). See also James A. Tyner, "The social construction of gendered migration from the Philippines," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* Vol. 3, No. 4 (1994): 589–617.

<sup>64</sup> F.J. Pidgeon, "The Springtime of Life," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 3, No. 1 (April 1997): 4.

<sup>65</sup> F.J. Pidgeon, "The Springtime of Life," 4.



made to do is devalued by the global job market, which segregates them to the job in the first place. And since it is done in the context of migration other matters complicate their situation. As migrant DH their job is within the derogatory category of the 3D (difficult, dangerous, and disdained) and SALEP (shunned by all citizens except the poor) jobs<sup>66</sup> where the Philippine government has less or no bargaining power nor political clout to fight for them.

### *Gendered Transitions*

With a patriarchal socialization DHs also undergo gendered transitions. In H.K., they have to learn to fend for themselves and fight for their rights on their own. There is no protector brother or father, husband or boyfriend to run to, as they have been taught or are used to. In H.K. they have to earn a living and learn to be politically and economically independent to a certain extent. They have to adjust to the effects of their (increased) economic value, and the relative degree of economic independence they experience with a paid job. Politically, they have to adjust from being followers of their parents,' older brother's, or husband's decisions to becoming, to a certain extent, decision-makers. They are forced to find their own voice, with regard to family matters (albeit only mostly on how their remittance will be spent) since even the parents, especially those who are entirely dependent on their daughter's remittance, give up some of their authority in deference to their daughters who are the economic providers. Most importantly, as can be gleaned from the story of Nora mentioned above, this role shift from being traditional or dependent daughters, sisters, and housewives to breadwinner can restrict personal development, especially for the majority who are young and unmarried. It buries them deeper into their oppression as their future takes a back seat and the family becomes the priority.

A lot of things about being Filipino women are also inevitably challenged by the liberalism in H.K. society itself. A case in point is the challenge to the *Maria Clara* image of the Filipina. The epitome of sweetness, modesty, chastity, and obedience *Maria Clara* dates back to

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<sup>66</sup> Writings by Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, "Between Women: Migrant Domestic Work and Gender Inequalities in the New Global Economy," *Concilium* 2002/5: 28–39 and "Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor," *Gender and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (August 2000): 560–81 provide a concise discussion on this.

colonial times. She is the Filipino version of the Spanish *doncella*—the sweet, docile, obedient, and self-sacrificing ideal young girl or woman of the Iberian peninsula around the 15th century—that the Spaniards used to domesticate and, hence, subjugate the Filipina.<sup>67</sup> The following excerpt from a letter titled “Maria Clara in Mini” indicates how DHs continue to be plagued by this colonial image:

I'd like to contribute a bit of my ideas about the MARIA CLARA issue. Well for myself I am simple in many ways.... Before putting on a sexy outfit, face the mirror and ask yourself *kung bagay o hindi* (if it looks good on you or not)... I suggest that those who are very pa-sexy, *mag-taxi na lang kayo para class ang dating* (just take a taxi so you'll look classy). We have to make ourselves respectable *dahil gawa ng isa ay damay ang iba*... (because what one does affects the others).<sup>68</sup>

For married DHs with children the effects of their absence as mother and wife constitute one of their deepest forms of oppressive transitions in the context of migration as Filipino women. “A Filipina,” as Chit says, is “a woman who loves [her] children and husband so much... will do everything to make them happy [and] for them... even face death,” since (for the DH mother) caring for her children is “the call of (my) God.”<sup>69</sup> Not surprisingly the sense of guilt for being an absentee mother is another source of much oppression for DH mothers. At the root of their guilt is what they perceive as a transgression of a “good” Christian woman’s proper place and role, which is at home with her husband and children.

This personal and societal perception of their sojourn in H.K. as a betrayal of their God-ordained and Philippine society-ingrained primary duty and responsibility to be good wives and mothers then

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<sup>67</sup> This was reinforced through the Catholic schools for girls and women that the Spaniards established. This was also accomplished through the “cult of the Virgin Mary” where the obedient Mary of the Annunciation was the only model used to speak of Mary. The *doncella*, through *Maria Clara*, became a powerful image in the systematic colonization of the Filipinas such that Carmen Guerrero Nakpil quoting Maria Cristina Velez, *Images of the Filipina* (Manila: Ala-ala Foundation, 1975), 47 says it is the “greatest misfortune to have befallen Filipino women...” Mary John Mananzan, OSB, *The Woman Question in the Philippines*, 4–5.

<sup>68</sup> See “Letters,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1996): 26–7. Also basic to the *Maria Clara* debate is the perceived violation of the Spanish-inculcated cherishing of the utter simplicity and “virginal look” of the woman, whose respectability is heavily based on how she “femininely” dresses and presents or carries herself in public.

<sup>69</sup> Chit Rosqueta-Valencia, “I am a Filipina,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 7 (September 1996): 16.

becomes like a millstone hanging over their neck. They bring to life, what Barbara Rogers, in *The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies*, refers to as maternal deprivation theory.<sup>70</sup> They feel guilty they have left their children in the care of others, while they take care of the children of others. They worry about the emotional needs of their children, which they think will suffer terribly because the *ilaw ng tahanan* (light of the house) is gone.<sup>71</sup> They are guilty and anxious too that the husband, the *haligi ng tahanan* (foundation of the house) will not be able to take good and proper care of the house and the children, since it is not his responsibility to do so.<sup>72</sup> They feel afraid, that their children will drift away from them, because someone else is doing the nurturing. They are tormented by the thought of their children feeling very uncomfortable with them, when they go home or, worse, of the possibility of their children dropping out of school, falling into drug addiction or alcoholism, and resorting to early marriage purportedly due to lack of maternal care and guidance.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> This ideology—attributed to John Bowlby and others at the end of World War II—holds that children would allegedly suffer if their mother, or another woman working full-time as mother substitute, did not provide them with “constant attention night and day, seven days a week and 365 days a year.” It appeals to mothers’ feeling guilty about the possibility of inflicting permanent traumas upon their children on account of their having to take on jobs outside the home. See John Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 77–8, as cited in Barbara Rogers, *The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1980), 23–4.

<sup>71</sup> Overprotection, virtually synonymous to a mother’s love, is one of the most desirable maternal qualities in Filipino culture. Ma. Emma Concepcion D. Liwag et al., “How We Raise Our Daughters and Sons,” 159.

<sup>72</sup> A study, for instance, revealed that in families with working mothers, fathers ranked only second to grandmothers as substitute caretakers. See University of the Philippines, College of Home Economics, *Final report on child-rearing practices: The Philippine Setting* as cited in Emma Concepcion D. Liwag et al., “How We Raise Our Daughters and Sons,” 160. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas. “The Gender Paradox in the Transnational Families of Filipino Migrant Women,” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* Vol. 14, No. 3 (2005): 243–268 illustrates this persistence of traditional gender roles more clearly in the context of migrant women workers.

<sup>73</sup> In her study of the October 1994 to May 1996 issues of *Tinig Filipino*, Rhacel Parreñas, “Transgressing the Nation-State: The Partial Citizenship and ‘Imagined (Global) Community’ of Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers,” <<http://www.iupui.edu/~anthkb/a104/philippines/migrationfilipinas.htm>>, accessed August 23, 2003 articulates a symptom of how maternal deprivation theory works among DH mothers. Apparently there is a general fear and suspicion among them that the children they leave behind are “abused.” For discussions related to this see Graziano Battistela and Maria Cecilia Astaro-Conaco, *Impact of Labor Migration on the Children Left Behind* (Quezon City, Philippines: ECMI-CBCP, 1996); Augustus T. Anõnuevo, “Migrant Women’s Dream for a Better Life: At What Cost?” in *Coming Home: Women, Migra-*

Allegedly the DHs' absence does not only create "solo parents" and "seasonal orphans" but also unfaithful husbands and juvenile delinquent children. As such DHs get depressed when they receive reports of the infidelity or infidelities of their husband, which is often justified, sometimes by the DHs themselves as a coping mechanism in their (DHs) absence. This systematically puts the greater blame on the DHs. Hence in in-depth interviews, where six out of ten husbands had an extra-marital affair, five out of the six women who acknowledged the problem of infidelity still continued to live with their husbands.<sup>74</sup>

Their guilt and burden get stronger and heavier with homilies and entreaties by religious leaders for them to prioritize their family and return home.<sup>75</sup> This places them in a more ambivalent position because they left for their family's sake in the first place. Inclusion of discourses on the various family problems their labor migration spawned in socio-political and religious discussions in the Philippines and H.K. is the final nail on their feelings of guilt and confusion. Instead of feeling like the *bagong bayani* (new heroines) that the Philippine government is calling them in appreciation of their contribution to the country's economy, they end up feeling like "traitors," to the people that matter most to them, i.e., their family, especially their children.

For unmarried DHs one difficulty that arises in coping as migrant Filipino women has to do with having a relationship with the opposite sex or, in their own words, "finding a good man to be a husband." Their gender (theirs is a predominantly female community) as well as race and class (they are Filipina DHs) strongly limits their options. According to a study by Marilen Abesamis titled *Romance and Resistance: The Experience of the Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong* single DHs prioritize the "white, middle-class male," thinking that marrying a white, middle-class male would mean attaining a higher

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*tion and Reintegration*, 73–83; and Gina Alunan-Melgar and Rene Borrromeo, "The Plight of Children of OFWs," in *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration*, 106–14.

<sup>74</sup> This also has to do with the sexual double standard in Philippine society whereby Filipinos are generally more tolerant of men's infidelity than that of women's. This common thinking that it is normal for men to have sex with other women because it is part of their nature then legitimizes (even lionizes) husbands who cheat on their migrant wives. Rosanna Luz F. Valerio, "Pagtitimpi at Panggigigil: Sex and the Migrant Woman" in *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration*, 63.

<sup>75</sup> See Anil Stephen, "Maid in Hong Kong: The city's churches are helping exploited migrant workers" <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/011/19.26.html>>, accessed August 23, 2003.

social class, more “freedom,” and rights.<sup>76</sup> But unfortunately this does not happen because of the cultural differences and society’s low regard for (Filipina) DHs. Even those who do end up having a relationship or marry non-Filipinos, eventually realize their partners were attracted to them because they are seen as homebodies—subservient, faithful, and good housekeeper—or a maid under another name.<sup>77</sup> As a result many unmarried DHs have little choice but to end up preferring Filipino men. But since there are so few Filipino men in H.K., and in view of class boundaries within the Filipino migrant community itself,<sup>78</sup> the “field” for the single DHs becomes all the more limited.

This severe limitation of possibilities for a “husband material” among unmarried DHs who are socialized in the Philippines that marriage and having children is the be-all and end-all of a woman’s existence often becomes a problem for them, as women. That is why those who are always asked “Why are you still single?” often get annoyed.<sup>79</sup> The prevalence of this mentality explains why marriages are primary occasions for celebration for the DHs. Wedding pictures even land on the cover page of magazines that have mostly DHs as contributors and readers.<sup>80</sup> Not surprisingly conflicts or fights about men or boyfriends, especially about boyfriend-grabbing, also occur within their peer groups. Moreover, men take advantage of this perceived “desperation”<sup>81</sup> and vulnerability of the unmarried DHs. Even Filipino men take them for a ride and deceive them, for instance, by not revealing that they (Filipino men) are already married. Still, a number of unmarried DHs enter into these tenuous relationships which are often short-lived. They range from two weeks to two years, which means these often end when the DH returns to the Philippines.

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<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Ma. Ceres P. Doyo, “Tomboy Love,” in Inter-Press Service, *Risks and Rewards: Stories from the Philippine Migration Trail* (Bangkok: IPS, 2002), 39–43.

<sup>77</sup> “The Mating Game,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 9 (September 1999): 5.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, “Class Conscious,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 11 (Jan.–Feb. 1997): 10–1.

<sup>79</sup> This preoccupation with their “lovelife” can also be seen in how it is a popular topic in magazines like TNT and *Tinig Filipino* where articles, columns, and letters are mostly written by them. See Ping Gonzalez, “Thirty-five and still single,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 8 (August 1999): 13–4.

<sup>80</sup> See, for instance, the cover page of *TNT* Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1996).

<sup>81</sup> As a DH says the price of male OFWs in H.K. is more expensive than gold. See “Presyo ng lalaking OFW sa HK, mahal pa sa ginto,” *Pilipino Star Ngayon* (August 27, 1997), 5.

Their sexual needs also land the DHs in problematic situations. Single or married, some get involved in casual relationships and casual trysts, because of loneliness. Married ones all the more resort to this when their husbands cheat on them. But most of the time the DHs find themselves on the losing end. Others get additional problems when they get pregnant. Some married women end up ruining their marriage.<sup>82</sup> The intensity of the problems posed by their emotional, psychological, and sexual needs as women is also partly reflected in the emergence of *tomboys*, and in the increase in relationships of “straight” women with *tomboys*.<sup>83</sup> They enter into what they call “For Hong Kong only” affair—a relationship that is usually a well-kept secret from their families. The problem is they are not often able to get out of such relationships unscathed even after they are supposedly ended upon their return to the Philippines. Most feel guilty because same-sex relationships are not really accepted in the Philippines, particularly in Filipino Catholic religious culture, which regards it as “sinful” and “immoral.”

### *Gendered Violence*

Violence directed to them as women also regulates and devastates the DHs. First, there is the problem of gendered economic violence. Gendered wage violations are another form of gendered economic violence. For example, the AMC’s baseline research on racial and gender discrimination reveals there is a marked difference, even among Filipino DHs, between the wages of women and men FDH. The report further says women FDH, on average, are lower paid (\$ 3,619 which is below the minimum wage) as compared to men (\$ 4,758). The same study also exposed that although (Filipina) DHs fared better and get most of the 11-day holidays per year the gender component of the granting of rest days or days-off, where less than 9% male FDH are

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<sup>82</sup> See Daisy Mandap, “The Call of the Sea (and Its Men),” in *Risks and Rewards: Stories from the Philippine Migration Trail*. Inter-Press Service Asia-Pacific (Bangkok: IPS, 2002): 32–4.

<sup>83</sup> *Tomboy* is the commonly used term in the Philippines to refer to lesbians. Marilen Abesamis’ study on the DHs’ sexuality which is quoted in Ma. Ceres P. Doyo, “Tomboy Love,” in *Risks and Rewards in Inter Press Service Asia-Pacific, Risks and Rewards: Stories from the Philippine Migration Trail* (Bangkok: IPS, 2002): 39–43 notes, as well, that *tomboy* relationships also serve as a means of resistance for those whose marriages had failed or those whose husbands are irresponsible and unfaithful. For these women, Abesamis says, *tomboys* are regarded “sensitive,” “caring,” and provide a sense of security more than any male in a heterosexual relationship.

affected, as compared to more than 22% of the women, points to a gendered dynamics.

The H.K. government further reinforced this institutionalized gendered violence with the proposal in 1999 to remove maternity protection for FDHs, under the Employment Ordinance.<sup>84</sup> In a letter to the secretary of Education and Manpower Bureau the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB)<sup>85</sup> pointed out the proposed amendment provides an excuse for unfair termination of FDH contracts. Moreover AMCB labeled it as “discriminatory, as it is applicable only to those in the category of foreign domestic helpers...[and] racist as it seeks to exclude workers of certain nationalities from enjoying a right available to local workers and those of other nationalities.” Most of all the group branded it as “sexist as it targets women for oppression” by considering “pregnancy and maternity as a ‘hindrance’ to more effective and productive labour.” They surfaced one important issue in their letter when they said that “the proposal brings us back to the age of slavery—where the right to bear children was considered a threat to productivity.” By doing so, they accused the H.K. government of ushering in an “age of slavery where domestic helpers are forbidden to bear children under threat of contract termination.”<sup>86</sup> This proposal, indeed, violates the DHs’ reproductive rights, a hard-won right of women, most especially women workers around the world.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> The proposed amendment actually stemmed from the H.K. Employers of Overseas Domestic Helpers Association who opposed the giving of maternity benefits to foreign domestic helpers with the argument that this may encourage more of them to get pregnant. It was created to offer “flexibility” to employers to terminate FDHs on the basis of “mutual agreement.” See “Maternity benefits for maids opposed,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (July 4, 1997): 3.

<sup>85</sup> The AMCB is an umbrella organization of the different organizations of Asian domestic workers in H.K. It includes the Association of Sri Lankans (ASL), Far-East Overseas Nepalese Association (FEONA), Friends of Thai (FOT), Indonesian Group, and the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL-HK).

<sup>86</sup> Nicole Constable cites a similar violation of the DHs’ reproductive right this time by an employer. She tells of a DH who was given an abortion without her knowledge when her employer brought her for physical exam and pregnancy test. Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 72.

<sup>87</sup> Hong Kong is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), International Labor Convention No. 97 (ILC 97) on Migration for Employment, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Hence, to avoid being charged with violating the said convention H.K. officials articulated the amendment as follows: “A pregnant live-in DH and her employer may mutually agree to terminate their employment contract whereby the employer will have to pay the DH a specified amount... the employer will not be taken to have committed an offence under the EO for unlawfully dismissing the

As migrant women DHs are also more prone to verbal, physical, and sexual violence. It is highly possible, for example, that the presence of an attractive young woman who is always in the house could put the woman employer on the defensive for having a possible “competition” for the husband’s affection. DHs become all the more vulnerable to abuse in the hands of their women employers because of the popular perception and fear in H.K. that FDHs will go to great lengths to snag rich or economically-stable men, like their male employers. Moreover, some male employers take advantage of this and entice DHs into false relationships with promises of economic rewards.

Women employers, in the meantime, control the DHs’ physical appearance to avert possible competition. Dress codes are imposed through the maid’s uniform. For those who do not make the DH wear a maid’s uniform, they require her to wear jeans and T-shirts or other “harmless” and gender-neutral clothes.<sup>88</sup> In view of this, women employers also have a preference for married women because married women are supposedly more “stable,” in greater financial need, and offer “less trouble than single girls.” It must be mentioned here, however, that some women employers also prefer to hire single women because they want women with no or fewer responsibilities in the Philippines. In this way, women employers can get the most out of their DH’s time, energy, and effort, since being single would mean lesser family members and family-related matters to worry about or attend to on the part of the DH. Whatever the case may be these practices still constitute attacks on the DHs, as women, as these capitalize on the identity and status of the DHs as women.

Discrimination in terms of age and physical appearance also contributes to gendered physical violence. Body control and discipline, as women, are important adjustments DHs have to make right from the start. Recruiters, upon the desires of prospective employers, “transform”

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pregnant DH”. By absolving the employer of criminal liability and making it appear that the DH terminated the contract, the DH cannot file complaints. F.J. Pidgeon, “Maternity Minefield,” *TNT Hong Kong*, Vol. 5, No. 10–11 (October–November 1999): 2–3.

<sup>88</sup> I got a sense how this body control and discipline concretely oppress the DHs when I saw how a lot of them carry plastic bags during their day-off. In these bags are their “maid’s clothes,” which they change out of the moment they get out of the house or out of the employer’s sight. Hence, on Sundays it is usual to see quite a number of them wearing make-up and dressed in fancy or comfortable clothes, which include short skirts, sleeveless blouses or tight-fitting clothes. A few even wear party clothes complete with high-heeled shoes.



the DH's body and appearance by dictating her body weight, length of hair, facial appearance (no make-up), kind of shoes to wear, etc. When the external fits the prescribed ideal DH's body appearance, the internal is the next one the recruiters tinker with. Aside from being subjected to the X-ray machine and the weighing scale, the DH's body is exposed to numerous tests as part of the application process. These include tests for hepatitis, syphilis, herpes, and even a pregnancy test. When the DH passes the "body quality control" she is photographed for her application photo with her "signature" clothes: the standard pastel pink or blue-striped maid's uniform. This "perfect maid" look is then photographed twice: a close-up of the face and a "full body" shot. All in all, the ideal DH must be neat and tidy but not so attractive.

Employers, especially women employers, do not go for pretty domestic workers. If the DH has "physical imperfections" like acne, scars, birthmarks, and "a bit [but not too] dark" complexion the more she will likely be employed. Skin color is a factor that Chinese employers value. Many of them shun women with darker skin, because a woman with dark color allegedly "scares the children." They also go for those who are more Chinese looking. As a result quite a number become what DHs call "from airport to airport." They are hired DHs who are terminated the moment employers lay their eyes on them at the airport and see "how beautiful" or "how dark" they are.<sup>89</sup>

Another thorny aspect of the DH-female employer relationship has to do with the children. Because it is the DH who is often with the children most of the day a close and deep relationship between them inevitably develops. Some employers' children even go with DHs during their day-off. In some cases children end up feeling closer to the DH than their own mother. In such cases, the female employer's jealousy and insecurity becomes a problem for the DH. The DH becomes involved not only in an emotional tug of war between the woman employer and the children. She also is at the receiving end of the female employer's hostility since closer ties with the child(ren) is tantamount to threatening if not usurping the employer's position and authority in her house and family. Hence, some female employers resort to maligning the DH in the eyes of children just to deflect and

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<sup>89</sup> A conversation with one H.K.-bound DH during her PDOS points to this. She told me she has prepared her first day of work get-up (the day she travels and arrives at H.K. airport) which is jeans and T-shirt. On further inquiry she explained that a DH should not and can not be more attractive nor look richer than her employer. Otherwise the DH will be sent back to the Philippines on the next available flight.

win back the children's affection and devotion. Some strongly impress on their children that the Filipina is "just your maid" and do not reprimand their children when they verbally and physically abuse the DH.

On the other hand many DHs also have good relationships with their female employers. But then, again, this can take on an abusive note when the DH is somehow put into a position where she has to do "emotional labor" for the female employer.<sup>90</sup> This happens when female employers treat their DHs as some kind of shock absorber and "safe confidant." "Women-talk" on philandering husbands is an example of this. Being inferior and financially dependent on the employer the DH is more or less compelled to listen. As Filipinos DHs value politeness and have a strong bias for the "underdog." As such they feel obliged to stay quiet and listen to the angst and, maybe, rage of the female employer. They also feel bound to express sympathy for the very same woman (even if they probably would rather not want to do so) who may have caused and may be causing them untold miseries. There may be some DHs who probably prefer not to listen to the catharsis of their female employers. But this is often difficult as, being domestic workers who are also women, they are expected to understand as well as stay and commiserate with their female employers.

In terms of physical abuse the AMC research confirms that women FDHs (26%) suffer more physical abuse than men FDH (20%). Abuses of this kind range from verbal abuse, e.g. pointing a finger, shouting abusive and obscene language, slapping the face, hand or any part of the body, spitting, kicking, being hit with or thrown objects at, beating, etc. The research also confirmed conventional assumptions on the greater vulnerability of DHs, as women, to sexual violence. Of the FDHs victimized sexually, for example, all or the overwhelming majority are women. For the (Filipina) DHs, kissing, touching, and sexual advances are the most common forms. These are closely followed by the employer displaying himself naked or asking the DH to touch him. Other complaints include being peeped at by employers when taking a bath or getting changed, being videotaped when in the bathroom or bedroom, and being touched while sleeping.<sup>91</sup> Male employers also tend to regard their DH as an in-house masseuse who is available

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<sup>90</sup> Judith Rollins, *Between Women: Domesticity and Their Employers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985) is one of the critical works on this topic.

<sup>91</sup> AMC, *Baseline Research on Racial and Gender Discrimination*, 35–6, 38. See also "Maid 'forced to watch sex,'" *Asia Migrant Bulletin* Vol. 11 Nos. 3 & 4 (July–December 1994): 4.

24 hours a day. Some make “substitute wives” out of their DH, especially if the wife seems not able to provide adequate “sexual services.” Even the grown-up male children also subject DHs to sexual abuse through lustful looks and malicious insinuations.

Many cases of sexual abuse, however, go unreported due to fear of termination, especially in cases where the employer or a family member is the perpetrator. The long, tedious, emotionally-draining, expensive legal process, not-to-mention the high possibility of not being given its due and equal importance in H.K. courts deter abused DHs from making their plight public. Some fight it out for a time but eventually give up and go home.<sup>92</sup> Another reason for the hesitation is that when DHs seek redress or justice for abuses other forms of violence with a woman-face await them in some of Hong Kong’s law-enforcement agencies. There are allegations, for instance, that some who have been detained by immigration authorities were not only denied their rights to a lawyer but were also “stripped naked in front of men.”<sup>93</sup>

#### *As Migrant Domestic Workers*

Last but not the least DHs also suffer based on their class position as it is woven with their racial and gender identity. As migrant domestic workers their labor is “bought” hence it is subject to control including control over their sexuality and nurturing functions, which, then, keep them in their inferior position.

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<sup>92</sup> One such known case is that of Anastacia, a forty-seven year-old widow and mother of five children. Her employer, a rich and famous horse trainer, raped her five times. After the fifth attack Anastacia ran to the police. The judge did declare the employer’s behavior “contemptuous of the woman’s dignity” but the millionaire was ordered to pay only US\$ 643 for each of the five counts of assault. Anastacia’s ordeal did not end there. Her employer stalled the legal process for three months before proposing an out-of-court settlement of US\$ 8,997. But then he gave the money in installment and made Anastacia wait and wait until she gave up. She went home after going through the case for one year and eight months. Her life was changed forever though. After being away for eleven years, there is not much economic improvement in her family’s condition. Two of her children even had to stop schooling. See Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 148–9. See also Jo-ann Q. Maglipon, *The Filipina Migrant: Braving the Exile* (Hong Kong: MFMW, 1990), 3–4.

<sup>93</sup> “Immigration denies abusing detained Filipina domestic” *Hong Kong Standard* (August 13, 1994) quoted in *Asia Migrant Bulletin* Vol. 11, Nos. 3 & 4 (July–December 1994), 5.

*Job Discrimination*

Domestic work itself is already replete with ambiguities that blur the boundaries between the public and the private. "Work," which is usually done in public is done in private, and "home," which is supposed to be the realm of the private, becomes the DH's work (hence public) place. "Daily she [DH] rubs with the family, roams about the house, pokes into drawers and the refrigerator, and picks up on the family's most closely guarded secrets. She is an insider. Her workplace is her employer's home, her colleagues are his family. She is in a very deep sense a 'part of the family.'"<sup>94</sup> But in reality she is not. "Home," which is supposed to be her haven and refuge, is the very site of her oppression. "Home," which is supposed to be her "territory," makes her a stranger in a lot of ways. It does not help that they are not judged for their "intimate labor" but as women who leave their own families to sell their services abroad for economic gain.<sup>95</sup>

The DHs' options and opportunities are all the more curtailed because of the discrimination of their job as domestic workers. First and foremost, their sense of belonging is contested. They have to contend with the reality of being reduced to "just a maid," i.e., someone who is expected to be economically and intellectually inferior, from a status or identity as educated, professionals, and, possibly, middle class. From Ma'am to *kunyang* (Cantonese for DH) or *utusan* (servant) or, worse, *banmui*. This dramatic drop in social status ruptures the DHs' sense of self, especially those who have never worked as DHs before. They have to force themselves to pretend to look "ignorant" "dumb" or "stupid" just to play the part of the maid. The professionals or those who have already worked as professionals in the Philippines particularly find it quite hard to deal with the reality that they are no longer the one in control but the one being controlled. They have to contend with demotion and de-skilling and its concomitant "*pagpuro ng utak*" (dulling of the brain because of lack of rigorous use) because their days and nights are spent doing work which does not deeply engage the brain. Some teachers and other professionals admit to losing confidence in practicing their profession again.

<sup>94</sup> "Surrogate Parent?" *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 2 (March 1996): 1.

<sup>95</sup> Kimberly Chang and Julian McAllister Groves, "Neither 'Saints' Nor 'Prostitutes,'" 74.

Problems also occur for the few who have middle-class backgrounds and are actually professional equals of their employers. For these DHs, the adjustment takes on tremendous proportions because they have to deal with the insecurity expressed in a more intense show of superiority of their employers, especially women employers. A lot of women employers of the DHs are themselves mostly working as schoolteachers, clerks, bank tellers or office staff. As such for them to subject the DH to a condescending treatment in order to assert her (employer's) own authority is not uncommon. This adds to the DH's misery. Indeed, as the Tracer study confirms, the emotional stress of submitting oneself and one's skills to a job that is generally lowly regarded can be a devastating experience. The study's finding that those who have had DH-related jobs in the Philippines are the ones more likely to become satisfied and successful in their job in H.K. seems to confirm that when one is reduced to a *banmui* it effectively means that one has had a downward class mobility. Edna vividly expresses the sentiments inherent in this: "I used to be called Ma'am and was respected in the community. But now I have to call my employer Ma'am, and *I am nobody*" (emphasis mine).<sup>96</sup>

The DHs' relationship with other Filipino migrants in H.K., who are non-DHs, is also constrained by their status as DHs. One (Filipina) company manager even tells non-DH Filipinas in H.K. to expect discrimination because most of their compatriots are DHs. She advises them (non-DHs) to inform people that not all Filipinos are domestic helpers right from the start. One could detect from her, however, a certain sense of distancing from DHs in the way she takes pains to mention that "the Philippine consulate has never had a complaint from the skilled 5 percent...*unlike the domestic helpers who have a litany of horrors...*" (emphasis mine).<sup>97</sup>

Their status as migrant DHs becomes doubly problematic because of the low regard accorded to migrant domestic workers in H.K. Its glaring indication is captured by the sign "Maids and pets not allowed," which was once posted at the entrance to some exclusive country clubs

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<sup>96</sup> Quoted by Anil Stephen, "Maid in Hong Kong: The city's churches are helping exploited migrant workers" <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/011/19.26.html>>, accessed September 23, 2003.

<sup>97</sup> Alice Sevilla Mendoza, "So you want to work in Hong Kong?" *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (June 1, 1995): C5. See also Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 38-9; 76-7.

in H.K. The DH founder of the Iloilo Association alludes to this when she says: “We often lose our right to freedom and dignity as a maid. They (employers) look down on their helpers.”<sup>98</sup> Remy Borlongan in “Is Hong Kong A Discriminatory Society?” names concrete manifestations of domestic work denigration: “the Tregunter issue in Mid-Levels forbidding domestic helpers to use the main lifts;...being denied entry to the swimming pools in Marina Club;...not allowed to use the hair and brushes provided [in the club];...a mall in Central tried to push through a plan denying Filipina DH access to its comfort rooms [and]...community resentments in North Point and objections from a few district Boards in the use of school premises on Sundays as Activity Centers.”<sup>99</sup> The dominant response to the AMC research’s question on the reason for their discrimination says it all: “Because I am a domestic helper.” To give a more concrete picture, below are some experiences of discrimination of FDHs in H.K.:

- 1) Library—inability to borrow from the library or become a member because these require proof of residence which they do not have
- 2) Police—ID checks are common for FDH; target FDH for jaywalking offenses even if other local people do the same; they side with employers and talk in Chinese when there is problem/dispute
- 3) Residency status—not granted to FDH
- 4) Use of abusive gestures against FDH (Chinese and/or English) e.g. dirty finger, making faces
- 5) Shops, market people are disrespectful, impolite if they know you’re DH; can’t afford; driven out of shop; sales people become angry...
- 6) Rude; snob; indifferent; don’t respond when greeted...
- 7) Insulting actions directed at FDH; stare/insulting stare; insulting smiles, laughs;
- 8) Separate the FDH food
- 9) Shouted at/degraded in public
- 10) Slave-like treatment<sup>100</sup>

Moreover it does not help that it is women, particularly the local women, who are the ones discriminating the DHs the most.<sup>101</sup> Since

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<sup>98</sup> Eric Loo, “Wanted: Sensitive Employers,” <[http://www.cyberdyaryo.com/features/f2002\\_0311\\_05.htm](http://www.cyberdyaryo.com/features/f2002_0311_05.htm)>, accessed November 3, 2003.

<sup>99</sup> Remy Borlongan, “Is Hong Kong A Discriminatory Society,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1996): 12.

<sup>100</sup> AMC, *Baseline Research on Racial and Gender Discrimination Towards Filipino, Indonesian and Thai Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong*, 46–8.

<sup>101</sup> They were followed by the local men and the DHs’ fellow Filipinos. AMC, *Baseline Research on Racial and Gender Discrimination Towards Filipino, Indonesian and*

this racism happens daily and they are treated as second-class or even third-class citizens from their homes or work place to public places one could imagine the tremendous implications of these on the DHs' sense of self, not to mention the restrictions on their mobility and relationships.<sup>102</sup>

### *Exploitation*

Exploitation is basic to the experience of oppression of most DHs. It happens on all fronts and across borders. It is inflicted by various groups, from their recruiters to their employers, the Philippine government to the H.K. government, and even their compatriots as well as their very own friends and family members.

*By Philippine Society* Long seen by Filipino migrants as an adversary and oppressor rather than a protector the Philippine government accounts for a number of the exploitations of the DHs. High on the list is its institutionalization and systematization of migrant labor through the LEP (Labor Export Policy), which capitalizes on its citizens and makes "national exports" out of its women.<sup>103</sup> Other exploitative policies and practices include: 1) former President Ferdinand Marcos' Executive Order 857 which mandated all overseas Filipinos to remit 50%–70% of their monthly income through government authorized channel, e.g. Philippine banks; 2) former President Cory Aquino's inclusion of migrant workers' dollar remittances as part of the five-year economic recovery program; 3) former President Fidel Ramos' calling and boasting of migrant workers as "internationally-shared human resource"; and 4) former President Estrada's Executive Order

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*Thai Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong*, 42, 46. The H.K. official who proposed the 20% wage cut in 1998 on FDHs, for instance, is a woman: Provisional Councilor Jennifer Chow Kit-bing.

<sup>102</sup> Public places include the beaches, restaurants, parks, markets or groceries, shops, public transports, courts, airlines, H.K. immigration, police, hospitals, media, banks, and, interestingly, even NGOs, the FDHs' consulate, and churches. See Julie Roque, "A Week in the Life of a *Kunyang*," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 3 (March 1999): 4–6, where she shares how she is reminded daily that she is 'just a maid': locking of two-thirds of public toilets on Sundays, putting yellow ribbons along the walls in some buildings to stop FDHs from camping there; and removal of metal benches beside the flower pots by high-end shops, e.g. Esprit, at Pacific Place.

<sup>103</sup> See Roland B. Tolentino, "Bodies, Letters, Catalogs: Filipinas in Transnational Space," *Social Text* 48, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Fall 1996).

No. 197 which raised the fees and other charges of all government agencies by not less than 20%, bringing the Authentication and Notary Services at the Philippine consulate in H.K. from HK\$ 170.00 to HK\$ 212.50 and the authentication of employment contracts from HK\$ 255.00 to HK\$ 297.50.<sup>104</sup> To think that each OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker) already shells out, from at least PhP10,450–PhP15,405, for government-related processing fees, and as much as PhP65,000 for recruitment fees.

The Philippine consulate in H.K., the immediate government agency directly tasked to look after the welfare of the DHs, also adds to the problem. For one it is guilty of passport overcharging. Instead of collecting the amount equivalent to the PhP 500–PhP 750 passport fee in the Philippines it charges HK\$ 510–HK\$ 595, which is more or less equivalent to PhP 2,500–PhP 3,000.<sup>105</sup> Another glaring lack of attention and protection on the consulate's part could be seen when it issued a policy in October 22, 2003 banning any form of protest action on its premises. The policy stemmed from the allegedly "regrettable" action of the H.K. chapter of *Migrante* (Migrant) sectoral party and other migrant federations who trooped to the Consulate in October 12, 2003 to protest the anomalous implementation of the OFW E-card.<sup>106</sup> And this is not the only way with which the Philippine government maneuvers things so as to make the H.K. DHs pay the OWWA (Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration) contribution. It devised another way by riding in on the mandatory vacation for

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<sup>104</sup> Former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's Proclamation No. 76 declaring the year 2002 as the Year of the Overseas Providers—meant to honor recruiters and their associations—was also seen by OFWs as misplaced in light of the many cases of recruiters who overcharge and harass OFWs.

<sup>105</sup> MFMW, "A Feast in Government Fees," *Migrant Focus Magazine* Vol. 1, Issue 2 (October–December 2000): 9.

<sup>106</sup> The OFW E-card is a permanent identification card for all overseas Filipino workers. It could serve as the OEC, a "passport" for claiming OWWA benefits, and availing of exemptions for travel tax and terminal fee. The irregularity has to do with the consulate's policy of requiring E-card applicants to pay first the HK\$200 OWWA contribution when the card is supposed to be free. See "Philippine Consulate in HK bans protest actions" *APMM News Digest* (October 2003), 2. In 1995, the consulate also figured in a similar repressive act which was even investigated by the Philippine Senate. It was accused that instead of attending to the complaint of migrant workers protesting the mandatory AIDS test, the consulate officials apparently called in the H.K. police who violently dispersed the protesters. See Juliet M. Labog, "Senate to probe dispersal of OCWs in Hong Kong," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (December 21, 1995), C1.



FDHs with new contract as stipulated under Clause 13 of Hong Kong's employment contract (for FDHs). It classified "vacationing" domestic workers as "new hires" which means going through the whole process of getting an OEC and paying the concomitant OWWA and Medicare fees. All of these points to the biggest pain the Philippine government is giving to all its OFWs: making milking cows out of them. A DH hits the nail right on the head as she says:

I am a maid commodity  
And something of an oddity  
Trapped in impecunity  
Thro' government cupidity<sup>107</sup>

The most crashing indictment of the Philippine consulate's lack of concern for the well-being of the DHs may be seen in the case of Glenda. In May 2, 1999, Glenda sought refuge in the OWWA—run Filipino Workers Development Centre after leaving her employer who had apparently assaulted her twice. On May 22, 1999 the former employer entered the shelter and took Glenda away. Glenda's body was found early the next day in a 4-foot deep manhole near the shelter. This outraged the DH community. They were repelled that someone could freely enter the shelter, "hunt down his runaway employee in full view of the terrified occupants, and then drag her from a second floor bathroom where she was hiding."<sup>108</sup> Worse, the consulate or, at least, the OWWA officials did not swiftly act until the hapless DH was bludgeoned to death.

DHs also suffer in the hands of their fellow Filipinos. Some are turned into "business opportunities" by their compatriots. This usually happens for the "direct hires" or those whose employer was found for them by a fellow Filipina. In some cases the Filipina who looks for an employer earns twice without the knowledge of the newly-hired DH. The Filipina "recruiter" does this by charging both the new DH and the employer. DHs are also exploited by their compatriots who ask them to stand as guarantor for loans and leave them to pay for the loans. Some are even put in deeper trouble by their fellow Filipinas by

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<sup>107</sup> See, "Break Time," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1996): 20.

<sup>108</sup> Salvador Ilad, "DH Not Protected in Their 'Home,'" *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 7 (July 1999): 16.

using their passport as collateral for loans. And there have been cases when these loan sharks are themselves Filipinos.<sup>109</sup>

Back home the DH's family is also guilty of exploiting her. For one, she becomes a source of status symbol the family is prone to maintain as long as it could. Moreover, there is an overwhelming direct and indirect pressure for the DH to provide and meet the family's financial needs. Some family members and relatives have no qualms about asking the DH for material things. Hence, she is not only turned into THE economic savior where she often ends up being the sole provider for her immediate and, sometimes, extended family. She also becomes the family's and the clan's milking cow. The short poem below by an unknown DH aptly titled "Commodity" bluntly exposes and subtly lashes at this exploitation:

Come home, they say  
But no! Delay!  
Extend your stay  
We need your pay.<sup>110</sup>

*Balikbayani* and ATIKHA's study of the children of domestic workers in H.K. and Italy says that children of migrants and even husbands are not so eager for the DHs to return for good due to the adverse economic effects. The statement of sixteen-year-old Efren is paradigmatic of other older children's sentiments. When asked about what he thinks or how he feels about his migrant mother's homecoming he says: "*Sana pag tapos na ako ng kolehiyo at pag siguradong mayaman na mayaman na kami*" (I hope my mother would return only when I have finished college and when we are [surely] very rich already).<sup>111</sup> Having been used to a better, easy-going, and even extravagant lifestyle the family is wary of the decreased financial capacity the return of the DHs for good would entail. This will not only mean a change in lifestyle but a downward class mobility in the eyes of the people in their community.

<sup>109</sup> See "3 Pinoys held for loansharking," *Abante* (September 9, 1996), 3.

<sup>110</sup> See, "Break Time," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1996): 20.

<sup>111</sup> Husbands who favor their wives' continued labor migration are mostly those who are jobless and have become dependent on their wives and the remittances being sent to them. Augustus T. Anõnuevo, "Reintegration, An Elusive Dream?" in *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration*, eds., Estrella Dizon-Anõnuevo and Augustus T. Anõnuevo (Quezon City, Philippines: Balikbayani Foundation and the ATIKHA Overseas Workers and Communities Initiative, Inc., 2002): 133.

In the Philippines migrants and their families often bear the brunt of the popular misconception that migration brings a lot of money and good fortune. Even internal migrants or those who move from the rural to the urban areas are not spared from this. This becomes all the more problematic for external migrants like the DHs. On top of the family's expectation for continuous remittance and the sending of imported goodies through much awaited *balikbayan* boxes the association of the migrant worker with "plenty of money" often drives relatives and other members of the community to also expect or unabashedly ask for *pasalubong*.<sup>112</sup> This preoccupation with the image of the migrant worker as a symbol of affluence and a milking cow makes it common among migrants to cynically and helplessly comment on how their family, relatives, and neighbors seem to think *parang pinupulot lang ang pera* (as if money is just there for the picking). But since they do not want to disappoint their families they, voluntarily or involuntarily, also take on this mentality and resort to borrowing just to be able to send money or imported goods back home. Most cannot or would rather not go home unless they have money to give to their families. Others, still, feel extra guilty if they do not have *pasalubong* for their immediate and extended family.

*By Hong Kong Society* Hong Kong's legislation concerning domestic workers seems to be in place and among the most expansive in Asia. The problem is, aside from the fact that new policies have been introduced and/or some provisions have been revised over the years, most of the provisions are being violated by employers. Thus, H.K. society also contributes to the DHs' exploitation through unjust working conditions.

The NCS (New Conditions of Stay), more popularly known as the Two-Weeks Rule, is one of these contentious new policies. First of all, it automatically reduces the DHs' visa to two weeks upon termination of their employment. This means that they have to apply for a visitor visa if they want to stay beyond two weeks in H.K. But then again, the NCS limits the granting of visitor visa to those who have causes for complaint.

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<sup>112</sup> "*Pasalubong*" is a material gift usually given by someone who came from far away to his/her family, relatives, and friends. In the context of out-migration this is usually in the form of money or goods made outside of the Philippines due to the Filipino colonial mentality of preference for "imported" goods.

The revised implementation of Clause 13 of the employment contract for FDHs also marginalizes the DHs. It states that “should both parties agree to enter into new contract upon expiry of the existing contract, the helper shall, before any such period commences and at the expense of the employer, return to his/her place of origin for a paid/unpaid vacation of not less than seven months, unless prior approval of extension of stay in H.K. is given by the Director of Immigration.”<sup>113</sup> The problem is most employers take advantage of the inclusion of the word “unpaid” in the clause. This non-payment of due salary while on vacation gives added financial burden to the DH who not only has to contend with being “jobless” for the time that she is on “forced” vacation.<sup>114</sup> She, too, has to shell out a considerable amount of money both for airfare and living expenses in the Philippines or wherever she decides to go. The revised version of Clause 13 also doubles the DHs’ burden in the sense that whereas the former version applies only to old employers, the new one requires FDHs to leave H.K. before the start of a new contract whether with the same or another employer. Furthermore, if the employer asks for a deferment of home leave, a visa is given for only one year during which the FDH still needs to exit because the remaining one-year visa would be stamped only upon her re-entry to H.K.

The implementation of the exceptions in the Two-Weeks Rule, e.g. employer’s death, emigration, bankruptcy or inability to pay the domestic worker’s wages, is also unfair for the DHs. This is primarily because the burden of proof lies with them and not on their employer. For example, they are the ones expected to produce sensitive documents that concern the employer, e.g. financial statements, if the employer terminates them due to bankruptcy. How many employers would willingly divulge and give to the maid, for public perusal, documents that show their unfortunate situation? Even if the employer agrees, doing this will most probably eat up the very limited two weeks for which DHs have to find employment.

The NCS was actually enacted as a response to the employers’ petitions to institute policies against maids who job-hop (terminating

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<sup>113</sup> Although the domestic worker is not forced to go back to the Philippines the alternatives given (a holiday either in Macau or China or anywhere outside H.K.) still means spending a considerable amount of money.

<sup>114</sup> APMM, “Forced Home Leave for Foreign Domestic Helpers,” *APMM News Digest* (October 2003): 2.

contract to find another employer) and do part-time work. It, however, severely impinges on the possibility for DHs to seek redress for possible grievances. DHs, for instance, still have to apply for a visa extension even when they have filed a case or are awaiting its resolution. Applying for a visa extension would mean that they have to shell out more money and, if the case drags on, they have to keep applying for it. This, of course, is subject to the approval of the Immigration Department. Because of all these hassles a lot of FDHs who have been victims of injustice do not file charges but agree to accepting unfair out-of-court settlements, or just simply give up and go home. Thus, they end up doubly victimized.<sup>115</sup>

The contract also disadvantages DHs. In terms of content Rita Raj Hashim quotes the loopholes that the AMC (1991) study pointed at:

The contract does not provide for fixed hours of work or provide means for the redressal of grievances concerning long working hours. Clause 12(b) provides reasons (dishonesty, neglect of duties) under which an employer can terminate without notice or salary in lieu. The reasons are vague and open to a wide degree of interpretation, allowing employers to arbitrarily terminate employment. Clause 12(c) provides reasons for the domestic worker to terminate (physical danger, ill treatment), again vague, and puts the onus of providing proof on the worker. The contract does not provide for a penalty clause with regard to contract violations; if terminated, workers lose the source of livelihood and are unable to seek employment during the entire process of litigation, whereas the employer can find new workers.<sup>116</sup>

The application of the contract is more problematic. An AMCB survey in 2003 reveals, that almost one-fourth of the total number of respondents is underpaid and the working conditions remain dismal. The study also indicated more than 90% work for more than 8 hours a day, more than 80% take less than 24 hours of their holidays, and

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<sup>115</sup> Attorney Melville Boase—a well-known legal advocate and counsel for domestic workers in H.K.—cites the case of a domestic worker, who ended up being the one charged with criminal offense for staying beyond two weeks after filing for recompense from her employer who then literally kicked her out of the house. The Labor Tribunal Presiding Officer even stopped the DH's claim on charges that she has violated her visa. See Atty. Melville Boase, "The Two Weeks Rule in the Context of the Legal Position of Foreign Domestic Helpers (FDHs)," in *Serving One Another*, 88.

<sup>116</sup> Quoted in Rita Raj Hashim, "A Review of Labor Migration Policies in Asia," in *The Trade in Domestic Workers*, 125.

66% are made to work before and after rest-days.<sup>117</sup> Under the name of employer and place of work, for instance, if the employer makes the FDH work for someone else or do a different job, the FDH will be the first one to be investigated and most likely prosecuted, even when it was the employer who is responsible for the offense.

There are other policies in H.K., which make life difficult for migrant domestic workers. First, FDHs are excluded from the Statutory Minimum Wage (SMW). Moreover, FDHs Minimum Allowable Wage (MAW) is subject to an annual review. While this has advantages as it provides possibility for wage increase this also makes the FDHs' wage easy target in times of economic slowdown. In fact FDHs have been victimized a number of times already through wage cuts or wage freezes that the H.K. government imposed on FDH wages to alleviate Hong Kong's economic woes.<sup>118</sup>

This vulnerability of the DHs during economic crisis could also be seen in the Liberal Party's proposed solution to ease the budget deficit in 2002 by suggesting that a HK\$ 500 tax be imposed on FDHs.<sup>119</sup> The imposition of a service charge on the FDWs' use of public facilities

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<sup>117</sup> The AMCB survey had 10,748 respondents which also included Indonesian, Sri Lankan, Thai, and Nepalese domestic workers. AMCB, *Evaluation Report: Asian Migrants Coordinating Body*, June 2003, Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Union Conference (Hong Kong: APMM, 2003). A more recent (2007) survey conducted by the Catholic Church-based Caritas Community Development Service shows the persistence of these and other ill or unfair treatments such as underpayment, trimming rest days or statutory holiday entitlement, forced illegal work, sexual abuse and physical abuse. Rev. Michael Yeung, "Some Insights Into The Development Work for Deprived Migrant Groups In Hong Kong," 156.

<sup>118</sup> After failing to impose its proposed 20% wage cut (the employers wanted 35%) in 1998, the H.K. government reduced FDHs' minimum wage by five percent during the economic crisis in 1999. Because of growing budget deficit, it (H.K. government) implemented another (and higher) wage cut for contracts signed after April 1, 2003 bringing the HK\$ 3,670 a month minimum wage of the already lowest-paid Hong Kong workers to HK\$ 3,270. Local DWs' wage, in the meantime, was slashed from HK\$8 to HK\$5 per hour. See "RP maids' dilemma in HK: Take pay cut or be jobless," <[http://archive.inq7.net/archive/2001-p/nat/2001/dec/24/nat\\_7-1-p.htm](http://archive.inq7.net/archive/2001-p/nat/2001/dec/24/nat_7-1-p.htm)>, accessed October 31, 2003. In between 2003 and 2009 the FDHs' minimum wage increased to HK\$ 3,580. Due to the global economic crisis, however, they were again targeted for a wage freeze in August 2009. See Jerome Aning, "Pinoys, Asians protest low HK wage for maids," <[http://services.inquirer.net/print/print.php?article\\_id=20090907-223983](http://services.inquirer.net/print/print.php?article_id=20090907-223983)> accessed September 8, 2009.

<sup>119</sup> This proposal was intense at that time because Hong Kong's unemployment rate went up to a record-high 7.7% due to economic slowdown. The H.K. government got its way and implemented it through the HK\$400 levy charged to Chinese who employ FDHs. See Ambrose Leung, "\$HK 500 a month from maids would ease deficit, say liberals" *SCMP* (November 5, 2002): 2.

also amounts to a systematic discrimination of the DHs as non-citizens and a clear reminder that they are outsiders. At the height of the Sara Balabagan's case in 1995, for example, they and the other FDWs were banned from staging a rally in Chater Garden until they take out a \$ 6.5 million insurance policy. But they and the other FDWs defied the order.

Two other burdensome legislation included the "live-out" policy and the mandate that the medical expenses incurred while on vacation outside of H.K. will no longer be paid for by their employers. Removal of the medical benefits obviously will have serious implications not only on the health but also the economic conditions of the DHs, especially in the light of the high prices of medicines and medical services. The "live-out" policy which declares that FDHs whose contract effectivity date is April 1, 2003 will not be allowed to live out of their employer's home could also increase the misery of the DHs.<sup>120</sup> As it is accommodation is already a serious problem for them. Exacerbated by the housing problem in H.K. the majority do not have their own room and are forced to share a room with the employer's children, or sleep along the corridor, the living room, dining room, store room, kitchen, laundry room, ironing area or any other available space. UNIFIL also receives complaints from DHs who are made to sleep in cupboards, cardboard carton cubicles, in the toilets, under tables, and on top of washing machines because of the small house of their employers.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Noeleen Heyzer and Vivienne Wee, "Domestic Workers in Transient Overseas Employment," 72 asserts the live-in work set-up is oppressive as it blurs the boundary between work and leisure. It puts them at the beck and call of the employer at all hours of the day and night. Heyzer and Wee say this makes the DHs lose their personal liberty and control over their time. Even their day-off, which could have been the only time they have for themselves, is curtailed when employers delay the DHs in going out and impose curfews on them. The worst lot, of course, falls on those whose employer does not give them a day-off (even if it is stipulated in the contract) and, especially, the ones whose contract itself does not allow any day-off from work.

<sup>121</sup> A survey by the APMM reveals that as much as 70.4% put up with this living condition. Noeleen Heyzer and Vivienne Wee, "Domestic Workers in Transient Overseas Employment: Who Benefits, Who Profits," 75. DHs are also made to sleep on the living room floor, near the bathroom, and under the table where they have no privacy. As a result some sleep for 3-4 hours only because they cannot sleep until everyone leaves the living room or stops going to the kitchen and goes to sleep. It becomes all the more difficult when their employers entertain guests or when they have to serve refreshments at *mahjong* parties, which could take place several nights a week. See, for example, "No More Sleeping in the Bathroom," *TNT Hong Kong*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1996): 28.

DHs also encounter problems with their employers when it comes to food as meals can be irregular, late or inadequate. One respondent in Rita Ybanez's study complained of being fed with just a piece of bread and coffee in the morning and the next meal is at 3 or 4 in the afternoon. Most said they are also not fed on occasions when their employer brings them to a restaurant. Others revealed they were given just porridge, noodles, or a hamburger as their food for the whole day.<sup>122</sup>

Like most domestic workers the DHs are also injury prone. This condition that is inherent in their job is exacerbated by their migrant status. In 1999, for instance, a survey conducted in H.K. by the Personal Care Worker and Home Helpers Association disclosed that more than 40% of personal care workers and over 60% of home helpers have suffered at least once while at work, with some 8% suffering more than 12 work-related injuries.<sup>123</sup>

DHs also have to deal with the misery of having employers who are slave—drivers, particularly those who require excessive work hours and illegal work, as well as those who impose rigid work schedule and house rules. Cathy's case<sup>124</sup> is a perfect example of all of these. Her employer tricked her into receiving only HK\$ 2,300 instead of the HK\$ 3,200 stipulated in the contract by falsely promising an eventual increase. She also deceived Cathy by indicating "single" in the civil status section of the contract when in reality she lives with her husband and daughter. Furthermore, her employer strictly made Cathy work before seven o'clock in the morning until close to midnight. Aside from her "official" duties of washing, marketing, cooking, cleaning her employer's flat and taking care of two dogs Cathy was obliged to clean the flat of her employer's mother and friend and her employer's office where she serves as a messenger as well. Cathy was also forbidden to wear make-up, fingernail polish, or perfume; she could not wear skirts, only pants; and her curfew on her day-off was strictly enforced. To ensure that she does not use the phone her employer threatened to deduct HK\$ 10 from her salary, even for free local calls. Her employer

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<sup>122</sup> Riza Faith Ybanez, *Conditions in Labor Migration that Contribute to the HIV Vulnerability of Migrant Domestic Workers: A Case Study of Filipino Domestic Workers in Hong Kong*, <[http://caramasia.gn.apc.org/Ritchie\\_HK\\_cdtm.htm](http://caramasia.gn.apc.org/Ritchie_HK_cdtm.htm)> accessed January 22, 2003, p. 4.

<sup>123</sup> "Overseas Contract Work," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 10–11 (October–November 1999): 11.

<sup>124</sup> Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 84–5, 91.



also specified the days when Cathy could wash her hair and monitored the length of time of her showers. Cathy was also always served last during meals, given the leftovers, and was given a storeroom as her room, which was sweltering hot in the summer and which leaked when it rained. Cathy's ordeal does not end here. When her employer opened a bank account for Cathy's salary, she made it into a joint account and did not give HK 200 every month effectively reducing Cathy's salary to HK\$ 2,100. Her employer even took and kept the bank book together with Cathy's other documents.

Indeed, employers' control of the mobility of their DH also results in unjust working conditions. The DH is not allowed to use the phone and talk or interact with other workers including other DHs. Curfew is imposed even on off-days. Some employers put up spy cameras or alarms or keep watch of the DH's every move. Because of this the DH cannot bring out the garbage unless the employer is there to switch off the alarm. Some employers phone to check on the DH periodically as they expect the DH to be always working. This control over the DHs' mobility becomes all the more problematic when a member of the family, e.g. mother of the employer or a relative, is at home. One DH in Ybanez's study, for example, complained of how her employer's mother kept a tight watch over her so she (DH) has to be doing something all the time. She revealed how she get her moment's rest by going to the bathroom and just sitting on the bowl to cry over her situation. Worse, some employers resort to locking and literally imprisoning the domestic helper inside the house.

Some DHs are, indeed, turned into a workhorse. An AMC study in 2000 claims that possibly more than 5,000 of the then existing number of DHs suffer from virtual slavery (0–1 days off per month) and some are made to work even if they are sick or something is not well with them.<sup>125</sup> Aside from their "official" job, they are also made to work outside their employer's homes, either as secretaries, nurses, waitresses, dishwashers, medical technicians, cooks, salespersons, messengers, hawkers, factory workers, and researchers.<sup>126</sup> The schedule of one maid

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<sup>125</sup> AMC, *Baseline Research on Racial and Gender Discrimination Towards Filipino, Indonesian and Thai Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong*, 29.

<sup>126</sup> Employers take advantage of their DH by making her do illegal work because they save or earn a lot of money in doing so. Instead of hiring or paying for another employee, they include the illegal work as one of the duties. Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 132–3.

that I found in Bethune's case files gives a picture of how DHs are taxed to their utmost: Each day she worked from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 a.m. with only three to four hours of sleep. She said "they hardly treated me as a human being and always shouted and screamed at me using bad language and swearing." She also said "the lady employer would often poke my forehead so hard that it hurt and the children would often punch me on my arms and chest until I was bruised."

This avenue for exploitation is made possible not only by the loopholes in the contract but also in the recruiters' practice of giving a three-month warranty for their "products," i.e., the DHs. The recruiters "package" their "products" by advertising, even in cyberspace, that their "products" are far superior, better trained and more "obedient." Some recruitment agencies offer as much as three free replacements if the employer is not satisfied with the "product." An agency, at one time, even put FDHs on "sale" with a "15% discount" price tag because it is celebrating its fifteenth anniversary. The fact that a significant number of employers subscribe to this ideology and practice by returning their DH and getting a replacement reflects a view of DHs as objects. The DHs, then, become like goods in the store where one has the ultimate freedom to choose which to buy and discard anytime. They are scrutinized through the application paper, interview transcript, and the video footage which are all part of the application process. With the warranty they can be returned by employers to recruiters for whatever reason. The DHs may, then, be shuttled from one employer to another or are left on their own to look for another employer with the Two-Weeks Rule hanging over their heads.

The employers also aggravate the DHs' working conditions by infringing on the DH's free or "rest" time and meddling with highly private matters like opening the DH's personal letters. The employer's children also append the problem. Melinda had to endure the eighteen-year-old employer's daughter who would throw money on the floor then order the DH to pick it up. In the meantime, the twenty-two year-old son, with his mother's knowledge, would embarrass her by standing naked by the bathroom door and order her to bring his underpants. He and his mother would even laugh at Melinda when she refuses to do it and scoff at her reaction emphasizing that she is "just the maid" anyway. Like the other FDHs, this inferior and demeaned position of Melinda also accounted for her vulnerability to victimization and scapegoating. Melinda's employer caused her tremendous stress not only by unceremoniously and unreasonably terminating her.

She also had Melinda arrested and imprisoned twice on trumped-up charges of stealing to free herself (employer) of the obligation to give a month's salary in lieu of notice. To top it all, the arrests were made even when the money, stockings, and underwear that she was supposed to have stolen were not found in her possession.<sup>127</sup>

The worst, however, of these unfair working conditions comes in the form of physical and mental abuse. The number of cases are significant enough to warrant the establishment of Bethune House a shelter where many DHs in distress run to usually penniless (sometimes frightened) and often with no more possessions than the clothes they are wearing. And there are atrocious cases. An example is that of Lilia:

Six days later (after arriving in Hong Kong) her employer burned her left forearm with a flat iron after she failed to follow her employer's instruction to put a handkerchief on top of a black long skirt that she was ironing. She was confined at the Queen Mary Hospital. She said her employer warned her not to tell the incident to anybody or her face would be the next target...<sup>128</sup>

Geraldine Pratt, in "Inscribing Domestic Work on Filipina Bodies," narrates an extreme case of exploitation. In the said article Pratt talks about how a DH's body and function as servant is objectified by building an equivalence between her and the household décor. The employer made Cora, the DH, wear a uniform which coordinated with the dishes. Cora was asked to wear her black uniform when the black dishes were in use.<sup>129</sup> These systematic abuses render the DHs helpless in fighting for their rights and welfare. A number are wont to speak about and against abuses done to them. Others hesitate to participate in advocacy activities like rallies for fear that they will get into trouble with their employer. When they are approached to join protests they either skeptically ask if something could really still be

<sup>127</sup> Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 145–6.

<sup>128</sup> "MRV Case Profiles: Lilia Bernardino Dangco," <<http://www.asian-migrants.org/mrvcases/999433070427.php>>, accessed February 2, 2003.

<sup>129</sup> Geraldine Pratt, "Inscribing Domestic Work on Filipina Bodies," in *Places Through the Body*, eds., Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (London: Routledge, 1998): 289. This treatment of FDHs as "property" or "part of the properties" is reinforced by the status attached to having a maid, especially a Filipina maid, among the mainly middle class Chinese who employ foreign maids of late. This is especially the case of DHs who work in the homes of employers who are new in the category of the "middle class"—those who have little previous experience of servants and play their new status to the hilt. As such, DHs become a family's prized possession and decoration. In certain cases, children even say "my Filipino[a]" or "my maid" to refer to them.

done about the situation or apprehensively decline for fear that they will be terminated. As such deciding to fight for their rights becomes a source of difficulty. Much as they regret they are often caught in a dilemma between job or justice.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It was established in this chapter that the DHs in H.K. experience oppression directed at their different identity markers. As migrant Filipinos the lack of recognition for and the regulation of differences in social and physical geography, religion, and culture as well as racial and ethnic identity limit their freedom, diminish social respect for them, and infringe on their basic socio-political rights and benefits. As migrant Filipino women the taming and control of their sexuality and nurturing functions in the Philippines and H.K. distort and impinge on their sense of self and restrict possibilities for personal development and advancement. This regulation of their sexuality and nurturing functions confines them to specific roles, which create problems and difficulties and lay them open to all sorts of abuses. As migrant domestic workers the DHs' labor as it is woven with the taming of their sexuality and nurturing functions is also controlled. Such discriminations result in certain avenues being closed for the DHs and, hence, they are unable to live freely and decently as members of a community. Moreover, the DHs' labor is exploited. In short, they are not able to fully live as persons and/or as women with dignity and integrity.

Domestication, intensified in the context of labor migration, then constitutes the oppression of the DHs in H.K. To domesticate is "to accustom to home life" and "to tame for man's use."<sup>130</sup> It entails teaching, breaking, training, and subduing. Most of all, it connotes an enduring process of oppression. Thus domestication captures the nature and character as well as the depth and breadth of the DHs' oppression. The DHs' geographical, religion-cultural, racial and ethnic difference is

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<sup>130</sup> Webster's *New World Dictionary School and Office Edition*. Philippine Edition (Mandaluyong City: Cacho Hermanos, Inc., 1971). Because it is closely associated with "home" it is also often used interchangeably with domesticity. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* Vol. 18, No. 1 (1992): 8.

stratified, maintained, and regulated.<sup>131</sup> Their gender identity is tamed and fashioned for it to fit particular roles and serve specific purposes. Their social location, which is artificially created by patriarchal mechanisms, is sustained and pushed even further down the bottom through limitations imposed by kyriarchal capitalism and society's discrimination. Labor migration which takes them out of familiar terrain and people and puts them in unequal relations with different people in a (different) place where kyriarchal capitalism reigns then reinforces and strengthens their domestication. Basic to this domestication is the fashioning of their identities to be dutiful daughters and sisters as well as devoted wives and mothers, which then leads them to end up being "shared resources" and today's slaves. To accomplish this kyriarchal Philippine and H.K. society, propped up by kyriarchal global capitalism, domesticates the DHs' sexuality and nurturing functions and exploit these in the context of labor migration.

Having looked at the DHs' experience of oppression I will, then, investigate the ways in which they deal with it in the next chapter. In walking through these ways (in which the DHs negotiate their domestication) I intend to draw particular attention to their everyday forms of resistance, which has emerged as a good diagnostic of power, especially in interdisciplinary texts.

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<sup>131</sup> Neferti Tadiar says the problem of Filipina DHs lies in the objectification of difference. She posits the source of the abuses, "mental disorders," "emotional stress," and other form of difficulties that are usually explained through the concept of culture shock is in the "stratifying of and contempt of difference that is enabled and necessitated by structures of capital accumulation and the relations of power among nations which such structure depend on and effect." Neferti Tadiar, "Domestic Bodies of the Philippines," in *At Home in the World?: Filipinos in Global Migrations*, ed., Filomeno V. Aguilar (Quezon City, Phils.: Philippine Migration Research Network, 2002): 274-5.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FRONTIERS OF STRUGGLE: NEGOTIATING FILIPINA HONG KONG DHS' WAYS OF DEALING WITH DOMESTICATION

Our heart is not the same, nor is our thinking. My grandmother and my mother went about in silence and only knew the colours of the cloak on the Virgin of the Rosary. Today, my daughters are still sleeping in the earth, hungry and sick, but the peace we are seeking is another one, although we still have a long way to go to find it. I may leave this earth, but my heart and my thinking are different, and this is no longer silence.

—Pascuala—<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the constitutive half of the preceding chapter. It walks through the ways in which the DHs negotiate the geographies of their domestication. It describes the strategies they use to navigate domestication's spheres and spaces and, consequently, define or re-define the boundaries of its oppressive landscape, especially in ordinary ways, in their daily lives.

In the first section, subtitled submission, I outline the ways in which the DHs acquiesce to their domestication. Key to this discussion is the ways and means in which gender, class, culture and religion inform the DHs' submission.

The next section probes the forms in which the DHs resist their domestication. Categorized according to political, economic, and religious-cultural dimensions, these forms of resistance constitute the "public transcript" as these are often staged within the public gaze locally, internationally, and/or globally.

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from the pamphlet *Mujeres indigenas de Chiapas*, Kinal Antsetik, Mexico City, as quoted in Maria Arcelia Gonzales-Butron, "The Effects of Free—Market Globalization on Women's Lives," *Concilium* 2001 (5): 49.

The last section examines the strategies that exist in the permeable space that exists between submission and resistance. These strategies which occur in this thin porous line that divides submission and resistance is, what in the last section is, described as accommodation. Central to this discussion are the cultural, religious, and political-economic ways in which the DHs defiantly submit and passively resist.

### DHS' WAYS OF DEALING WITH DOMESTICATION

In the past few decades there has been a consistent scholarly attention to everyday forms of resistance, especially in anthropological and sociological researches.<sup>2</sup> “In these studies resisters are portrayed not as help-less victims of domination but as conscious, intentional subjects who have learned how to skillfully manage and negotiate power relations in their daily lives whether between colonized and colonizer, between workers and managers, (or) between women and men [and between women]. They are the heroes and heroines who have found ways to empower themselves in spite of the crippling constraints of the worlds they inhabit.”<sup>3</sup> This theme of everyday resistance is particularly dominant in feminist scholarship challenging the stereotypical view of women as victims and pointing to the many small, yet significant, ways in which women defy control.<sup>4</sup>

Such scholarship has evolved critical concepts for apprehending power dynamics in human relationships. James Scott, for example, talks of “cautious resistance” and “calculated conformity” and/or the

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<sup>2</sup> Originally theorised by Gramsci the concept of everyday resistance refers to the small, seemingly trivial daily acts through which subordinate individuals and groups undermine—rather than overthrow—oppressive relations of power. See A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith (London: Wishart, 1971) as cited in Kimberly Chang and Julian McAllister Groves, “Romancing Resistance and Resisting Romance: Ethnography and the Construction of Power in the Filipina Domestic Worker Community in Hong Kong,” in *At Home in the World?: Filipinos in Global Migrations*, ed., Filomeno V. Aguilar (Quezon City, Phils.: Philippine Migration Research Network, 2002): 316.

<sup>3</sup> Kimberly Chang and Julian McAllister Groves, “Romancing Resistance and Resisting Romance,” 317.

<sup>4</sup> See L. Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); A. Ong, *Spirit Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987); and J. Rollins, *Between Women: Domesticity and Their Employers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985) as cited in Kimberly Chang and Julian McAllister Groves, “Romancing Resistance and Resisting Romance,” 317.

“hidden and public transcripts.”<sup>5</sup> A related work by Louis Zurcher, in the meantime, puts forward the idea of conformity, conflict, and creativity.<sup>6</sup> The DHs are no different from the subjects of the above mentioned researches. Hence, the categories used here to characterize the ways, in which they deal with their domestication, draw from the rich concepts, that have been articulated in such studies. This research uses, in particular, the three modes of dealing with oppression that Nicole Constable directly and indirectly referred to in her study of the DHs themselves,<sup>7</sup> namely submission, resistance, and accommodation.

### *Submission*

Constable partly describes the DHs as passive and oppressed victims.<sup>8</sup> The sense of submission embedded in this description constitutes a mode of dealing with oppression, which may come in the form of acquiescence and complicity to the oppression. Acquiescence especially happens when DHs unwittingly succumb to their oppression out of extreme feelings of defeat and deep resignation. Complicity, meanwhile, happens when they wittingly surrender, justify, and even intensify their oppression by their subscription to the very images and reasons that account for their oppressive situation. These yielding by the DHs to the death-dealing situations surrounding their sojourn in H.K. are strongly discernible along gender, class, cultural, and religious lines.

### *Based on Gender*

Along gender lines DHs resort to submitting to their oppression by acceding to their gendered socialization and consenting to their gendered migration. This is perceptible in their concurrence to work in a gendered job, i.e., domestic work, which is premised on the idea that

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<sup>5</sup> His critical contributions include James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990) and *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> See Louis Zurcher, *Social Roles: Conformity, Conflict, and Creativity* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> See Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers*, 180.



care work is women's work.<sup>9</sup> Most of them even keep going back to H.K. to work as DH although it has been, and still is, the lynchpin of their oppression.<sup>10</sup> In so doing, they fit themselves into and reinforce the stereotype that care work, like housework, is women's work. One can also see their submission in the way they willingly accept all kinds of "feminine" housework, e.g. cooking and baby-sitting, but balk at "heavy" or "masculine" housework, e.g. painting the house and fixing home appliances.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the fact that they themselves are the ones in H.K. point to their yielding to the ideology of domesticity that forms part of the socialization of women in Philippine society, particularly in the family.

DHs also acquiesce to their subordinate status as women and daughters and to the social inscription that women must live for the family to the point of self-denial and self-sacrifice. One can discern this in the overwhelming majority of DHs, who point to their families as their main reason for going to H.K., or those who resort to accepting their difficult situation "for the sake of the family." The circumstances surrounding siblings Elsa and Belle's migration is a perfect example of this, particularly in relation to submission to male authority. Elsa and Belle's father first tried to send Belle to H.K. when he did not like her involvement with union activities back at home. When Belle could not make it Elsa became the next target. Elsa's account of her last conversation with her father reflects the dynamics of DHs' submission to male domination, especially when "family-talk" is used as the means of persuasion:

"Elsa" he told me, "can you help your sisters in their schooling? Because they like to study and you know that I don't have any capability to send them to college." He said, "Elsa can you help me? Your sisters, they like to go to school." ...and so I said, "OK. No problem. This is my oppor-

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<sup>9</sup> Their enthusiastic reception of the 10/10 contest which actually promote and perpetuate the image of Filipina women as devoted both to home and nation, hence, as domestic workers, shows this. Nicole Constable, "Dolls, T-Birds, and Ideal Workers," 237, 240.

<sup>10</sup> However, one cannot give a blanket statement that the DHs' migration to H.K. is an unadulterated submission to their domestication. For one, the DHs themselves point to their migration to H.K. as a resistance against their economic domestication. This ambivalence will be picked up for further discussion in the section on resistance and accommodation.

<sup>11</sup> Julie Roque, "Jill—of—all Trades," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 7 (July 1999): 7.

tunity to help....Don't worry, *Tay* [father], I will try my best to help you."<sup>12</sup>

Submission to male authority and the social inscription of care work as women's work can also be seen in how DHs defer to their husband's, father's, parents' or family's demands and needs over and above their own desires or interest. Vangie<sup>13</sup> had to forego her wish of entering the religious life after her parents objected to it. They told her she had to support the family, which Vangie did, by going to H.K. to work as a DH. Like Vangie single DHs' strong sense of responsibility for their family, especially for their parents, is often their main reason for slaving themselves in H.K. As pointed out in the previous chapter parents ingrain this in them from childhood. That is why many single DHs send a large part of their salary to their family which is used to send their siblings as well as nieces and nephews to school. Furthermore, single DHs carry this high sense of responsibility for their immediate family even when they marry.<sup>14</sup> In the case of Vangie she had to first make her husband agree that she will continue giving financial support to her parents before consenting to marry him. Unmarried DHs also give in to their socialization that, as women, marriage and having children is their chief source of happiness. They yield to the social pressure so much so that they enter into fights with other DHs (including their friends) because of men.<sup>15</sup>

Those with children, in the meantime, submit to their own primary vocation, i.e., motherhood. Even in their absence they struggle to fulfill their motherhood duties through transnational mothering.<sup>16</sup> They pamper their children with material goods and spend a sizable chunk of their salary for overseas calls to them. These "cell-phone mothers" do anything and everything they can do as mothers (via the cell

<sup>12</sup> Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 18.

<sup>13</sup> See "El Shaddai Bride," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1996): 2-3, 6.

<sup>14</sup> The stories of Veronica: "A Reunion Away From Home" and Edna: "Life After Debt" as documented by MFMW in *Migrant Focus Magazine* Vol. 1, Issue 3 (Jan.-March 2001), 19-22 concretely illustrate DHs' submission to the burden of responsibility for their immediate and even extended family.

<sup>15</sup> Vickéi Dorde, "Where Are Your Manners," *TF* (December 1992): 32 as quoted in Constable, "Dolls, T-Birds and Ideal Workers," 230, speaks of DHs' public confrontations on Sundays because of boyfriend-grabbing.

<sup>16</sup> Augustus T. Añonuevo, "Migrant Women's Dream for a Better Life: At What Cost?" in *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration*, 78. See also, Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, "Human Sacrifices," <<http://www.iupui.edu/~anthkb/a104/philippines/migrationfamilies.htm>>, accessed September 23, 2003.

phone), from comforting and counseling troubled children to helping them with their assignments.<sup>17</sup> They do these because, first, their husbands usually demur or refuse to play these roles as these hurt their (husbands) “macho” image.<sup>18</sup> Second, DH mothers need to appease their strong sense of guilt for their supposed dereliction of their motherly duties and responsibilities. But in doing these they submit to their oppression rooted in the dominant ideology that defines female sexuality only in terms of procreative functions, specifically that of a wife and mother.

DH mothers’ internalized feeling of leaving a void that they are supposed to fill as good mothers also make them resort to appointing a *tagasalo* (surrogate). This *tagasalo* is almost always another woman, e.g. DH’s mother, sister, aunt, and eldest daughter, who serves as the substitute of the DH for most of the nurturing duties she has left behind.<sup>19</sup> But, in appointing these women, DH mothers perpetuate the Filipino socialization that care work is women’s work. They reinforce, as well, the notion of the “double burden,” which expects women to be still responsible for reproductive labor even when they are engaged or are the ones solely engaged in productive labor.

When DH mothers cannot or do not appoint someone from their family they hire their own DH who is usually another poorer woman. This passing on of household duties to another woman, who receives a salary which is a fraction of what H.K. DHs get, reproduces gender and class oppression. DHs do this by transferring caretaking to another poorer woman in the same way that their affluent women employers passed on their caretaking duties unto other poor(er) Asian women like them. By hiring and exploiting the services of a less privileged Filipina who could not afford the high costs of overseas labor migration DHs bolster class stratification.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Mai Dizon-Añonuevo, “Revisiting Migrant Women’s Lives: Stories of Struggles, Failures, and Successes,” in *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Augustus T. Añonuevo and Dennis D. Estopace, “Doing the Second Shift: Difficulties of Husbands Left Behind,” in *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration*, 84–95 illustrates this.

<sup>19</sup> See Augustus T. Añonuevo and Mary Grace A. Guerra, “Lola, Tita, Ate... Nanay Ko Rin?: Caretakers as Mother Substitutes,” in *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration*, 96–105.

<sup>20</sup> Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, “Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor,” 571, writes about this reproduced exploitation by pointing out the significant wage disparity between the migrant DH and the DH in the Philippines. On the average, DHs in the Philippines earn more or less US\$ 40

DHs also submit to their oppression along gender lines by owning the blame for various problems that arise from their gender-based roles. They feel guilty they “abandoned” their children so they hold themselves mainly responsible when their children end up being juvenile delinquents. They fully buy the traditional reason that if the mother is away the children will go astray. Because of these some DHs rush back home or go home for good when very serious children-related problems crop up. Some also attribute their husband’s infidelity to their absence and even resort to accepting the infidelity on the condition that their husband does not bring home his mistress.<sup>21</sup>

As women, DHs’ submission to their oppression is also discernible by their docility to constricting racialized and women-migrant-specific images imposed on them by their gendered socialization and to H.K. people’s forms of control over their sexuality. On the basis of such stereotypes one reprimands the “unladylike” manners of a compatriot, which she thinks is very un-Filipina. She expresses repugnance at how the DH in question:

sat with legs up and feet at the window [on a bus]. Just imagine, a lady sitting with legs up and feet at the window of a public transportation! Although she was wearing jeans, for me it was improper to sit the way she did. . . . Let us bear in mind that . . . we do not only carry our own name but the whole name of [all] Filipinos and that our misbehavior affects the reputation of the whole Filipino community. To the lady concerned, I’m sorry but I think we should discipline ourselves next time.<sup>22</sup>

Another DH adds her voice to the above mentioned exhortation by summoning “every Filipino helper to belie [those] criticisms, by preserving the epitome of a dainty and demure image” and urges them to “realize that whatever misbehavior” they show in their sojourn in H.K., “is a disgrace and shame to the whole Filipino race.”<sup>23</sup> A third DH

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per month, which is below the Philippine poverty wage, while the DHs receive a few hundred US dollars. Moreover, domestic workers in the Philippines do not enjoy the additional benefits that DHs receive.

<sup>21</sup> Mai Dizon-Añonuevo, “Revisiting Migrant Women’s Lives: Stories of Struggles, Failures, and Successes,” 25.

<sup>22</sup> June Laggawan Sannad, “Some Disgusting Behavior,” *Tinig Filipino* (September 5, 1993), as quoted in Nicole Constable, “Dolls, T-Birds and Ideal Workers,” 230–1. This preponderance to instill feelings of shame over the DHs’ ungrateful and un-Filipino woman’s behavior is a powerful tool in molding the minds and imagination of DHs into participation, if not complicity, in their own oppression.

<sup>23</sup> Oly Rueda, “Some Food for Thought,” *TF* (April 1992): 16 quoted in Constable, “Dolls, T-Birds and Ideal Workers,” 231.

was more explicit in reinforcing submission to this gender-oppressive nationalist discourse in a way that kowtows to their oppressor's desire to control them. She reminds her fellow DHs to "avoid discotheques and pub houses to keep themselves away from temptation and suspicious eyes" and obtain a good reputation from the local community.<sup>24</sup> These forms of self-control capitulate to traditional Filipino and religion-based expectations of women. These fall exactly into the imposed colonial images on women to be "chaste" and "pure" or "dainty" and "demure." These sound so much like the exhortations of a manual for young girls used by the Spaniards to mold the *mujer indigena* to the image and likeness of the *doncella*—the perfect woman of the Iberian society around the 15th century. The manual—titled *Los Avisos a las Doncellas Cristianas*—was written by Bishop Antonio Ma. Claret and translated into Tagalog with the title *Mga Tagubilin sa mga Dalaga* (Instructions for Young Women). This was supposedly given to make Filipinas "virtuous young women and genuine devotees of Jesus Christ." Chapter IV and V of this manual, like the third DH, warns against attending dances and theatres.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, the last chapter of the manual advises against "vanity and indecency in dress" and laments over the vain woman who cannot be controlled because "she wants to see and be seen."<sup>26</sup> Some DHs speak in the same manner when they declare that "staying clean is a lady's best asset" and suggest dressing in a way that does not make one look "loose" or provocative to avoid attracting male attention. One DH, whose letter was widely supported, even appealed to her fellow DHs not to wear "sexy" clothes, challenging them: "How could you expect a man to act like a saint when you are garbed in sexy clothes?"<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Vady Madamba, "Discotheques and Pubhouses: Let Us Avoid Them," *TF* (December 1991): 33, as quoted in Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 187.

<sup>25</sup> Bishop Claret even calls dances *obras del diablo*. See Antonio Ma. Claret, *Los Avisos a las Doncellas Cristianas* (Tambobong: Impreso del Asilo de Huerfano, 1890), 32, as quoted in Mary John Mananzan, "The Filipino Women: Before and After the Spanish Conquest of the Philippines," in *Essays on Women*, ed., Mary John Mananzan (Manila: Institute of Women's Studies, 1989): 28–9, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Mary John Mananzan, "The Filipino Women: Before and After the Spanish Conquest of the Philippines," 30–1.

<sup>27</sup> Annabelle Basabica, "The Way We Wear in Summer," *TF* (May 1993): 37, as quoted in Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 189. Constable also observes how other articles or featured columns of *Tinig Filipino* strongly reinforce this by stressing modesty and personal cleanliness complete with advice about grooming, clothing, and appearance.

Indeed, one can discern this gendered submission to their oppression in various articles by the DHs that reflect and encourage passivity, compliance, and similar sorts of discipline imposed by employers, agencies, and governments. This is evident in how “much of the advice [given mostly by DHs themselves] suggests workers should find satisfaction ‘from within’ rather than address the conditions of their oppression,” thereby putting the blame on the domestic worker.<sup>28</sup>

### *Based on Class*

From a class perspective the DHs’ submission to their oppression is palpable in their compliance to the demands of domestic work inscription. First of all, they give in to the nefarious practices of the recruitment process. They suit themselves to the employment conditions. They forge documents and lie to their teeth about their age, civil status, and level of education just to get accepted for the job. Some forge their birth certificates and try to look the part by acting and making themselves physically “look younger.” Constable says that even if these may be seen as just “playing along” the DH also begins to “learn how to fit herself into the employer’s desired mold.”<sup>29</sup> DHs also submit as DHs when they behave according to the “typical DH” stereotype of the “economically-desperate,” which is an image constructed by recruiters and prospective employers. DHs actually become economically desperate when they sell their properties or borrow huge amounts of money just to pay the expenses for overseas work. And it usually takes them close to a year to pay off these loans. In the meantime, they have to send money home. They then get more loans in order to pay for their recruitment loans and still be able to send money home. Consequently, they fall into the debt trap and the “poor DH” image becomes a reality. Because they keep on borrowing money to pay off their debts they get tied to the oppression of economic subordination and dependence on the recruiter who finds work for them, the employer who pays them, the loan sharks who provide much-needed money, and the H.K. government which gives them work. This vicious cycle of

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<sup>28</sup> Articles even promote and teach supposedly “proper attitude” of DHs, which include optimism and controlling anger towards employers. An ideal DH, most articles relay, is passive, acquiescent, and one who strives for “patience,” “contentment,” “love,” “devotion,” and “positive thinking.” Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 185–6, 189.

<sup>29</sup> Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 68–70, 72–3.

financial indebtedness ensures that they will finish their contracts even if it means submitting to unfavorable conditions.<sup>30</sup> “The situation of the DH desperate to remain in H.K. soon after their employment contract ends, is tailor-made for exploitation”<sup>31</sup>—the kind of what Filipinos call as *kapit sa patalim* (survival of the fittest). Because of heavy debts, a lot of them keep on renewing contracts and keep on going back to H.K., thereby perpetuating their oppression as migrant domestic workers.

To cope with the increasing economic demands of their families at home DHs submit more deeply to their oppression by resorting to taking more loans at usurious rates and which also entails leaving their passport behind as collateral.<sup>32</sup> In doing so, they intensify not only their economic hardships but also their vulnerability as migrants. For one, their passport is their most important document as a migrant. Losing it or not being in possession of it could spell greater trouble for them with the H.K. Immigration. Worse, they lay themselves open to deportation.

Indeed, having more loans buries Filipina DHs deeper into the quicksand of their oppression. A 2002 MFMW survey of their expenditures,<sup>33</sup> for example, shows that they end up spending most of their wage in paying their loans, making their personal needs suffer in the process. With more loans to pay, Filipina DHs resort to finding other ways to make more money. Some turn to gambling at the square where all kinds of popular Filipino forms of gambling like *pusoy*, 41, *Lucky 9* and even *jueteng*<sup>34</sup> are held on Sundays. Some take up multiple “*aerobics*”<sup>35</sup> or *kuskos*—DHs’ idioms for part-time jobs. Naturally, they wear out their bodies even more and enslave themselves further to more people. Worse, they get arrested and imprisoned as part-time work is illegal for the DHs.<sup>36</sup> Part-time work through the faster and

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<sup>30</sup> Erino Ozeki, “Migration Frontier of Filipino Women: Ethnic Relations of Filipina Domestic Helpers with Chinese Employers in Hong Kong,” *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (March 1997): 683.

<sup>31</sup> “Part-time Contract: An Agency’s Moneymaking Scheme,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 3 (March 1999): 9.

<sup>32</sup> Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 73.

<sup>33</sup> MFMW, “Where Do Our Wages Go?” *New Migrant Focus*, Issue # 34 (December 2002): 3.

<sup>34</sup> *pusoy*, 41, and *Lucky 9* are card games while *jueteng* is a numbers game.

<sup>35</sup> Jo-Ann Maglipon, *Filipina Migrant: Braving the Exile* (Hong Kong: MFMW, 1990), 11.

<sup>36</sup> In 1996, for instance, Immigration officials arrested 802 FDH and 718 in 1997 for working illegally. See “DH Can’t Put Up Ads,” *TNT Hong Kong*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (January 1999): 12.

more lucrative flesh trade especially buries the DHs deeper into their oppression. Since many of those who resort to it are those who are really desperate syndicates prey on their vulnerability.<sup>37</sup> In effect, these DHs seal their class oppression, exacerbate their racialized stigmatization, and reinforce their gendered oppression.

DHs also succumb to their oppression by believing that they are a “member of the family”—a ploy on the part of some employers to draw submission from the DHs. This scheme may include the following scenarios: when employers allow DHs to eat at the same table and share the same food; when DHs are brought or invited to “family affairs” like picnics, beach outings, or dinners in restaurants; when DHs’ birthdays are remembered or celebrated by the employers’ families; and when employers extend friendship to DHs’ families by sending material things when DHs go home. When these happen, DHs begin to feel being treated equally and in a “special” way like a “member of the family.” As such, DHs feel it is but natural to obey and lovingly take care of their “parents” or “elders” (employers) and their “siblings” (employer’s children). When DHs enter into the “like a family” mentality their “surrogate” family’s welfare becomes more important. They become more pliant and compliant. They go home early on their off-day so they can cook for the family. They begin to rationalize and accept their sacrifices as just right and fitting for their “adopted family.”

Because DHs think that their employer considers them as a member of the family, they also interpret their employer’s strict regulations as signs or expressions of concern, all the more extorting their active submission. Linda, for example, says she does not mind and even says “Thank you ma’am” to her employer’s numerous and rigid rules regarding work and dress codes, which include going home on her off-day at 8:30 p.m. when she is supposed to be 24-hours free; waking up daily at 6:30; and going to bed at 9:30. These are alright with her because she believes that her employer “is looking out for [her] like she does her daughter.”<sup>38</sup> “I don’t mind what they (employers) do to me as long as they are nice to me” then becomes the oft-repeated response.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> S. Samydorai, “Forced prostitution of Filipinas in Hong Kong,” <<http://www.ahrchk.net/hrsolid/mainfile.php/1993vol103no01/2044>>, accessed September 23, 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 103–4.

<sup>39</sup> “Surrogate Parent?” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 2 (March 1996): 1.



For those who do not fall into the “like a family” trap, submission becomes the response to the negative situations of domestic work when they themselves see the employer’s rigid rules as “proper for maids.” Fernandina,<sup>40</sup> for example, dutifully obeyed her employer’s stipulations on how a maid should look: nails cut close to the nail bed, hair cropped like a boy’s, and legs covered in pants. For the educated ones, submission becomes the response when they regard their employer’s strict regulations as a “professional” way of treating maids. They do not find anything wrong with it. They even see it as an advantage in the sense that at least they know what the employer wants and what they, as maids, are expected to do. As such, they respond more positively to this “professional” treatment than when employers have unclear expectations or enforce control through shouting or screaming.<sup>41</sup> This acceptance or preference for a “professional” treatment then leaves the oppression unquestioned.

Lastly, deference and obedience to people in authority is also a DH strategy that paves the way for an unchallenged domestication. This often happens among DHs coming from rural areas who are preferred because they are more submissive and meek. Apparently, socialization into traditional gender roles and the Philippine version of the patron-client, landowner-tenant relationship—factors that mold adaptability to harsher forms of control—is stronger in the rural areas. Moreover many of these *promdi* (pejorative for the province-born and bred Filipino) DHs are less-educated and do not have substantial knowledge of their rights as domestic workers.<sup>42</sup> In their case, submission then happens because of ignorance and internalization of being the inferior, low-class “maid.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Jo-Ann Maglipon, *The Filipina Migrant: Braving the Exile*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 15.

<sup>42</sup> Dally, who suffered from being locked in the kitchen whenever her employers go out, first thought that her forced imprisonment was alright because her employers did not know her yet. She felt that if they knew her better and if she worked harder, they would stop it. Her ignorance of her rights is the final nail to her acceptance of the situation. Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 181–5.

<sup>43</sup> Even in their Sunday outreach or volunteer work they resort to doing the maid’s work. In the Wanchai Methodist Church, they “help clean the sanctuary and the toilets after the Sunday service even if no one asked them to do it.” See Anil Stephen, “Maid in Hong Kong: The city’s churches are helping exploited migrant workers,” <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/011/19.26.html>>, accessed September 23, 2003.

*Based on Culture and Religion*

As Filipinos, DHs submit by conforming to cultural values. *Utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), for example, is one motivating factor for their capitulation to their parents' wishes and the demands of the "like a family" mentality.<sup>44</sup> For example, if the DH receives a favor from the employer she will have *utang na loob* "which morally binds her to reciprocate in the future, even if the giver [employer] does not expect such reciprocal action."<sup>45</sup> That is why there are DHs who end up in greater trouble when out of *utang na loob*, they take out loans for the relative or friend who brought them to H.K. or when they accede to their parents' requests or suggestions that they take care of their siblings' education. And because *utang na loob* to parents is a Filipino moral norm children, especially daughters like the DHs, usually do not have much choice but pay back by obeying their parents' wishes and ensuring financial and emotional care for them until they die.

DHs submit, too, through subscription to the Filipino values of *kapalaran* or *tadhana*, which means "fate" or "destiny." They rationalize their difficult situations, including their being a DH, as *itinadhana ng langit* or *iginuhit ng tadhana* (designed by heaven; fated; destined) and *iginuhit sa palad* (etched in the palm). These then make them accept their "fate" as a DH. As a cultural valuation, *kapalaran* or *tadhana* is rooted in "the belief in and acceptance of heavenly influences over human lives."

*Kapalaran* or *tadhana* is also linked to a central Filipino value, i.e., *bahala na*. *Bahala na*, as understood and practiced by Filipinos, is actually two-pronged; one positive and the other negative. Here, however, we look, first, at its negative form. *Bahala na* has been interpreted by most early Filipino historians, as the world-view that has contributed largely to the passivity of Filipinos, in the face of Spanish corruption and abuses. Hence it gained some kind of notoriety,<sup>46</sup> particularly as it

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<sup>44</sup> *Utang na loob* is the Filipino moral rule governing duties and obligations. It is established when assistance is sought or extended to another especially in times of crisis. Thus, it becomes the "psychological contract" which morally binds interacting persons to one another.

<sup>45</sup> F. Landa Jocano, *The Filipino Value System: A Cultural Definition* (Quezon City: Punlad Research House, Inc., 1997), 82–3. Erino Ozeki, "Migration Frontier of Filipino Women: Ethnic Relations of Filipina Domestic Helpers with Chinese Employers in Hong Kong," 689, explains this more concretely.

<sup>46</sup> *Bahala na* as a fatalistic faith implies that the future is in the hands of fate and a Supreme Power. Life is, therefore, to be submitted to and never mastered. See Bruno Torpigiani, "The Church and the Filipinos' cultural and religious values," *Manila*

is imbricated with fatalism or resignation and the shirking of responsibility. In relation to fatalism *bahala na*, indeed, becomes a means for submission. This happens more concretely when it is understood and practiced as playing things by ear or accepting whatever happens. This is reflected, for example, in the expression commonly uttered by Filipinos beleaguered by widespread poverty and natural calamities occurring in merciless regularity, which carries a fatalistic resignation and faith in Divine Providence.

Together with the notion of *kapalaran* and *tadhana*, *bahala na* drives the DHs to accept their situation as their God-given lot or destiny. Vicky Casia-Cabantac gives a glimpse of this when she laments: "It is quite pathetic to see how hopeless and helpless fellow DH can be. Clearly, they are ready to accept whatever salary, just to feel secure in their job. But where is justice? Until when do we allow ourselves to just keep quiet and leave everything to *bahala na*."<sup>47</sup>

As can be gleaned from the above-mentioned interpretation and application of *bahala na*, religion is also a factor in the DHs' submission to their oppression. Filipinos, particularly Filipino women, have a strong association with religion. All the more so when they are in a foreign land. This predilection to religion, among Filipino women, has strong roots in patriarchal Spanish socialization. Jane Corpuz-Brock in "Gospel, Cultures, and Filipina Migrant Workers" reckons the church and state during the Spanish colonization were responsible for the imposition of religious and sexual purity on the Filipina.<sup>48</sup> Today, this preoccupation with religion persists among Filipinas, most especially among Filipina migrant workers. To them, religion is a cogent and authoritative tool in understanding and behaving in light of their oppression. Whether superficial or deep, exploitative or responsive, religion is *a* and oftentimes, *the* norm to view and confront personal and social oppression. Not surprisingly, religion is used to at best cushion the impact, and at worst rationalize or justify their multifarious oppression. To be sure, religion is often invoked as a source of life

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*Bulletin* (August 6, 1988): 8–10, cited in Freddie Obligacion, "The Empowering Impact of Faith Among Filipino Women: Implications for Development Initiatives," *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring 1997): 19.

<sup>47</sup> Vicky Casia-Cabantac, "Job or Justice?" *TNT Hong Kong*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (April 1999): 9.

<sup>48</sup> Jane Corpuz-Brock, "Gospel, Cultures, and Filipina Migrant Workers," *International Review of Mission* Vol. LXXXV, No. 36 (January 1996): 66.

orientation. This is evident especially in the DHs' writings in the print media. DH writers in *TF (Tinig Filipino)*,<sup>49</sup> for instance, often couch their advice to fellow DHs in religious language. Lanie in "Because of Love," encourages her fellow DHs to learn to love their employers no matter how bad they may be and to just recourse to "seek[ing] the Lord's guidance."<sup>50</sup>

DHs also submit by seeing oppression from the perspective of religious-based notions of dependence on God and suffering. They become more submissive, however, when the latter is linked with sacrifice and becomes "redemptive suffering." They reckon that it is acceptable, even good, to suffer if it will mean redeeming someone. Faye,<sup>51</sup> for example, gloats at how her "hard work has paid off." She claims that because she "threw a bread" in response to her employer who "threw a stone" she "finally gained the prize." And what is the prize? Her employer "changed a lot." This positive valuing of suffering become all the more potent when DHs view their suffering in the context of obedience, duty, and responsibility for their family, community, and even for their country.<sup>52</sup> Like Jesus, the dutiful Son, they just consider their submission to the oppressive situation as an act of a dutiful daughter, wife, mother, and a Filipino citizen.

Positive or romanticized religious notions of sacrifice, indeed, drive DHs to endure their oppression. Melanie,<sup>53</sup> in "Rewarding Sacrifice," shares how "strong faith," "grace of perseverance," and "prayer" are keys to finishing a troublesome contract and how blessings come after the difficulties. Tina puts it succinctly as she assures that "sadness will always give way to joy" in the same way the "Calvary [and] death gives way to resurrection and everlasting life."<sup>54</sup> For others the issue becomes more complicated when sacrifice and suffering are endured in the name of "faithful love," especially for their family, or when

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<sup>49</sup> This is a Hong Kong-based transnational magazine for OFWs which has a former Hong Kong DH as its editor and heavily carries literary works by migrant domestic workers, including Hong Kong DHs.

<sup>50</sup> Lanie Mathias Jose, "Because of Love," *TF* (February 1992): 8 quoted in Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 190.

<sup>51</sup> "She Threw a Stone, I Threw a Bread," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 1 No. 3: 19–20.

<sup>52</sup> See Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 180–96.

<sup>53</sup> Melanie Romero, "Up Close and Personal," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 4 (April 1999): 22.

<sup>54</sup> Tina Bautista, "Pro-Life Corner," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 4 (April 1999): 27.

sacrifice becomes “the best definition of love,” emulating Christ who selflessly sacrificed his life for us.<sup>55</sup>

Most DHs make sense of, accept, and even embrace their oppression through an instrumentalist view of suffering made more puissant by an interpretation of suffering as “natural,” “necessary,” and “redemptive” just like the sufferings and death of Jesus, which “remains at the very heart of their [Filipinos’] spirituality.”<sup>56</sup> This spiritualization and valorization of suffering is evident in many DHs’ reflections on their experiences of injustice:

We find ourselves wondering about these unpleasant situations and often bow our heads in despair. There are times when we shed tears and question God for abandoning us... Instead of becoming bitter, why not thank the Lord for the troubles that helps us recognize our spiritual needs. When we take these burdens a challenge for us, we come to... understand clearly that it brings us humility, contentment, and spiritual health. These difficulties we face supply us with spiritual growth if we accept them as a test of our faith in God....<sup>57</sup>

The Bible also plays a role in the DHs’ submission to their oppression. For one, it is used to justify suffering. Erlinda Layosa, for example, quotes a biblical passage which says, “You servants must submit to your masters and show them complete respect... If you endure suffering even when you have done right, God will bless you for it.”<sup>58</sup> Mommie Jingco, a regular columnist on religion in *TF*, also quotes from the Bible to make her fellow DHs feel good and accept their role as “servants”:

What is wrong with being a domestic helper anyway, or shall I use the word servant or *muchacha*? From Christ’s point of view these are the people who will become great because they humble themselves to serve others. It was [Christ who] promoted servanthood.

.... Here are some tips to remember from the Scriptures: “... Servants be obedient to those who are masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling as to Christ; not with eye service, as men pleasers, but

<sup>55</sup> Evelyn Celario, “On the Wings of Love,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 12 (March 1997): 12.

<sup>56</sup> F.J. Pidgeon, “Pag-Aralan ang Biblia,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1996): 30.

<sup>57</sup> Miriam C. Becasen, “Are You Dealing with Agonizing Burdens?” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 4 (April 1999): 14.

<sup>58</sup> Erlinda Layosa, “Don’t Find Fault... Find a Remedy,” *TF* (July–August 1990): 15 quoted in Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 192.

as bond servants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, and knowing that whatever anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is slave or free" (Ephesians 6:5–7).<sup>59</sup>

Kimberly Chang and Julian Mc Allister Groves give a more comprehensive and perceptive analyses on the DHs' utilization of faith, particularly the image of Jesus as servant, to redefine service which, in the DHs' case, have been heavily imposed with sexual overtones. Chang and Groves note, for instance, how some DHs "define themselves as servants of the Lord rather than the physical world of men" and "describe this service to God and Church as cleansing, filling them with a sense of 'righteousness' and 'completeness.'"<sup>60</sup> The two cite Layosa's "love letter," supposedly written by God to Filipina overseas workers who are described as the "Chosen People to be Helpers of the World." In the said letter Layosa said that God urges Filipina domestic workers to embrace their work as servants bringing to it their "true Christian values, your resilient, cheerful, persevering, helpful qualities, and humble ways."<sup>61</sup> Chang and Groves claim that statements like Layosa's cleanse the notion of the DHs' service of its sexual overtones and turns it into an almost sacred activity, giving the women a sense of moral identity and purpose.

### *Resistance*

Constable also says the DHs engage in organized protest—a mode of dealing with oppression that is usually known as resistance.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, they do not simply submit to or resign themselves to their domestication. Under certain circumstances and using strategic means they actively fight against it in their quest for full humanity and liberation. These active attempts to transform their lives are not just on the level of the local but also that of the global; social not just individual;

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<sup>59</sup> Mommie Jingco, "Lowly Yet Fulfilling," *TF* (October 1991): 24 quoted in Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 192.

<sup>60</sup> Kimberly Chang and L.H. Ling, "Globalization and its intimate other: Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong," in *Gender and Global Structuring: Sightings, Sites, and Resistances*, eds., Marianne H. Marchand and Anne Sisson Runyan (London: Routledge, 2003): 38–9.

<sup>61</sup> Erlinda R. Layosa, "Into Thy Hands," *TF* (April 1994): 6 quoted in Kimberly Chang and L.H. Ling, "Globalization and its intimate other: Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong," 39.

<sup>62</sup> Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers*, 155.

personal as well as structural; formal and informal; public and private. While these strategies overlap and defy neat categorizations they will be classified here as political, economic, and religious for purposes of a clearer and more systematic presentation.

### *Political*

To politically contest their oppression, DHs first resort to building formal and informal networks. Formally, their principal way of networking is by organizing themselves into associations or clubs and joining unions and alliances or federations. While associations are often according to region and are mainly for socio-psychological and political-economic purposes many are also religious in nature. Others are according to place of work or area of concern, e.g. savings groups. In most of these associations, DHs engage in consciousness-raising on their rights and welfare through seminars, workshops, training, and public fora. These associations also create various organized mechanisms to help their members. The *Abra-Tinguian Ilocano Society* (ATIS-H.K.)<sup>63</sup>—a federation of 25 organizations from the province of Abra—gives shelter and paralegal counseling to its members and scholarship to indigent students from each of the municipalities of their province. It has also established an OFW Center in Abra (in the Philippines), which serves as a linkage with the families of member DHs in case of urgent problems.

In terms of alliances or federations, most of the DHs join the umbrella group UNIFIL-H.K. (United Filipinos in Hong Kong),<sup>64</sup> which is also affiliated to one of the most active and influential alliance of migrant domestic worker organizations in H.K., that is, the AMCB.<sup>65</sup> Made up of an alliance of more or less 25 Filipino migrant organizations (in

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<sup>63</sup> Vicky Casia-Cabantac, "The Abra Tinguian Ilocano Society: A Family Away from Home," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 7 (July 1999): 26–7.

<sup>64</sup> UNIFIL was officially formed in May 12, 1985 but it actually started in 1984 when 11 Filipino migrant groups and organizations in H.K. formed themselves as the United Filipinos Against Forced Remittance (UNFARE) to rally against the Philippine government's EO-857, which mandated all OFWs to remit 50–70% of their total earnings. This high political profile intensified in 1996 after the execution of Flor Contemplacion.

<sup>65</sup> The AMCB, where UNIFIL is a founding member of, includes the Association of Sri Lankans, Far East Overseas Nepalese Association, Friends of Thai, and Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers. DHs are also key players in the other umbrella group—CMR (Coalition for Migrants' Rights)—which is the broadest coalition of grassroots migrant organizations in H.K.

H.K.) UNIFIL is very active in advocacy and empowerment activities for the DHs on vital issues both in H.K. and the Philippines. Together with the H.K. and Philippine churches (especially Christian churches) and Filipino-run migrant NGOs (non-government organizations) like MFMW (Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers), APMMF (Asia-Pacific Mission for Migrant Filipinos), and Bethune House, UNIFIL has tremendously aided DHs in helping themselves and their fellow DHs not only to survive but triumph over some of the anti-migrant and anti-(Filipina) DHs policies of H.K. It utilizes sophisticated strategies such as lobbying, dialogues, petition signing, fora, protest rallies, discussion groups, surveys, and conferences. Public protests aimed at creating social change and improving working conditions are by far its most overt political strategy of resistance. These various discursive, communicative, and practical strategies in combating oppression that it (particularly with AMCB) employs, is a known phenomenon in H.K.<sup>66</sup>

Today, this lobbying and networking<sup>67</sup> has taken on international proportions. With the leadership of Connie Bragas-Regalado—former UNIFIL chairperson and AMCB spokesperson and now *Migrante* (Migrant) Sectoral Party chair in the Philippines—and with the help of MFMW, DHs have expanded their lobbying mechanisms. They have linked with GABRIELA—the biggest Filipino feminist organization that is known internationally—to respond to social problems in

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<sup>66</sup> Equipped and empowered by all these political strategies for resistance facilitated by UNIFIL, DHs assail their oppression by being at the forefront of the resistance movements among the FDHs. Three notable fruits of their efforts include: 1) winning an increase in DHs' minimum wage in 1993; 2) reduction of the wage cut from 20–35% to just 5% in January 1999; and 3) shelving of the proposals on the ban on driving duties, abolishment of maternity protection, and live-out arrangement in 2000. More recently, the campaign by KOALISYON or Coalition Against Government Exactions—an alliance of 83 DHs organizations and Filipino migrant institutions in H.K.—has been successful in the consulate's reduction of the contract processing fee from HK\$ 297.50 to HK\$ 85. For an elaboration on all these accomplishments, see AMCB, *Evaluation Report: Asian Migrants Coordinating Body*, (Hong Kong: APMM, 2003), 11, 15; UNIFIL-HK, *Seeking Strategies on how to Combat Racism and Discrimination among Migrant Workers in Hong Kong* (HK: UNIFIL-HK, 2003): 4–16; and MFMW, "Pagbaba ng Bayad sa Kontrata Ikinagalak ng mga OFWS sa Hong Kong," *New Migrant Focus*, Issue No. 33 (November 2002): 3.

<sup>67</sup> The DHs also extend their formal network by forming solidarity both with fellow foreign and local workers. This solidarity was particularly seen in the campaigns and mobilization against the wage cuts. They worked hand in hand not only with the FDHs but also with LDWs and the H.K. Confederation of Trade Unions. See related story by Michael Wong, "Locals, foreign helpers in joint rally against pay cuts," *Hong Kong Standard* (October 1, 1998), 3.



the Philippines which have a bearing on their well-being. They have also tapped the help of important international institutions like the UNCHR (United Nations Commission for Human Rights), Caritas International, Centre for Women's Global Leadership, and WCC (World Council of Churches).<sup>68</sup> Gillian Youngs<sup>69</sup> further notes the international dimension of the group's presence or visibility, through their public outrage and protests over the execution of Flor Contemplacion (a DH in Singapore), which the group linked directly to their own right's campaigns.

Within and outside these formal networks, DHs build informal networks to resist their racial and class discrimination. This strategy also has to do with the strongest social urge for the Filipino to connect, to become one with people, and have harmonious relationships. In fact, the key Filipino standard for relationality is *kapwa*<sup>70</sup> or "shared being," which may refer to "partnership," "shared orientation," "being a part of," and "being together." This network of support is made up primarily of family members and relatives, who also work as DH in H.K. Those who do not have kin in H.K. build relations with other DHs, especially those who come from the same region or province, belong to the same religious group, or those who share the same place of work. This informal network gives them a sense of security and belonging that is limited or denied to them as migrant (Filipina) DHs. It is not surprising, for example, to see a lot of them clumped together on Sundays just whiling the time away talking, eating, laughing, gambling for fun, or giving each other a manicure or pedicure.<sup>71</sup>

Sisterhood, especially with and for their fellow DHs also serves as a powerful informal network. They have no qualms or inhibitions about talking to or asking for help from other Filipinas (even if they do not know them) because they know some kind of assistance will be given

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<sup>68</sup> MFMW, "Bringing HK FDH concerns to the international community," *New Migrant Focus* Issue # 41 (June 2003): 7. Bragas-Regalado finished six contracts as a DH in H.K. During the 2004 elections she was named as one of the nominees of *Migrante* to sit as the sectoral party's representative in the Philippine Congress in case it gets enough number of votes to win a seat. See Rowena Carranza, "HK Migrant Takes Road to Congress," <<http://www.bulatlat.com/news/4-2/4-2-domestic.html>>, accessed February 9, 2004.

<sup>69</sup> Gillian Youngs, "Breaking patriarchal bonds: Demythologizing the public/private," in *Gender and Global Structuring: Sightings, Sites, and Resistances*, 53.

<sup>70</sup> F. Landa Jocano, *Filipino Value System: A Cultural Definition*, 61–6.

<sup>71</sup> Congregating is an emotional blanket for many as it fortifies and recharges them from the rigors of the week's work. See Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 3.

to them. Jocelyn Manuit experienced this five times. The first time was when she told another Filipina she had met, that she was not given breakfast for three days, and the Filipina gave her some bread. Then when she was unceremoniously terminated and hurriedly brought to the airport on her fourth day of work she looked for Filipinas to ask for help so she could call her aunt. Sure enough she found one who gave her HK\$ 5 so she could make the call. Her aunt came and rescued her. A friend of her aunt then took her under her wings for some time. Finally, Bethune House—a shelter run by Filipinas—took her in.<sup>72</sup> Such is their understanding and concern for each other's living conditions that they often help each other in whatever way they can. Fellow DHs are usually the first ones they run to in times of distress.

Some DHs even go the extra mile by lending money, providing temporary refuge, giving emotional support, and looking for another employer for their terminated 'sisters.'<sup>73</sup> This solidarity becomes a critical link and source, that enables them to survive socially and politically, both on the individual and collective level, and endure the incessant insults and abuse, that have become a normal part of their daily lives, as migrant DHs. They keep each other abreast of potentially oppressive employers and deter other Filipinas from working with such employers. In one case, in a residential building, the DHs' highly developed informal network prevented an employer, whom they considered as a common enemy, from being able to hire a Filipina as a domestic worker.<sup>74</sup> Word gets around so fast among them, especially for those who live in the same neighborhood.

Indeed, their informal network provides for them all kinds of assistance to resist their various difficulties. During Sundays their fellow DHs serve as accomplices to their cash-strapped compatriots who sell the illegal *halo-halo* (a concoction of fruits, milk, sugar, and shaved ice), by providing the vendor a human camouflage every time the Urban Services Guard passes by.<sup>75</sup> When one of them is caught selling

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<sup>72</sup> MFMW, "Food for Thought (Or the lack of it...)," *Migrant Focus Magazine* Vol. 1, Issue 2 (Oct.–Dec. 2000): 18–9.

<sup>73</sup> Their fellow DHs also often run to their rescue without being asked. See, for example, "Domestic Solidarity," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 7 (September 1996): 28.

<sup>74</sup> The "sanctioning" of the employer by the DHs occurred because her previous (Filipina) DH resigned allegedly due to overwork. See Erino Ozeki, "At Arm's Length: The Filipina Domestic Helper-Chinese Employer Relationship in Hong Kong," *International Journal of Japanese Sociology* No. 4 (1995): 45.

<sup>75</sup> FABC-OHD, *Pilgrims of Progress*, 13.

food by the patrol for illegal hawking, the cluster of Filipina customers suddenly sing “Happy Birthday,” and instantly transform the activity into one of many birthday parties celebrated at the square. Those who work in the same building, in the meantime, create “safe meeting places,” like the garbage area and the car park. Since these are places where employers do not “tail” them DHs then utilize garbage-throwing and car-washing time for S.O.S. and socialization, especially those who are strictly monitored.

These strategic places and “meetings” enforce their sisterhood. In fact they themselves say that the gatherings at Chater Road and Statue Square every Sunday gives them back a semblance of sanity. Their interactions with their fellow DHs in the public spaces of H.K. help them to deal with the ruptures and discontinuities in their lives. This is true, especially for those who feel they would probably go crazy or even commit suicide without their Sunday gatherings. Socially and politically, these gatherings have become literally and figuratively symbolic of their resistance. As a matter of fact, it has become their primary act for refusing to be sidelined and wanting to be seen and heard. Aside from visibility, it is also an indirect assertion of autonomy:

The ritual could be seen as more than just a get-together. Their occupation of Statue Square and the ground floor of Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, on their only day off, is highly symbolic and a claim of autonomy over their oppressive working conditions. Sunday gatherings let them be free. . . . It is an expression of power beyond their lowly rank as maid, and gives them a chance to throw away imposed Chinese customs, meet with friends, and talk about home.<sup>76</sup>

Youngs even considers this “successful and dramatic claim to high-profile public space,” as one of those rare “sightings” of gender resistance, especially since it “represents a disruption of public/private divides.”<sup>77</sup>

With the help of their networks DHs fight for their rights. In fact, they are known to be more organized and better informed about their

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<sup>76</sup> Words of Dr. Lisa Law quoted in Julian Lee, “Filipino maids’ act of resistance,” [http://info.anu.edu.au/mac/Newsletters\\_and\\_Journals/ANU\\_Reporter/\\_pdf/vol\\_29\\_no\\_07](http://info.anu.edu.au/mac/Newsletters_and_Journals/ANU_Reporter/_pdf/vol_29_no_07), accessed November 3, 2003. It is also the day when they can attend to their body and sexuality as they get out of their maid’s uniform and wear clothes they like to wear, eat Filipino food, as well as have a haircut, manicure, and pedicure in church compounds, NGO centers, and along the various streets, alleyways, and passageways they occupy at the Central District.

<sup>77</sup> Gillian Youngs, “Breaking patriarchal bonds: Demythologizing the public/private,” 51, 54.

rights.<sup>78</sup> Collectively, they participate in conscientization on and mobilization for issues in the Philippines, e.g. voters' education and registration. In H.K., they are key players in the fight against the series of anti-migrant domestic worker policies.<sup>79</sup> With their leadership they and the other FDHs have staged massive street protests over the reduction of their wages and the charging of levy to their employers. They even brought these issues to the Equal Opportunities Commission—the anti-discriminatory body of H.K.—and the UNCHR (United Nations Commission for Human Rights).

Individually, a notable number of DHs come out in the open to speak about their abuse and fight it out in courts despite the overwhelming odds they are up against. One unnamed DH courageously faced the extreme odds and horrors of filing a rape case against an employer. As it is, a Filipina back in the Philippines already has this fear, if not dread, of approaching police authorities to report and file a rape case: "To approach a police [in the Philippines] with an accusation of rape has for her all the terror of walking unprotected into a crocodile's lair. Police will openly ridicule many women who cry rape. Not rarely their cases are dismissed before they even get the respect of a hearing."<sup>80</sup> All the more so in H.K. where they are discriminated on the basis of their gender, class, race and identity as migrants. Indeed, the said DH had to endure fierce cross-examination, especially during the trial. But she persisted and she won. Her employer was convicted.

DHs also come up with strategies to counter sexual violence using their own sexuality. Most do this by emphasizing their identities as wives, mothers, and daughters. They invoke their marital or family responsibilities and say they are "not available" because they must "sacrifice for the family first" to fend off sexual advances from male employers. Some resort to being *tomboys* or lesbians.<sup>81</sup> In a study, titled

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<sup>78</sup> Shu-Ju Ada Cheng, "Migrant Women Domestic Workers in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan: A Comparative Analysis," in *Asian Women in Migration*, eds., Graziano Battistella and Anthony Paganoni (Quezon City, Phils: SMC, 1996): 119.

<sup>79</sup> See "Filipinos Lead Protest vs Pay Cut," *The Itinerant* (March 1999): 10; and "Hong Kong Filipino Maids Decry Tax Levy," <<http://www.bulatlat.com/news/3-5/3-5-levy.html>>, accessed March 8, 2003.

<sup>80</sup> F.J. Pidgeon, "DH Rape Claim Upheld by HK Court," *TNT Hong Kong*, Vol. 5, No. 7 (July 1999): 14–5.

<sup>81</sup> Most DHs are also more accepting of *tomboys* despite the Catholic Church's injunction against homosexuality. Many *tomboys* are even entrusted with positions of power within the migrant DH community. See Kimberly Chang and L.H. Ling, "Globalization and its intimate other: Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong," 40.

“Romance and Resistance: The Experience of Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong,” Marilen Abesamis concludes that *tomboyism*<sup>82</sup> is a response of the DHs to the relaxation of traditional norms, the absence of a normal context of heterosexual pairing, the opportunities provided by the company of so many women, the relative autonomy created by a higher income and the loneliness and isolation in an unfamiliar culture.<sup>83</sup> Others, especially single DHs, enter into relationships with *tomboys* to fill in the need for pleasure and intimacy, especially in the face of little opportunity to meet Filipino men who will take them seriously. Abesamis also adds that DHs turn to *tomboys* because they (*tomboys*) provide some protection and relief from (the DHs’) intense sexualization. They are “safe” weapons against sexual advances and “sexual problems.” They serve as a “safe outlet”: a means of enjoying the romance and intimacy of a relationship while, at the same time, preserving marital vows and avoiding pregnancy.<sup>84</sup> Many, in the meantime, resort to self-talk to resist the oppressive gendered transition of need for pleasure and intimacy. They tell themselves to “keep busy, keep focused on the work, [that] it’s a matter of controlling, disciplining oneself, pray, ward all temptation, keep close to God and on the right track, go to church [and] unburden there...have fun with [and] call friends, buy something special once in a while, enjoy some wholesome entertainment, remember the children [and] the family, listen to their voice tapes, phone the husband [and] the children.”<sup>85</sup>

Individually, there are also those who try to actively fight their oppression even before it happens,<sup>86</sup> when it is happening, or before it becomes worse. Some use pro-active measures like studying Cantonese or Chinese cooking. Most use reactive measures, which include

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<sup>82</sup> Abesamis calls the practice “tomboyism” (not lesbianism) because the DHs themselves prefer to use the word *tomboy* to refer to themselves or their female partners.

<sup>83</sup> Cited in Ma. Ceres P. Doyo, “Tomboy Love,” in Inter Press Service Asia-Pacific, *Risks and Rewards: Stories from the Philippine Migration Trail* (Bangkok: IPS, 2002): 42–3.

<sup>84</sup> See also L. Eronico, “The Modern Romeos in the Making,” *TF* (March 1994): 10 quoted in Kimberly Chang and L.H. Ling, “Globalization and its intimate other: Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong,” 40.

<sup>85</sup> Cited in Ma. Ceres P. Doyo, “Tomboy Love,” 43.

<sup>86</sup> A case in point is Rosie. Though she was not having problems with her employers she keeps a list of names, addresses, and telephone numbers of government agencies, civic organizations, and people who can help her. She also maintains a network of friends whom she can run to for help. See “Mga Dapat Malaman,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 1, No. 3: 5.

answering back, reasoning out, and refusing to be cheated or manipulated. Some do not sign blank papers or blank receipts even when they are being coerced to do so while others resort to leaving their employer. There are also those who try to circumvent the inherently or potentially oppressive side of their work, by devising more resistant strategies. They refuse to renew a contract even if the employer wishes it; choose day work over live-in work; do part-time work for several employers rather than full time work for a single employer; and look for good or “ideal” employers—employers who allow them greater autonomy, better working conditions, and flexibility. DHs also avert possible nasty experience by not mingling or interacting with the local population unless it is necessary. In the study done by Erino Ozeki<sup>87</sup> he found out that (Filipina) DHs tend to keep to themselves in their activities in the private domain and rarely try to develop any other relationship with the Chinese. As a matter of fact, the overwhelming majority of his interviewees had no Chinese acquaintances beyond their employers and their employers’ immediate and extended family.

Leaving or running away from the oppressive situation is employed too as a political expression of resistance. Albeit not definitive, migration itself could be seen as an act of political resistance, particularly for the young and unmarried who use it to contest gendered responsibilities and the rural life, assert oneself and one’s freedom, enhance personal growth, face new challenges, and experience adventure and independence.<sup>88</sup> Those who are abused in H.K. seek temporary shelter by going to either the government-run Filipino Workers Resource Center, the three Catholic-run shelters under the DPCF, or similar shelters run by the Protestants and various charismatic groups like the JIL (Jesus is Lord) or *El Shaddai*. For legal assistance or anything to

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<sup>87</sup> Erino Ozeki, “Migration Frontier of Filipino Women: Ethnic Relations of Filipina Domestic Helpers with Chinese Employers in Hong Kong,” 682–3.

<sup>88</sup> ECMI-CBCP, *Feminization of Migration* (Manila: ECMI-CBCP, 1997), 12. This argument may also apply for those who return to H.K. Nicole Constable, “At Home but Not At Home,” 388–407 says while economic considerations, family obligations, filial piety, and family relations figure importantly these could mask other more painful, less comfortable, less socially-acceptable, but equally important—and sometimes contradictory reasons, especially since it is considered “not normal” not to want to return home. Based on DHs’ stories Constable points out some DHs return not only because they have gotten used to the H.K. way of life but that it is also a source of independence, new pleasures, and new senses of personhood. She insists, despite the hardships, there are pleasurable aspects to life in H.K. and that H.K. is not necessarily experienced as a total selfless sacrifice.

do with their rights they go to DPCF and the more established groups like AMC, APMMF, and MFMW. For spiritual and personal assistance they also run to the churches and its service institutions. From these institutions DHs learn Cantonese, stress management, and livelihood courses like computer, sewing, etc. to prepare for their return to the Philippines. Others spend their own money to learn fast food and catering business, food processing, flower technology, fruits, vegetables and flower soap carving, and even music lessons, particularly guitar and piano playing. For more personal problems like marital infidelities more and more DHs dare to confront the problem and do not just accept it as their fault due to their absence. Some take the road less traveled by most Filipina wives when it comes to marital infidelity by separating from their husband.<sup>89</sup>

Utilizing the mass media is another political strategy of the DHs in contesting their domestication. A significant number write to newspapers and magazines about vital migrant DH issues. Vicky Casia-Cabantac, for example, writes against the wage cut:

it will be the final blow for migrant workers who are already in a desperate plight. While we sympathise with the economic slump... we feel that it would be great injustice if we were made to pay for the effects of the crisis. Domestic helpers are at the bottom of the Hong Kong labour force wages ladder... The fact is that the Philippine economy is also suffering from an economic depression. We are having to cope with the devaluation of the peso... We have not asked for a wage increase... But it would be wrong to cut our wages.<sup>90</sup>

Even cyberspace is not spared in bringing their numerous struggles to as many DHs and as many individuals, groups, and institutions (whether local or international) as possible. Their various publications, e.g. magazines and press releases, which serve as vehicles for their socio—political struggles are posted on the worldwide web.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> See, for example, MFMW, “Be Strong She Must,” *Migrant Focus Magazine* Vol. 1, Issue 3 (January–March 2001): 18.

<sup>90</sup> Vicky Casia-Cabantac, “Pay cut proposal so unjust,” *SCMP* (September 5, 1998). Other examples include the letters of Pacita Romanillos, “Nothing degrading about being domestic,” and Lorna Dumo, “Setting the Record Straight on Filipinas,” in MFMW, *Filipino Workers: Off to Distant Shores*, MFMW Documentation Series No. 2 (Hong Kong: MFMW, 1983), 61, 73, 91.

<sup>91</sup> UNIFIL, for example, has its own web site <[www.unifil.org.hk](http://www.unifil.org.hk)> where one can access the numerous press releases they have on the various anti-migrant DHs policies of H.K. as well as crucial Philippine issues. The umbrella groups AMCB and CMR, in the meantime, maintain link with and send press releases to highly—established

Others turn to other forms of mass media in what may be seen as less cogent but nevertheless strategic and effective manner. Letters, for instance, which ranked the highest in the Tracer study, help them maintain constant communication with their loved ones. These letters are read on and on and brought to their different group gatherings to share or show off to their friends. Calling is the next most popular means of communication with their families. Those who are more homesick avail of the high-tech video call that enterprising Hong Kong telecommunication companies put up.

Reading newspapers, books, and magazines in view of consciousness-raising also form part of the utilization of mass media to express downgraded but still potent political resistance. They also turn to print media to unburden themselves and ask for help (oftentimes in the form of advice). Cristy, for example, unloads her predicament to *TNT*:

my lady employer always shouts at me and calls me “silly” every time I make a mistake. Most of the time I just cried because I can’t take it. She said she was just trying to teach me a lesson and not hurt me. I tried to adjust to them and tried not to commit mistakes. But the truth is I can’t take it anymore. However, I can’t possibly go home because I still have so many debts to settle. I’m confused. Please help me.<sup>92</sup>

Some, meanwhile, turn to broadcast media. They call radio programs like *Philippines Tonight* and *Helpers’ Hotline*, which serve as some sort of lifelines for DHs who are in dire need of legal advice or service, as these programs offer free counseling and “therapy.” These shows are very popular among DHs, that *Philippines Tonight*—the most successful among these—even spawned a sister program known as *Magan-dang Sunday* (Beautiful Sunday).<sup>93</sup>

Notable resistance against their gendered Filipino socialization can also be evinced from the DHs. This is particularly palpable among single DHs, who question the self-denial, self-sacrifice and/or suffering they have done for their family. Consider the following reflections of an unmarried DH who at 19 years old went to H.K. and spent the

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groups and web sites on migration. See, for instance, AMCB’s press release “Victory in Hong Kong” posted in <<http://www.december18.net/pressreleases21.htm>>, accessed September 23, 2003.

<sup>92</sup> See “Letters,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 1, No. 3: 20.

<sup>93</sup> Another value of these shows to the DHs is their strategy of tapping officers of the Office of the Labor Attache to take turns answering phoned-in questions by listening DHs.



prime of her life there to earn money for her family, send her siblings to school, and build a house:

Madalas naitatanong ko sa aking sarili: Tama ba ang ginawa kong pag-ako ng obligasyon sa aking pamilya na dapat sana'y si Ina at Ama ang siyang gumaganap? Tama bang ibinuhos ko sa kanilang lahat ang lahat-lahat na... mistulang ang aking sarili ang tipirin?... Subalit bakit ganoon sa haba ng panahong nagdaan sa aking pakiramdam, I was lost? Walang fulfillment. Walang achievement.... Masakit mang aminin but I was totally fooled and stupid.... akong naghihirap at nagtitiis ang siyang walang naipon at ang siyang kawawa... tama bang naging mabait akong anak at kapatid sa kanila... Batid kong marami akong kaparis na martir.... panahon na upang umaksiyon naman ako at harapin ang aking sarili.... hindi ba marapat lamang na matuto ding tulongan ng isang tao ang kanyang sarili? (I often ask myself: Did I do the right thing by taking on my parents' obligation? Was it right for me to give all of them everything they wanted, to the point of depriving myself?... But why is it that in all these years I feel that I was lost? No sense of fulfillment. No achievement.... Though it is painful to admit, I was totally fooled and stupid.... I who slaved and sacrificed have no savings and is now pitiful... was it right for me to be a good daughter and sibling for them?... I know there are many like me who are martyrs.... it is time to act for myself... isn't it just right for a person to also help help him/herself?)<sup>94</sup>

Lastly, DHs use creative political strategies to resist. An example of this is singing. In 1994 when much fuss was made by the management of the Dynasty Court about Filipina maids washing their feet after washing their employer's car, the DHs did not only call the management's notice as an act of "upper class inanity." They also have a song to express their disapproval at the seemingly snotty notice. The song, which has the tune of "*Magtanim ay di Biro*"—a popular folk song in the Philippines—has the following lyrics: "Washing car is little fun. Rub and scrub in morning sun. Water flooding down the street. Maid wash car but not her feet."<sup>95</sup> The choice of "*Magtanim ay di Biro*" alone is already significant. It is a song every Filipino knows. Moreover, it is some sort of a "resistance song" against planting rice and, in effect, against agricultural work—a physically strenuous manual work that

<sup>94</sup> Ella Adriano, "Tama Ba O Mali Ang Tumulong," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 10–11 (October–November 1999): 14–5.

<sup>95</sup> The issue became known because the management did not only issue a notice which read as: Washing oil or dirt off a Mercedes is OK, but not off a maid's feet." An article about it even came out in the business section of the November 10, 1994 edition of the *SCMP*. See "Atin-Atin Lamang," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 1, No. 3: 23.

the American colonizers tried to inscribe in Filipinos by peddling the idea that the Philippines is better off as an agricultural country.

### *Religio-Cultural*

Turning to religion is another strategy by the DHs to oppose their oppression. As a study released in 1997 pointed out, “many survive the challenges because of their strong faith and determination.”<sup>96</sup> Chit Valencia points to this when she says “a Filipina is brave and strong, someone who really believes that a merciful God is in His Heaven”<sup>97</sup> and Susan’s letter vividly depicts this:

I am a mother of three children....I had only applied for Hong Kong two weeks before when my husband died suddenly. Halos mawalan ako ng katinuan....*Lakas loob* lang ang pag-aabroad ko. Araw at buwan ang nagdaan, para na akong isang bangka na napapasama sa agos ng ilog but I accept these challenges. *God gives his strength so I can face these trials, no matter how hard they are.* “Ako’y sasa-inyo, huwag kang matakot ako ang inyong Diyos, di ka dapat matakot kaninuman. Palalaka-sin kita at tutulongan at ililigtas...” (Isaiah 41:10) (...I nearly lost my sanity.... Going abroad was just pure guts and courage on my part. Days and months passed and I felt like a boat just going with the flow of the river.... Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will give you strength, I will help you... (Isaiah 41:10).<sup>98</sup>

Like other Filipino women, who learned about God and being religious by praying the rosary and going to church every Sunday from their mothers,<sup>99</sup> DHs live up to the renown Filipino religiosity.<sup>100</sup> They immediately find the nearest church and join a religious group as soon as they can. For like most Filipino women migrants the church is not just the principal site of celebration for *Pinoy* identity and community. It is the DHs’ chief source for dealing with and combating their

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<sup>96</sup> See the ASPBAE study as cited in “The Face of the Filipino Overseas Domestic Worker (ODW) in Hong Kong”, 31. The discussion in this section will primarily be in relation to the Christian religion (particularly Catholicism) not just because the overwhelming majority of the DHs are Christians but also because of lack of available sources on the other religious traditions as practiced by DHs, e.g. Islam.

<sup>97</sup> Chit Rosqueta-Valencia, “I am a Filipina,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 7 (September 1996): 16.

<sup>98</sup> Susan, “A Mother’s Love,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 12 (March 1997): 30–1.

<sup>99</sup> See Joy la Madrid, “Worshipping With Other Christians,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 9 (September 1999): 14.

<sup>100</sup> ECMI-CBCP, *Character Formation Program on Migration*, 69. See also Reynaldo Iletto, “Toward a History from Below,” in *Southeast Asia: Sociology of Developing Societies* (London: Macmillan, 1988): 194.

domestication. It is their refuge in times of crisis and their home when they want to shout for joy. This is confirmed in the Asian Migrant Workers Center' study which revealed that they seek out Christian fellowships and churches for refuge and solace. The study also affirmed that many spend a longer a time in church and related activities for strength and support.<sup>101</sup>

Sunday—the day of freedom and the most favored off-day—will not be complete without them going to Mass or the Sunday service. In H.K. it is common knowledge that, on Sundays, it is the Filipinas who fill up the churches, which have English and *Tagalog* Masses or services. The sight at Saint Joseph's Church on a Sunday is extraordinary. How often do you find a church where crowds fall in line both at the front and back entrance of the church just to get inside? How often do you find a church that has to close its doors to people because it is already filled to capacity? Lastly, how often do you find a church where the overwhelming majority of church attendees are women? This is Saint Joseph's Church on a Sunday. At the Protestant church (Saint John's Cathedral) nearby the sight is almost the same. A handful of men [including the priest] and a sea of women.

For DHs the Mass or Sunday service is a non-negotiable weekly event or ritual. Amidst the confusion and isolation wrought by their marginalization the religious celebration is a powerful means for defying their feelings of negation. For a number of them, it does not even matter where and which church or place of worship they go to. For the mostly Christian and Catholic DHs, the important thing is they see a church building, a cross, their friends, or Filipinas in a religious gathering. That is enough to draw them. The young DH I met on the grounds of (Protestant) Saint John's Cathedral, for example, goes to Mass there even if she is a Catholic. What matters to her is that it is nearer and her friends are there.

Even the lack of actual church buildings is not a problem for them. If there is no church building available for them, the DHs find places, create, and build their own "church" out of parks, gyms, and auditoriums. Eliseo Tellez Jr. says that Filipino NGOs in H.K. even establish and forge links with the DHs by "visiting churches and hanging around church grounds" since the church is where the DHs meet. Even "the

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<sup>101</sup> Asian Migrant Workers Center, *Foreign Domestic Workers in Hong Kong: A Baseline Study*, 67.

physical structure of a church is sometimes enough to assure them that things will improve.”<sup>102</sup>

Indeed, the establishment of literally “Filipina churches” provides what could be the single most important source of continuity in their world that has changed in so many ways. Religion is a basic value among Filipinos and their “church” or the “Filipina DHs’ church” represent the continuation of this most important institution in their lives. The church is both a religious and a social center—the place where they hold meaningful rituals and forge ties with their fellow DHs. Randy David, a noted Filipino sociologist, describes one such experience of this power of religion in the DHs’ life in H.K.:

I recently sat through a Sunday service in one such gym in Hong Kong, and wondered what it was that drew in the participants. It could not have been the long high-pitched and thoroughly uninspiring lecture-sermon of the *pastora*, who certainly did not deserve her audience’s reverential attentiveness. I am more certain now that it was the community, and the bonding and the comfort they derived from each other’s sheer presence that made them come... For when it was time to sing... the gym came alive. A band started to play a rousing tune and costumed dancers with ribbons and tambourines took center court. I thought for a while it was a prelude to a basketball tournament. Three thousand *Pinoys*, almost all of them women, stood up. With eyes closed and arms raised, they swayed their bodies to the rhythm of a prayer. They cheered, they clapped and they shouted God’s name; and *in that anonymous collective drone, they cried out their individual pain* (emphasis mine).<sup>103</sup>

Shu-Ju Ada Cheng, in her comparative study of migrant women domestic workers in H.K., Singapore, and Taiwan, singles out this practice of the DHs (in H.K.), as a factor that explains “their ability to break the isolation and engender (the) visibility.” She specifically extols Church attendance as one that “provides an important opportunity and space for Filipino women to establish their support system and networking, which is essential for breaking the isolation of the household.”<sup>104</sup> Indeed, many admit to a feeling of “homecoming” whenever they join other DHs for the religious service or celebration. Wherever it is held,

<sup>102</sup> Eliseo Tellez Jr., “An Overview of Filipino Migrant Workers in Hong Kong,” in *Serving One Another*, 82.

<sup>103</sup> Randy David. *Public Lives: Essays on Selfhood and Social Solidarity* (Pasig City, Philippines: Anvil, 1998), 50–1.

<sup>104</sup> Shu-Ju Ada Cheng, “Migrant Women Domestic Workers in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan,” 119.

“it’s another home” where they can “forget [the] misgivings induced by being a stranger in another country.”<sup>105</sup> They do not care whether they have to stand instead of sit, kneel on a rough floor, or put up with the noise and the stares of curious passers-by. For them, “it is the spirit in which one attends the Mass that counts.”<sup>106</sup>

In their church or religious institutions DHs look for the religious leaders, e.g. “Pastor” “Father,” or “Sister,” whom Filipino Christians have a high regard for. Not surprisingly, these religious leaders figure significantly in the DHs’ religious strategy for resistance.<sup>107</sup> For one, priests can hear Confession, a sacrament that is very much sought after by DHs. Through this sacrament, DHs expunge themselves of all their guilt—a deeply ingrained and easily imbibed religious feeling among Filipino Christians—<sup>108</sup> which is a result of a Spanish Christian heritage that puts a lot of emphasis on human beings’ weakness, sinfulness, and consequent unworthiness. So many of the Catholic DHs avail of this sacrament that one of the difficulties a Filipino missionary priest identified in his 1998 apostolate report is “giving confession to thousands of *El Shaddai* members.”<sup>109</sup>

For quite a number of them, the time in and for the church does not end with the Mass or religious service and Confession. A lot of them practically spend their one and only day-off in the parish. In Saint Joseph’s Church a lot stay and eat in the church grounds with their friends. Most linger for a chat on the latest stories or news in their friends’ lives or for news about the Philippines. Some peruse or buy books from the makeshift booth of religious items run by the Daughters of Saint Paul. Others return the books they borrowed or borrow

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<sup>105</sup> Chris Yeung, “A building that serves both God and mammon,” *SCMP* (June 27, 1983) in MFMW, *Filipino Workers: Off to Distant Shores*, 66.

<sup>106</sup> Chris Yeung, “A building that serves both God and mammon,” in MFMW, *Filipino Workers: Off to Distant Shores*, 66.

<sup>107</sup> “Pastor”, “Father”, or “Sister” is their “savior” not only for their spiritual needs but even for their political and economic needs. See Appendix X in MFMW, *The Filipino Maids in Hong Kong*, 98.

<sup>108</sup> As “More 20 Best Things About Being Pinoy,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 4 (April 1999): 20–1 trumpets: “What fun would sin be without guilt? Jesus Christ is firmly planted on Philippine soil.”

<sup>109</sup> This may be guilt from leaving and not even saying goodbye properly to their children; guilt from leaving their husbands all their domestic responsibilities; guilt from being an “absentee mother”; guilt from not sending money or enough money; or simply the guilt of falling short of religious obligations like not going to Mass or confession.

books from the “Borrow A Book” program of the parish.<sup>110</sup> But even without the book-lending most of them gravitate to the church primarily as a way of resisting the loneliness and isolation of migration. Hence, the church also becomes a focal point in their life for social reasons. Escoda, in her portrait of the *amah* as Filipina says a DH “starts to feel at home, especially after she has met some congenial fellow Filipinas at the Catholic Church where she attends Mass each Sunday.”<sup>111</sup> To further eradicate their feelings of loneliness and isolation DHs also turn to the church by joining choir groups and/or other religious groups and attend regular prayer meetings or Bible study sessions.

But it is also in and through the church that many DHs who are at the forefront of the struggle for justice get their inspiration and begin their “mission.” Some do pastoral work (every Sunday) by caring for sick people, visiting the needy, and performing other charitable activities, particularly for the local people.<sup>112</sup> Connie Bragas-Regalado witnesses to this church-inspired active struggle towards collective justice:

When I first came to Hong Kong, my first Sunday’s off was at the Church of All Nations in Repulse Bay. An old friend who was already involved with the Filipino Fellowship of the said church fetched me. It all started with Bible Studies and Choir service...I volunteered to be part of the Church Board of Social Ministry. Then the group decided to request a paralegal training, which was conducted by the Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers. Then I learned about the Mission and UNIFIL...their work.<sup>113</sup>

The rest is herstory for Connie. From working as a DH in Singapore and then in H.K. she went on to join UNIFIL in 1994, where she served as one its key people until 2004. Today, UNIFIL is widely-respected

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<sup>110</sup> Borrowing and reading a book is obviously one church-initiated means that DHs take advantage of to negate their problems and resist *pagpuro ng utak* (dulling of the mind because of lack of use).

<sup>111</sup> Isabel Taylor Escoda, *Letters from Hong Kong: Viewing the Colony through Philippine Eyes*, 49–50.

<sup>112</sup> FABC-OHD, *Pilgrims of Progress*, 15. The group Handicapped Net, who go to Caritas Medical Center or Shun Lee State Adult Training Centre for Handicapped twice a month on their off-day to visit the disabled, was even given a certificate of appreciation for assisting in caring for the handicapped and disabled of H.K. See “Sino-Sino sa Hong Kong” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 7 (September 1996): 33.

<sup>113</sup> MFMW, “Talks with Connie Bragas-Regalado,” *Migrant Focus Magazine* Vol. 1, Issue 2 (Oct.–Dec. 2000): 24–5.

within the Filipino migrant community in H.K. and, to some extent, by the local community.

Aside from conducting religious services, churches provide well-organized and extensive means to help the DHs. The Catholics, for example, have the DPCF while the Protestants have the MFMW. These two church-based institutions have a variety of strategic activities designed to resist the DHs' domestication. They organize the DHs. They have hotlines and shelters for DHs in distress. They help in pursuing cases, give counseling and religious formation programs, e.g. theology classes, and offer livelihood courses, which a lot of DHs avail of, especially those programs designed for reintegration. Some churches set up special joint savings accounts in which DHs may place a portion of their earnings for later withdrawal to pay for education or travel expenses or just to make sure the DHs will be able to save even just a little for themselves.

DHs also engage in other religious activities that help them resist. These include religious talks or seminars like catechism, retreats and recollections, and lay leadership training. Prayer also plays a major role in contesting their difficulties. This resolute propensity for praying or calling on God is confirmed in the Tracer study, which attributes it to the deep religious nature of Filipinos.<sup>114</sup> This deep capacity for faith also accounts for the deeper religious strategy namely drawing hope and strength from God. To be sure, this is not the passive unquestioning kind of faith. Moreover, one can see or sense in many narratives, letters, and testimonies of the DHs a matching personal hope and strength. It is not complete dependence as can be evinced in an oft-repeated quote of theirs, i.e., "*Nasa Diyos ang awa, nasa tao and gawa*" (Do your best and God will do the rest). Melina speaks of this when she says: "I like the word "empowerment". That is what happens when a woman overcomes her fear and doubts of the unknown and declares her inner strength. Some of my friends used to ask: "How did you manage?" I told them it is the Lord who is always my secret source of hope and strength."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Noel Vasquez et al., *Tracer Study on Filipina Domestic Helpers Abroad*, 40, 54, 75-6.

<sup>115</sup> Melina P. Lagarbe, "The Healing of Sorrows," *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 3, No. 1 (April 1997): 10.

One can evince within Melina's avowals one of the DHs' most popular religio-cultural strategy of resistance which is that of *bahala na*. As discussed earlier *bahala na* can be negative and could serve as a means for submission. But, as mentioned also in the section on submission, *bahala na* has a positive dimension. In fact, the Tracer study reveals *bahala na* ranked first in the question on the supposedly positive attitude towards work of the respondents.<sup>116</sup> This is not surprising since *bahala na* is often mainly presented as a harmless, if not positive Filipino trait. Even *TNT*—a popular magazine among the DHs—lists it as one of the 20 best things about being *Pinoy*. But it is actually its religious dimension that makes *bahala na* more acceptable and prevalent among Filipinos like the DHs. One interpretation has it that *bahala na* is the shortened version of *ipa-Bathala na*. *Bathala* is the indigenous word for God. Hence, *ipa-Bathala na* means to “leave it all up to God” or just “trust in God.” *Bahala na* is primarily a worldview and a general attitude that embodies the Filipino way of life and epitomizes the Filipino attitude toward life as such and toward God's rules within life.<sup>117</sup> It is about determination in the midst of uncertainty and the readiness to take risks with *lakas ng loob* (courage).<sup>118</sup> It is, ultimately, about hopeful risk-taking faith.

One interesting occurrence among the DHs in Hong Kong is the emergence of the image of God as a foreigner or God as a host. This is not a common God image in the Philippines but it is one that DHs are discovering and embracing in order to resist their domestication as migrant (Filipina) DHs. They resort to imaging God as a foreigner or a God of foreigners/strangers and have the view that they and everyone else are God's guests.<sup>119</sup>

Without doubt DHs' recourse to Christian-related means and resources are strongly facilitated by the desire to fight the difficulties, especially the injustices, born out of their status as Filipino women migrant domestic workers. But when their exposure to the multiple religious traditions in H.K. seeps in and the stifling Filipino Christian

<sup>116</sup> Noel Vasquez et al., *Tracer Study on Filipina Domestic Helpers Abroad*, 37.

<sup>117</sup> Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 85.

<sup>118</sup> Virginia Fabella et al., “Dugo-Duga ng Buhay: A Philippine Experience in Spirituality,” 226.

<sup>119</sup> See, for example, Racquel Morales “Sa Aking Pag-iisa,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 4, No. 2 (July 1998): 33–4.



traditions and norms weigh heavily on them, DHs take another religious means, that is, religious conversion. Most conversions occur within denominations or within the same religious tradition. Moreover, the change is often from the established Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations to the charismatic groups. Across religious traditions a significant number of conversions to Islam is happening. Sithi Hawwa in “Religious Conversion of Filipina Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong”<sup>120</sup> says DHs make up 70% of the 60–70 annual average of conversion to Islam in H.K. This is significant considering the fact that Muslims and Christians in the Philippines have a deep-seated historical conflict. In any case, Hawwa says DHs are primarily brought and converted to Islam through their Pakistani boyfriends and Sr. Madiha—a DH convert to Islam—whose similar background and good relationship with her fellow DHs have led to the conversion of 300 (DHs) in just a matter of 5–6 years.

Apparently their formation of social networks to resist their discrimination is the primary means by which they come into close contact with the Pakistani men. A lot of these Pakistani men become their boyfriends and even husbands, which creates good conditions for possible conversion. Aside from romantic involvement and intermarriage with the Pakistani men, factors such as prior contact with Muslims (like Sr. Madiha), previous work experience in the Middle East, influence from converted family members, employers or co-workers, dissatisfaction with their former religion, mere curiosity, or a desire for enlightenment account, as well, for their conversion. It is also interesting to note that most conversions are fueled by a desire for “greater autonomy and liberation”, especially from stifling marriage-related policies of Christian Philippines like the ban on divorce and abortion and the severe restrictions on birth control methods.

Obviously DHs feel that Christianity adds to their oppression and to halt this they choose religious conversion. This becomes an easier option in view of the distance (from conservative Filipino Christianity) and in the face of their immersion to the more liberal views, practices, and other religious traditions in H.K. But then a lot of converts also revert back to their religion when Islam becomes repressive or less

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<sup>120</sup> Sithi Hawwa, “Religious Conversion of Filipina Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong,” *ISIM Newsletter* 4 (99): 10 also attributes the facilitation of the conversion to the “intensity of religious faith of Filipino women and their prior tendency to shift among different denominations within Christianity.”

able to contribute to the mitigation of their oppression. Hawwa attributes the reversion to the “inability of Mosque to fund sisters in terms of financial crises, the absence of a physical space for converts with terminated contracts, the unwillingness of fellow Muslims to employ them, and the dissatisfactory behavior of Muslim men.”<sup>121</sup>

### *Economic*

DHs also devise various economic strategies to resist their domestication. Their migration in itself, as DHs themselves say, is a means for mitigating their economic oppression. Saving money is also one of these strategies. They join *paluwagan* groups—an informal savings group—where they contribute money monthly and then receive a considerable sum of money at one point. Although *paluwagan* can be short-term, it forces them to save in a more stable way because the money is not in their hands until it is their turn to receive it. For more reliable and long-term savings, they join highly organized savings and reintegration groups like the *Forum of Filipino Reintegration and Savings Group*. Through their savings, a few significantly reduce their economic oppression by bringing social mobility to their family.<sup>122</sup> Some save more than enough to put up a small business. For these DHs turned self-employed women some form of liberation happens as they shift from employee to employers, economic dependence to some form of financial independence, and from a disdained job to a decent job.<sup>123</sup>

Chain migration,<sup>124</sup> or recruiting their female family members and relatives to also work as a DH in H.K.,<sup>125</sup> is another means employed

<sup>121</sup> Sithi Hawwa, “Religious Conversion of Filipina Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong,” 10.

<sup>122</sup> After working for six years Angela was able to buy her family farm lands and a second house. She even brought her parents to H.K. for a tour. Elenita, on the other hand, accomplished what many DHs dream of, i.e., education (for all her nine children). She now has a civil engineer, a midwife, a nurse, and a chemical engineer. Jo-Ann Maglipon, *The Filipina Migrant: Braving the Exile*, 10–1.

<sup>123</sup> See Aida’s case in Mai Dizon Añonuevo, “Migrant Returnees, Return Migration, and Reintegration,” in *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration*, 142.

<sup>124</sup> A study by the *Balibayani* Foundation found out that hundreds of those working in Rome come from one and the same village in the Philippines. One even has up to seventy relatives working in Rome. The same study says Pangasinan, a northern province, has about 10,000 women working in H.K. Mai Dizon Añonuevo, “Revisiting Migrant Women’s Lives: Stories of Struggles, Failures and Successes,” 17–29.

<sup>125</sup> Families or clans in chain migration, commonly, referred to as *iisang pisa* (one hatched brood), is very common among DHs. Family and friends provide the most

by DHs to assail their economic burden. Aside from the psycho-social benefits of having a relative in a foreign land, another family member in H.K. would mean someone sharing the financial responsibility. It would mean additional remittance and, consequently, greater chances for the family's financial stability and upward mobility. And, indeed, in a few cases this has brought improved living conditions to families, clans, and, to a certain extent, to their own communities.<sup>126</sup> Those who are more ingenious enterprising and daring come up with various ways to save or earn money. Some of the few who live outside their employer's home look for bed spacers to share flat rent. Others engage in business that target *Pinoys* like catering or putting up a store that sells or rents *Tagalog* romance novels and/or other Filipino goods. Some set up informal businesses during Sundays and earn by giving a haircut, manicure, or pedicure along the street or in the church grounds.<sup>127</sup>

Others, meanwhile, try to find a way to resist the hardships of economics by learning other skills that can be used to generate income, especially when they are back in the Philippines. Encouraged by church-based groups and NGOs, who offer livelihood learning projects, this strategy is very much employed by those who are about to go home. The DPCF and Caritas, for example, offer a number of these livelihood courses, which include computer classes, soap-carving, bridal bouquet making, tailoring, dressmaking, hair culture, meat processing, and baking. Layosa,<sup>128</sup> a former DH-turned editor of the successful transnational OFW magazine *Tinig Filipino*, got the skills needed for the job by studying journalism via correspondence course while working as a DH.

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extensive source for information for job openings as DHs. DHs themselves "recruit" via direct or name hires. They recommend their family member or relative to prospective employers who want to do away with the recruitment fee and the hassles that come with going through an employment agency. Because of this, a family can even have most of its women working as DHs in H.K. See, for example, Noel Vasquez et al., *Tracer Study of Filipino Women Domestic Helpers Abroad*, 54.

<sup>126</sup> See, for example, Maruja Asis, "Women Migrants Who Make A Difference," *Asian Migrant* Vol. 15, Nos. 1–2 (Jan.–June 2002): 35–40.

<sup>127</sup> See Carolyn French, *Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong: A Preliminary Survey*, 25; and FABC-OHD, *Pilgrims of Progress??: A Primer on Filipino Migrant Workers in Asia*, 13–4.

<sup>128</sup> For a more detailed version of her story, see Linda R. Layosa, "Anywhere, Everywhere: The DH's Saga," in *From America to Africa: Voices of Filipino Women Overseas*, ed., Lorna Kalaw Tirol (Makati City, Phils.: FAI Resource Management Inc., 2000): 150–64.

### *Accommodation*

Between submitting to or resisting the oppression, DHs devise strategies that do not fall simply, neatly, and clearly into the submission and resistance category. These are the in-between strategies or strategies that neither simply resist the oppression nor accept it. These are what Constable describes as strategies that “both contest and embrace power structures”<sup>129</sup>—strategies that scalingly resist and/but at the same time calculatingly submit. In other words, they accommodate the oppression. Couched or veiled in non-threatening methods, these strategies are the ways that DHs feel they can do best, given their complex and precarious circumstances. These fall into what Mary Romero and Leslie Salzinger probably refer to as “unaggressive aggressiveness,”<sup>130</sup> or what Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo designates as “negotiate.”<sup>131</sup> These usually accommodate the oppression by taking a stance of cold obedience on the surface and subtle defiance underneath. These often take the form of passive resistance or defiant submission to a facet of their domestication without necessarily changing it radically.

### *Cultural*

In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* James Scott draws attention to a politics of disguise and anonymity among subordinate groups that is partly sanitized, ambiguous, and coded. He says this is often expressed in rumors, gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, rituals, codes, and

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<sup>129</sup> Nicole Constable acknowledges that there is a small number of studies on domestic work that have pursued the issue of accommodation. I, however, share such theorizing of the gap. I believe one cannot just adroitly or smoothly classify all the DHs’ strategies for dealing with domestication into either active resistance or resistance *per se* and passive compliance or clear-cut submission. There is a problematic dichotomy between the two that accommodation, as a concept, captures and expresses. See, for example, Shelee Coleen, “‘Just a Little Respect’: West Indian Domestic Workers in New York City in *Muchachas No More: Household Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean*, eds., Elsa M. Chaney and Maria Garcia Castro (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989): 171–94 as cited in Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 13.

<sup>130</sup> See Leslie Salzinger, “A Maid by Any Other Name: The Transformation of ‘Dirty Work’ by Central American Immigrants,” in *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*, eds., Michael Buraway et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991): 139–60; and Mary Romero, *Maid in the U.S.A.* (New York: Routledge, 1992) as quoted in Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 9.

<sup>131</sup> Interestingly, although she does not discuss them in detail, Hondagneu-Sotelo has parallel categories. She uses the words “comply”, “resist” and “negotiate.” See Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

euphemisms that usually come from folk culture.<sup>132</sup> Similarly, most DHs draw upon Filipino culture, particularly folk culture, to accommodate their oppression. Laughter or laughing is one of these. Filipinos are known for their cheerfulness and unbridled optimism.<sup>133</sup> The DHs, for instance, tolerate their oppressive situation by just resorting to finding and/or seeing the funny side of it or making light of it in order to bear it or make it more bearable. They make a joke even out of difficult, problematic, or tricky situations and try to be happy, albeit momentarily. But *tawanan mo ang iyong problema* (Laugh at your problems)—a common Filipino dictum for coping/defense mechanisms against life's adversities—can tend to be escapist.<sup>134</sup>

On the other hand laughter is upheld by folk wisdom as a means of resistance. Filipina feminist Rina Jimenez-David, for example, points to it as a strategy of resistance. She says this obstinate cheerfulness serves as a personal bulwark against the vicissitudes of loneliness and alienation.<sup>135</sup> With regard to the DHs Jimenez-David says

Once a week, on Sundays, Hong Kong becomes a different city. Thousands of Filipina women throng into the central business district, around Statue Square, to picnic, dance, sing, gossip, and laugh. They snuggle in the shade under the HSBC building, a Hong Kong landmark, and spill out into the parks and streets. They hug. They chatter. They smile. Humanity could stage no greater display of happiness.<sup>136</sup>

There are a number of ways in which the DHs employ laughter to accommodate their domestication, the most popular of which is

<sup>132</sup> James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 19.

<sup>133</sup> University of the Philippines professor Felipe de Leon says this has a lot to do with the unique ethnic and historical cocktail that is Philippine culture: Malay roots (warm, sensual, mystical) mixed with the Catholicism and *fiesta* spirit of the former Spanish colonizers, to which is added a dash of western flavor from the islands' days as an American colony. Quoted in Rina Jimenez-David, "Why Filipinos are happy," <[http://www.inq7.net/archive/2002-p/opi/2002/jan/11/opi\\_rj david-1-p.htm](http://www.inq7.net/archive/2002-p/opi/2002/jan/11/opi_rj david-1-p.htm)>, accessed October 31, 2003.

<sup>134</sup> Noting the photographs of DHs playing the violin, competing in a singing contest, and congregating in one of H.K.'s plazas, in the September 4, 2005 issue (on HAPPY FILIPINOS) by the Chinese magazine *Yazhou Zhoukan* (Asiaweek) Filipino sociologist Michael Tan says Filipino happiness is really part of Filipino coping mechanisms rather than being a product of a good life. See Michael Tan, "Happy Filipinos," [http://news.inq7.net/opinion/index.php?index=2&story\\_id=49383](http://news.inq7.net/opinion/index.php?index=2&story_id=49383), accessed September 7, 2005.

<sup>135</sup> Rina Jimenez-David, "Why Filipinos are happy," <[http://www.inq7.net/archive/2002-p/opi/2002/jan/11/opi\\_rj david-1-p.htm](http://www.inq7.net/archive/2002-p/opi/2002/jan/11/opi_rj david-1-p.htm)>, accessed October 31, 2003.

<sup>136</sup> Rina Jimenez-David, "Happiness is power," <[http://www.archive.inq7.net/archive/2002-p/opi/2002/jan/10/opi\\_rj david-1-p.htm](http://www.archive.inq7.net/archive/2002-p/opi/2002/jan/10/opi_rj david-1-p.htm)>, accessed September 31, 2003.

through jokes. Like most Filipinos who love a good joke DHs have many jokes that poke fun not only at their condition but also (and mostly) at their employers. As mentioned in Chapter 1 their jokes about themselves even have a caricature in the person of “Maria the stupid DH.” To many DHs jokes are their way of getting back at their employers in a covert manner. Most jokes, especially chicken and cooking jokes, make fun of the employer’s English. An example is that of Maria’s employers going out for dinner and the conversation goes like this:

Sir (in broken English): Maria, come—eat outside.

Maria: Sir, you mean you’re going out for dinner?

Sir: Yes, come...you like?

Maria: Thank you, sir. But I prefer to eat here.

Sir: All right. Just cook yourself!<sup>137</sup>

Jokes are a common strategy for them to feel that the capitulation is not complete. First, these discursive and creative communicative strategies help them mitigate their oppressive interactions with their employers, who are pervasively controlling. Second, jokes allow them to indirectly attack the local community, which could be openly condescending of the DHs’ presence. Lastly, jokes make the DHs feel that they are smarter and that they have come so far in learning to adjust to the difficulties arising from their situation. As such jokes that make fun of themselves and their usual problems also abound. One popular joke concerns that of a husband about to leave his wife for another woman:

Husband: Goodbye, mother of five!

Wife: Goodbye, father of two!<sup>138</sup>

Other jokes serve as an indirect critique to a source of their oppression. One pokes fun at the coercive side of the “member of the family” strategy of employers:

A Filipina domestic helper arrives in Hong Kong at the home of her new employer. The employer says to her, “We want to treat you as a member of the family.” The domestic helper is very happy to hear this.

<sup>137</sup> Vicky, “Cook Yourself,” *Tinig Filipino* (July 1992): 48 quoted in Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 177–8.

<sup>138</sup> Erlinda Layosa and Laura Luminarias, *Sapang Pagyuko Kawayan: A Collection of Jokes from Filipino Overseas Workers* (Hong Kong: Asia Pacific, 1992) quoted in Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 175.

On Sunday, the helper's day-off, her employer says to her, "You must work before you leave the house on Sundays because you are a member of the family." And the employers adds, "And you must come home in time to cook dinner for the family." "But sir, ma'am I would like to eat with my friends today because it is my day-off," says the helper. "But you are a member of the family," says her employer, "and because you are a member of the family, you must eat with us."<sup>139</sup>

Language manipulation is another means by which DHs accommodate their oppression in a humorous manner. For example, they jokingly substitute the Tagalog word *unggoy*, which means "monkey," for the Cantonese *m'goi*, which can be translated as "please," "thank you," or 'excuse me,'<sup>140</sup> in different situations and places, where they are also usually victimized. These include the restaurants where they may call the Chinese waiter saying, "*Unggoy, unggoy!*" The waiter will most probably understand this as a polite but poorly pronounced attempt to get his attention by saying "Excuse me" or "Please." Having made the waiter respond to the epithet "monkey" DHs, meanwhile, feel that they have outsmarted him hence break into smiles or burst into laughter. Similarly, a group of DHs who want to inch their way to the front of the line at the train station might blurt out "*Unggoy! Unggoy!*" consequently making a laughingstock out of everyone in the crowd, especially when people make way for them, thinking that the DHs are politely saying "Excuse me." DHs make use of this prank, as well, on their employer when they thank him/her or excuse themselves for a misdemeanor or slight offense. These different ways or instances in which language is humorously manipulated<sup>141</sup> make the DHs feel that they have somehow gotten even for the many times Chinese people insult or mock them in Cantonese without them (DHs) having a clue on what it is all about. In this way, DHs are able to claim or achieve symbolic superiority even if it is just for a moment.

Inasmuch as it is utilized to resist, singing is also a typical Filipino trait that DHs use to accommodate. Filipinos love to sing. Whether one

<sup>139</sup> Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 104–5.

<sup>140</sup> Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 176.

<sup>141</sup> The usage of folk speech to refer to their employer also utilizes language as a strategy of accommodation. Degrading words like *bruha* (witch) or pejorative words like *kulasa* are some of these. Using such terms like *nanay* (mother) for the female employer or *tatay* (father) for the male employer falls under this too. These terms assuage the domestication since they breach the hierarchical employee-servant relations. Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 176.

carries the tune well or not does not matter. This penchant for singing can be seen in the many *karaoke* and *videoke* bars in the Philippines, the numerous singing contests (which DHs also engage in) and social gatherings that are not complete without some singing. Even public protests, whether in H.K. or the Philippines, are peppered with singers as well as dancers to entertain the crowd.<sup>142</sup> From the workroom to the kitchen and bathroom Filipinos give vent to their musical inclinations without inhibitions. In the same manner, a lot of DHs take refuge in singing. One DH claims “singing makes work lighter, less stressful.” She also reasons out that “humming songs brightens our day, making our workload seem lighter and more bearable, easing our weariness and homesickness.”<sup>143</sup> They sing all sorts of songs, from the latest pop hits to Christmas carols and, most especially, religious songs to be “in touch with God,” “uplift the soul,” and allow them to entrust their sorrow and burdens to God. But then again this is also escapist entertainment. It does not totally take away the burdens of domestic work nor makes the problems disappear. Hence, they resist but only for a few moments.

Cultural values like *hiya* (shame/losing face) and *tiis* (endurance) also help the DHs accommodate.<sup>144</sup> For its part, *hiya*<sup>145</sup> and its close link with *karangalan* (dignity) greatly helps in making first-timers remain (even illegally) in H.K., although they have been duped or have ended up in an exploitative situation. Filipinos’ strong tendency to avoid “losing face” which come with experiencing something embarrassing or something that transgresses important Filipino social values and norms make the DHs just stay in the situation rather than face the ridicule or censure of their families, friends, and communities. This feeling of *napahiya* (shamed) because they were duped by recruiters or because things did not work out in H.K., is exacerbated by *tiis* or endurance—a Filipino value that advocates surviving, tolerating, bearing with and remaining in a situation no matter how oppressive it may be. *Nandiyan na iyan* (It is already there) Filipinos would often say as

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<sup>142</sup> See, for example, Jerome Aning, “OFWs in HK dance vs Charter change,” <<http://services.inquirer.net>> accessed December 29, 2008.

<sup>143</sup> Chris M. “Sing Lah, Sing Lah...Don’t Shy!” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 1, No. 3: 17–8.

<sup>144</sup> Elsa Katarungan, “Most Maids Keep Quiet,” *SCMP* (May 14, 1993) quoted in Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 13.

<sup>145</sup> See Thelma Kinatanar, ed., *U.P. Cultural Dictionary for Filipinos* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1996), 649.



they grudgingly accept their situation and resolve or try hard to make things work no matter what the cost. Of course, this is partly based on the belief that to be a survivor is tantamount to being a victor or that success always comes with hardships. “No pain, no gain” as a Filipino colloquial saying goes. Hence, DHs often succumb to *tiis* thinking like most Filipinos that the problems and suffering are a part of life<sup>146</sup> and one just has to endure them because they will pass anyway. DHs all the more turn to this cultural orientation of *tiis* as a means of dealing with their domestication when they see *pagtitiis* (enduring) as a sacrifice or something they do for a good cause. As Joyce G. says:

*Di bale na tayong maghirap huwag lamang ang ating mga anak; makatapos lamang ang aking kapatid; maipagamot ko lamang si Inay; makatulong man lamang kay Itay;... Sadyang maka-martir na mga dahilan at pangarap.* (It does not matter if we suffer as long as our children do not; as long as our siblings finish their studies; as long as Mother will be cured from her illness; as long as I can help Father... Truly, these are martyrs' reasons and dreams).<sup>147</sup>

*Hiya* and *tiis* also partly account for silence—another strategy of accommodation. This is evident in those who do not speak about their abuse nor bring it to court partly because they do not want to wash dirty linen in public. These DHs, who recourse to silence, then take refuge in *tiis* so much so that the silence, that was initially born out of avoidance of humiliation, is then exacerbated by a silence that is born out of forced resignation. Those who do not join rallies or migrant organizations, especially the militant types, because they do not like to increase the abuse on them also exhibit this accommodative silence. This culture of silence<sup>148</sup> is fueled by the classic Filipino defeatist statement: “*Wala ring mangyayari*” (Nothing is going to come out of it). Some, like those who were skeptical of the protest movements for wage increase, even reason that if the wage was to increase, the

<sup>146</sup> See “Nobody’s Perfect,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 1, No. 3: 20.

<sup>147</sup> Joyce Gallego, “Filipino Survival Instinct... ‘Can or Cannot,’” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1996): 16–7.

<sup>148</sup> Together with or underneath the silence, DHs also accommodate by resorting to another non-confrontational approach namely crying. In fact, it is the usual means as it is the most available and least radical form of scaled resistance for them. In the solitude of their room, in the private space of the bathroom, and even in the public spaces of H.K. they give in and release their pent-up emotions of humiliation, betrayal, anger, and frustration. But crying is only a form of release. It soothes the pain but does not take it away. Neither does it wash away the problems.

Chinese employers will not be able to afford them and that may mean termination for them. These DHs, who are simply glad to have a job and do not want complications, are even critical of the highly political presence of their fellow DHs and see it as detrimental to their individual and collective position as migrant domestic workers in H.K.

### *Religious*

Turning to religion for reassurance is another common means of accommodation for the DHs. They cultivate at best a spirituality of neutrality and at worst an escapist spirituality by drawing from or using their faith in a way that lulls them into a false sense of security. They do not make the link between religion and political action amidst injustice and oppression.<sup>149</sup> They nurture a “deep faith” and use it to think or imagine that nothing bad will happen to them even in the most threatening circumstances<sup>150</sup> without them necessarily doing something to avert it. At the height of the SARS epidemic, which badly hit H.K., Fr. Dwight de la Torre laments how some “refuse[d] to use masks and disapprove[d] of what the churches are (currently) doing as demonstrating lack of faith” and even arguing “if one has faith, one will not get sick.” As Fr. Dwight asks: Is this faith or superstition?<sup>151</sup>

DHs also accommodate through religion by doing all kinds of novenas and/or engaging in numerous devotions, particularly to the Virgin Mother.<sup>152</sup> But the practices of this devotional faith are the very practices of the (Spanish) friar-educated Filipino women who “mumble prayers knows nothing by heart but *awits* (songs), novenas, and alleged miracles, and whose amusement consists in playing *panguinge* and in frequent confession of the same sins.”<sup>153</sup> These descriptions are,

<sup>149</sup> Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, xi–xii.

<sup>150</sup> Randy David, “Public Lives: Essays on Selfhood and Social Solidarity,” 51.

<sup>151</sup> Dwight de la Torre, “Of SARS and the Christian Faith,” *New Migrant Focus* Issue # 39 (May 2003): 5.

<sup>152</sup> This is a practice inculcated during the Spanish colonization. Mary John Mananzan, “The Filipino Women: Before and After the Spanish Conquest of the Philippines,”<sup>32</sup> asserts the cult of the Virgin Mary was one way by which the Spaniards ensured the young Filipina’s virtue. Dionisio M. Miranda, “The Filipino Catholics and Christian Moral Life,” *Docete* Vol. XXV No. 110 (July–September 2002): 7 contends this Marian cult remains ardent and widespread that many think the Filipino is closer to the Mother than to the Son.

<sup>153</sup> Words of Jose Rizal in Carlos Quirino, *The Great Malayan* (Manila: Philippine Foundation Co., n.d.), 146 quoted in Mary John Mananzan, “The Filipino Women: Before and After the Spanish Conquest of the Philippines,” 33–4.

indeed, not much different from most DHs which, in more ways than one, fit Dionisio Miranda's portrayal of the spirituality of the contemporary Filipina, particularly the migrants: "The Filipino woman maintains her closeness from the intrusions of evil by surrounding herself with blessed objects and trinkets that some claim to be vestiges of her *anting-anting* (amulet) past. Thus she finds the assurance of protection in the touch of the rosary in her pocket, the feel of the scapular around her neck or of an *El Shaddai* handkerchief on her head."<sup>154</sup> Miranda claims it is this community of Filipinos who carry medals and wear scapulars, believe in healing oils oozing from images who as nurses, chambermaids, waiters, and seamen, fill up on Sundays the otherwise empty churches of Europe and America.

In a way, this scenario is replicated in H.K. by the DHs. This intimate and non-resistant faith is palpable, especially in charismatic communities, whose gatherings are replete with healing sessions or healing masses.<sup>155</sup> It is also there in the different activities of the various religious groups—named after saints that are known to be miraculous or strongly associated with images of tenderness and protection—which are heavily devotional in nature.<sup>156</sup> These may answer their need for consolation and comfort. But, in the end, the oppression remains. All they get is temporary gains.

Lastly, DHs accommodate religiously by creating an ethic of service and retrenching into a romanticized conservatism of God and religious values. They redefine service in terms of devotion to God. They regularly focus social activities around religious organizations that impose extensive rules and stress religio-cultural activities, e.g. singing church hymns to dispel Filipina association with prostitution. While these offer a refuge from the transnational ideology of sexualized, racialized service they become controlling and oppressive, dispossessing DHs of

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<sup>154</sup> Dionisio M. Miranda, "The Filipino Catholics and Christian Moral Life," 5. Incidentally, the *El Shaddai* group is the biggest charismatic group among Filipina Catholics in H.K. Among the Protestants, the *Jesus is Lord Movement* is also a religious force to reckon with.

<sup>155</sup> One can gather this as much from Fr. Tom Gonzales' 1998 Apostolate Report. He has a separate ministry to charismatic groups where "charismatic" masses and "healing" are explicitly stated.

<sup>156</sup> Every Friday, for example, the Sacred Heart Group of The Loved Flock Catholic Charismatic Renewal Ministries engages in the Adoration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Holy Rosary, Novena, and Divine Mercy Prayer.

autonomy and independence and putting them in-between: tradition or modernity, virtue of independence, sainthood or sin.<sup>157</sup>

*Political-Economic*

DHs also use political-economic means to accommodate. One way is through their migration. This is true especially for those who use migration to escape problems at home like strained family relations with siblings and parents or when migration becomes a temporary release from gender-related problems like uncaring, irresponsible, and violent husbands.<sup>158</sup> DHs also accommodate by negotiating their identities. They find ways and means to construct a separate or distinct social identity as a strategy or defense mechanism against social exclusion. They try to project and create an image that they are more than just DHs. One way in which they do this is through what Rhacel Salazar Parreñas says as “basing their identities on the increase in their class status in the country of origin” or “stressing the greater privilege that they have in relation to poorer women in the Philippines.”<sup>159</sup> Since they cannot do much about their marginal status in H.K. they mitigate their downward class mobility by “stressing their higher social and class status in the Philippines.” Aside from projecting a “luxurious” life through fancy pictures, DHs do this by also “showing-off” their material acquisitions and achievement when they go home. Moreover, they hire their very own domestic worker(s) and perceive themselves as rightful beneficiaries of servitude<sup>160</sup> in the Philippines when they go home for vacation or when they go home for good. Back in H.K., they also mollify, to a certain extent, their class-based oppression by taking pride in being the “preferred domestic” or “favorite DH”.

Another common form of identity negotiation is through beauty (and brain) contests, where they take pains to mention their above

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<sup>157</sup> Kimberly Chang and L.H. Ling, “Globalization and its intimate other,” 38–40.

<sup>158</sup> Mai-Dizon Añonuevo, “Revisiting Migrant Women’s Lives: Stories of Struggles, Failures, and Successes,” in *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration*, 19.

<sup>159</sup> Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, “Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor,” 574–5.

<sup>160</sup> Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, “Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor,” 575.

average academic background and dress in elegant gowns.<sup>161</sup> Jo-Ann Maglipon eloquently describes the important role these contests play:

For Filipinas, this is always a major event. Donning their shimmering black cocktail dresses, their hair done at the beauty parlor, faces and nails fully pampered, they are transformed. Suddenly no longer the mousey maids who keep their eyes cast politely downward when addressed by masters whose English is less perfect than theirs, they go back to being secretaries and campus queens and social workers and music teachers they were before they came. For one night at least they twirl in their bouffant clothes and declare their lives theirs.<sup>162</sup>

Aside from beauty contests DHs also negotiate their identities through talent contests, e.g. singing, dancing, and declaiming “to promote the wholesome, friendly, and brainy image of Filipinas to the community.”<sup>163</sup> They hold gatherings, celebrations, and parties in posh hotels, and are dressed in flashy gowns, complete with stilettos, make-up, and the works. On Sundays, too, most of them dress in ways that make them not look “like a maid.” Amidst the summer heat many have pictures taken wearing rented fashionable hats and chic clothes in front of fountains and imposing buildings.<sup>164</sup> Inasmuch as they can, they try to create and instill in the H.K. public that they are not “just” or not “only” a maid.

Similarly, DHs make their families and communities in the Philippines think all is well and/or life is great as a maid in H.K. This censoring, embellishing, and camouflaging of the hardships of a DH’s life in H.K. also have to do with coping with the generally low regard for domestic work in the Philippines. And yet, like their sanitized letters and pictures, these deceptive portrayals of their life in H.K. do not qualitatively respond to their domestication. These do not really make the exploitation go away. These are just stop-gap solutions that address the effects but not the cause of the problem. If any, they intensify the economic pressure on them to keep on sending (more) money since they are doing very well in H.K.

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<sup>161</sup> MFMW, *Filipino Workers: Off to Distant Shores*, 65 describes one such contest specifically mentioning Juliet Oligario—a DH who graduated with honors at the esteemed University of the Philippines.

<sup>162</sup> Jo-Ann Maglipon, *The Filipina Migrant: Braving the Exile*, 20.

<sup>163</sup> MFMW, *Filipino Workers: Off to Distant Shores*, 77.

<sup>164</sup> FABC—OHD, *Pilgrims of Progress?*, 14.

On their off-days too DHs stroll, go around malls, or take boat trips around the islands. Some make it a point to take lunches in restaurants where waiters serve just in order to “be served for a change.”<sup>165</sup> As I have said elsewhere, Sunday is “freedom day.” “It is the day when they come out of their invisibility and lay claim to the heart of H.K. society by invading the Central District, from its roads and parks to the commercial centers. It is the day when each one sheds her maid’s uniform and moves out of the shadows of her employer’s domination to try to be her own person in places that have been the site of Filipina-Chinese tensions: Statue Square and Chater Road. Even if it is for just one day. And that, ultimately, is the problematic angle in this. It is only for one day in a week. The rest of the week, they are back to the reality of domestication and miserable working conditions.

Some DHs, in the meantime, negotiate their identities by seeking refuge in their role as the Philippines’ *bagong bayani* (new heroes) or as economic saviors. They focus on the thought that what they are doing is “good work.” They try to convince themselves that through their perseverance and hard work they will become instruments in the economic improvement of their “sick” country and, consequently, the progress of their children and their children’s children.<sup>166</sup>

Accommodation also happens by marrying foreigners, who are seen by the DHs as ticket to freedom and financial elevation. While some of these marriages do work and DHs, indeed, get some economic gains such a strategy often land them in the very same situation they are trying to run away from, i.e., as DHs. As pointed out in Chapter 1, they are also turned into maids by their partners, who liked or sought them in the first place for being subservient and good housekeepers.<sup>167</sup> Others accommodate their oppression through moonlighting as DH or as secretaries, waitresses, and salespersons. Many like to do part-time work because they often get paid on an hourly basis. Moreover aside from the real pay for the part-time work, some get extra pay e.g. waitress tips. Doing these help the DHs resist their class oppression in two ways. They (often) receive more than the minimum wage and

<sup>165</sup> Jo-Ann Maglipon, *The Filipina Migrant: Braving the Exile*, 19.

<sup>166</sup> Erlinda Layosa, “Into Thy Hands,” *TF* (April 1994): 6 quoted in Kimberly Chang and L.H. Ling, “Globalization and its intimate other: Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong,” 39.

<sup>167</sup> Most of the foreigners are usually ten and even twenty years older than their Filipina brides. “The Mating Game,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 5, No. 9 (September 1999): 5.

the working conditions are better. Even some of those who engage in prostitution actually see the flesh trade as, first, a quicker and more lucrative means to assail monetary problems and, second, a form of release from the oppression of domestic work.<sup>168</sup> But then, as has been pointed out in the previous chapter, moonlighting also lands the DHs in problematic situations as they get arrested and imprisoned. Moreover, such strategy exacerbates existing negative perceptions and/or stereotypes of DHs.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In sum, the DHs deal with their domestication in three interwoven forms. They submit by virtue of their acquiescence and complicity. Gender roles, class distinctions, and cultural and religious factors give rise to such mode of responding to their domestication. At the same time the DHs resist. They engage in organized protest through numerous political, economic, and religio-cultural strategies that transcend borders and nationalities. Moreover, DHs are not simply passive victims or active resisters. They also accommodate their domestication in different creative ways with the help of political-economic and religio-cultural sources that they deftly and subtly appropriate to their advantage, albeit not in a definitive and radical sense.

Except probably for organized protest and resistance what stands out in these modes and strategies of dealing with domestication is that they cannot be neatly categorized. They oscillate. They do not happen chronologically and in isolation. Rather, they happen simultaneously and fluidly. By laughing, for instance, they resist on the surface but, underneath, they just accommodate their domestication and vice-versa. *Bahala na*, which appears in both submission and resistance, is another example of this. Hence life for the DHs is a constant negotiation and re-negotiation of their subjectivity in their quest for full humanity and liberation. Their experience, particularly in dealing with their domestication, is, therefore, that of struggle. It is marked by persistent and unremitting efforts to work out humane living conditions in the midst of oppressive situations.

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<sup>168</sup> See Cookie Micaller, "Crossing the Line," in *Risks and Rewards*, 35–8.

To struggle is to labor, to toil, or work really hard. In the context of oppression it requires not just immense and creative physical efforts. It also demands relentless courage, steadfast faith, and boundless hope. For struggles against oppressive conditions, like the DHs' struggle against domestication, often have to do with the pursuit of surviving as human beings with dignity and integrity. They are concerned with the search for and working out of (more) life-giving paths and/or the quest for justice and peace by people who desire and dream of the good. Insofar as the DHs' struggle is a struggle for full humanity and liberation and insofar as this struggle marks their daily lives and is forged in faith it has a sacramental character. For the act of struggle itself is an experience of God's presence, a foretaste of liberation in the making, and a spiritual experience.<sup>169</sup> This theological value, which is embedded in the struggle of the DHs, is what I begin to probe in the next chapter.

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<sup>169</sup> Feliciano Carino, "Reflections on Culture and Religious Symbols," *Kalinangan*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (September 1988), 25 cited in Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 31.





## II. THE MARKERS



## CHAPTER THREE

# EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES: THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES ARISING FROM THE STRUGGLE OF THE FILIPINA DOMESTIC WORKERS IN HONG KONG

Theology is always on the way.

—Samuel Rayan, sj—<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Divine Wisdom, Elisabeth Schüssler Friorenza maintains, does not dwell in kyriarchal institutions or in texts but “among people” and/or in wo/men’s struggles to survive and transform relations of domination. Such struggles, in other words, have divine Wisdom as their hermeneutical horizon.<sup>2</sup> It is my intention, in this chapter, to begin to detect and explore this divine Wisdom as embodied in the struggle of the DHs by identifying and discussing the theological challenges of their experience of struggle.

The theological challenges are thematized into three clusters which are further thematized into sub-topics or sub-themes for greater clarity and coherence. The first cluster explores the backdrop of the DHs’ struggle, i.e., migration, which I propose as a new locus for theological reflection. Under this cluster the three sub-themes which will be discussed are as follows: 1) The Challenge of Borders and Strangers; 2) The Call to Hospitality; and 3) The Implications of Migrant Religion.

The second cluster brings in the concern of/for a gendered subject (in this case the woman) in theological reflection. More explicitly this

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Rayan, s.j. “Decolonizing Theology,” in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, eds., Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharajah (New York: Orbis Books, 2000): 66.

<sup>2</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 13, 156 and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Introduction: Walking in the Way of Wisdom,” in *In the Power of Wisdom: Feminist Spiritualities of Struggle*, eds., Maria Pilar Aquino and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (London: SCM Press, 2000): 7.

cluster puts forward the integration of women's experience and perspective as a continuing challenge for Christian theological reflection through an exploration of three sub-topics central to the gendering of theology. These include: 1) Gendering the Quest for Global Economic Justice; 2) Em-body-ing Theology; and 3) Re-thinking Suffering.

The third and last cluster scrutinizes certain existing analytical category/categories of Christian theology given Hong Kong DHs' re-definitions of identity and subjectivity, which are considered as two of the most important issues in theology today. The three sub-themes, presented as three possible future directions for Christian theology, that will be tackled are: 1) From Fixed and Specific to Multiple and Dynamic (to specifically address the question of identity); 2) From the Power of the Powerful to the Power of the Power-less (to deal with subjectivity); and 3) From "Multi" to "Inter" (to apprehend religious and cultural plurality which are re-shaping identity and subjectivity).

### THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES<sup>3</sup>

In arguing for a contextual approach to theology Stephen Bevans points to the sacramental nature of reality and/or the interpersonal notion of revelation as a rationale for a theology that takes seriously the actual

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<sup>3</sup> A synthesis of Chapter 1 and 2 and a condensed version of this section won the *Best Academic Essay in Theology Award* given by the Catholic Theological Society of America in its 2005 convention in Saint Louis, Missouri. Random parts of Chapter 1, 2, 3, and 5 has since then been subsequently published as follows: "Between Identity and Security: Theological Implications of Migration in the Context of Globalization," *Theological Studies* Vol. 69, No. 2 (June 2008): 357–375; "Singing the Lord's Song In a Strange Land: Religious Identity in the Context of Migration," *Forum Mission* 4/2008: 60–87; "Christendom on the Move: The Case of the Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong," *Global Christianity: Contested Claims*, eds., Robert Schreiter and Frans Wijzen (New York-Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 2007): 199–218; "Em-body-ing Theology: Theological Reflections on the Experience of the Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong" in *Body and Sexuality: Theological-Pastoral Perspectives of Women in Asia*, eds., Agnes M. Brazal and Andrea Lizares Si (Manila, Phils: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2007): 60–74; "Church of the Stranger: Church of the Future?" *New Theology Review* Vol. 20, No. 2 (May 2007): 82–85; "Faith on the Edge: Religion and Women in the Context of Migration," *Feminist Theology*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (September 2006): 9–25; "Gendering the Quest for Global Economic Justice: The Challenges of Women Labor Migration to Christian Theological Reflections," *Voices from the Third World* Vol. XXVIII, No. 1 (June 2005): 128–46 and; "The Power of Resistance: An Inquiry into the Power of the Power-less," *CTC Bulletin* (December 2004): 131–137.

contexts in which men and women experience God.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, all theology participates in his/herstory. To address the issue of the day or the “signs of the times” is the purpose of theology; to dialogue with current forms of reflection is the nature of theology. Accordingly, the sacramental character of the DHs’ struggle offers certain challenges and perspectives that theology, as an enterprise of “faith seeking understanding,” cannot afford to ignore.

*A New Context: Migration as a Locus for Theological Reflection*

Arguably no other phenomenon under the process of globalization can serve as an icon for the ongoing reformulation of the boundaries between what used to be clear polarizations: core and periphery, global and local, home and away, and difference and identity, than that of migration. Migration is a highly complex phenomenon with significant economic, socio-political, cultural, and religious repercussions for the migrants, their native countries, and the host societies. It has become a source for the transformation of identities and the re-definition as well as re-shaping of culture and religion as sources of empowerment, making it a site for the reconstruction of the meanings of the human condition. This facet of migration as a rich source for learning about and/or understanding the human condition makes migration a new place for humanity and, as such, a new place of theology.<sup>5</sup>

*The Challenge of Borders and Strangers*

To migrate is to cross borders. For today’s migrants, however, borders are no longer just the political membranes through which goods and people must pass, in order to be deemed acceptable or unacceptable. Today borders have become the “thin porous membrane”<sup>6</sup> that people risk to pass and cross towards freedom or towards the promised land only to find spoils and end up in a no wo/man’s land. They have

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 8–10.

<sup>5</sup> Carmem Lussi, “Human Mobility as a Theological Consideration,” in *Migration in a Global World*, Concilium 2008/5 ed., Solange Lefebvre and Luiz Carlos Susin (London: SCM Press): 49–60 also provides some bases for this.

<sup>6</sup> Bobby Byrd and Susannah Byrd, eds., *The Late Great Mexican Border* (El Paso, Tex.: Cinco Puntos Press, 1998), viii quoted in Daisy Machado, “The Unnamed Woman: Justice, Feminists, and the Undocumented Woman,” in *Religion and Justice: A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, eds., Maria Pilar Aquino et al. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002): 169.

become places where “people cross and sometimes remain, as if suspended, awaiting the next step in their life’s journey” trapping people “in a reality that is filled with human suffering, poverty, neglect, and despair.”<sup>7</sup> Today, to cross the border is to live on the border. For the border, as Gloria Anzaldúa posits, is an “open wound.” It is a gaping wound that serves as a testament to the violence of difference and the ever-widening gap between the haves and the have-nots. It is a bleeding wound inflicted by discrimination and infected by a sense of loss and isolation. Cuban-American theologian Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz lays bare this wound as she says:

I am caught between two worlds, neither of which is fully mine, both of which are partially mine....As a foreigner in an alien land I have not inherited a garden from my mother but rather a bunch of cuttings. Beautiful but rootless flowering plants—that is my inheritance. Rooting and replanting them requires extra work...it requires much believing in myself....<sup>8</sup>

Borders serve as indicators of the limits of existence, identity, and belonging. When one crosses the border, one traverses the yawning gap between being a citizen to being an alien or a foreigner, a visitor, a guest, in short, an outsider.<sup>9</sup> To cross the border is to live on the margins and be a stranger. Xenophobia—fear of the stranger—is the curse of the migrant for today’s migrant is today’s stranger—“the image of hatred and of the other.”<sup>10</sup> As people left at the borders or pushed to the margins migrants are also today’s marginal people.

Clearly, the DHs are Hong Kong’s alien underclass. They are Hong Kong’s stranger *par excellence*—an imposed identity that comes with untold misery. But where is God in all these? How does one do theology amidst this new, if not more pronounced, reality? Where does theology figure in the face of the challenge of borders and strangers? How does one articulate the Christian command to love one’s neighbor, when the neighbor is a migrant, hence, a stranger? How can the-

<sup>7</sup> Daisy Machado, “The Unnamed Woman,” 169.

<sup>8</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “A Hispanic Garden in a Foreign Land,” in *Inheriting Our Mothers’ Gardens*, eds., Letty Russell et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988): 92.

<sup>9</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, “Transformation of Borders’: Border Separation or New Identity,” in *Theology: Expanding the Borders*, eds., Maria Pilar Aquino and Roberto S. Goizueta (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998), 29.

<sup>10</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 1.

ology contribute to the accordance of dignity to migrant humanity? These are key questions that theology has to grapple with given the problematic conditions that are inherent in migration.

Authentic borders are actually meeting points. They exist not to separate but for people to meet. They are not meant to ward off or drive people away but they are places where we meet people halfway. “A true border is a place of encounter [and] is by nature permeable. It is not like a medieval armor, but rather like skin. Our skin does set a limit to where our body begins and where it ends. But if we ever close up our skin, we die.”<sup>11</sup> A true border then is a space where “we may choose to lay our bodies bare, where[in] we may choose to tell the truth of our lives.”<sup>12</sup> Space creates presence. Space empowers presence. Our bodies are the primary mediators of this presence. As such when one is considered some-body and not a no-body one is made present. When one is present, one counts. This notion of space as presence is significant to theology because it is revelatory.

The DHs, while pushed to live on the border of H.K. society, refuse to do so completely and have created spaces for themselves to survive. Their street demonstrations, public (e.g. Sunday rituals) and private (e.g. fellowships) gatherings illustrate this. Their creative use of an “imposed shrunken space” like the garbage area and their literal as well as symbolic occupation of the Central District—a highly public and core space—has a revelatory quality. It gives us a glimpse of how “bordered” or marginated existence can be transformed into spaces of presence. These re-configurations of the borders into “spaces,” by migrants like them bring a new frontier into theology. For one, their Sunday rituals, transnational families, and international links, challenge theology to articulate home not as a place “but a movement, a quality of relationship, a state where people seek to be ‘their own,’ and [be] increasingly responsible for the world.”<sup>13</sup> This also means re-assessing the adequacy of “land” as an analytical category for identity. More concretely, this means that “land” is no longer enough as a category to theologize about “home” and “identity.”

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<sup>11</sup> Justo L. González, *Santa Biblia: The Bible through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) 86–87.

<sup>12</sup> Melanie May, *A Body Knows: Theopoetics of Death and Resurrection* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 90–1.

<sup>13</sup> Nelle Morton, *The Journey is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), xix quoted in Letty Russell, *Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 67.



But the main question remains: How can theology engage in subverting the process of “other-ing”? Feminist theologian Letty Russell points out that theology must subject the doctrine of election (God has “chosen” certain groups of people over others) to a hermeneutics of suspicion, in view of intolerance and discrimination. Russell argues “it is often the hidden assumption of divine election to privilege and power,” that is “used to deny the diversity of our society and of the whole earth by closing out persons of different race, class, sexual preference, gender, or nationality.”<sup>14</sup> She maintains that a reconstruction of the doctrine must avoid this deformation by insisting that its meaning is situation variable.<sup>15</sup> Liberation theology provides here a relevant reconstruction with its notion of “preferential option.” Indeed, the doctrine of election can only make much sense in this time when racism and xenophobia rear their ugly heads when we interpret it in the light of the option for the poor and when we integrate a new face of the poor, a new face of the stranger, that migration brings, i.e., the migrant’s face.

As strangers the DHs’ experience challenges theology not only to utilize the biblical notion of the stranger, but also to re-appropriate it by integrating the distinct experiences of today’s migrants as the new strangers. Being a stranger is the primary condition of the people of God (Ex. 23:9; Deut. 24:18) and migration is woven into this “stranger condition.” “... The land... is mine” says the Lord and we “are but strangers and guests of [His]...” (Lev. 25:23). As David acknowledges in prayer: “All comes from you; what we have received from your own hand, we have given to you. For we are strangers before you, settlers only, as all our ancestors were; our days on earth pass like a shadow...” (1 Chr. 29:14–15). God even commanded the Israelites to love the stranger, as they were also strangers in Egypt (Deut. 10:19). In fact, many other Old Testament laws were put in place to protect the stranger<sup>16</sup> (Ex. 22:20;

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<sup>14</sup> Letty Russell, “Practicing Hospitality in a Time of Backlash,” *Theology Today* Vol. 52 (April 1995–Jan. 1996): 478.

<sup>15</sup> Letty Russell, “Practicing Hospitality in a Time of Backlash,” 481.

<sup>16</sup> See Aida Besancon Spencer, “Being a Stranger in a Time of Xenophobia,” *Theology Today* Vol. 54 (April 1997–January 1998): 464–9; “God the Stranger: An Intercultural Hispanic American Perspective,” in *The Global God: Multicultural and Evangelical Views of God*, eds., Aida B. Spencer and William David Spencer (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Bridge Point Books, 1998): 89–103; A. Lacocque, “The Stranger in the Old Testament,” in *World Council of Churches and Migration: WCC Fifth Assembly Dossier No. 13* (Geneva: WCC Migration Secretariat, 1981): 49–59; and Frank Crusemann, “‘You Know the Heart of the Stranger’ (Exodus 23:9): A Recol-

Lev. 19:33–35; 24:22; Deut. 14:28–29; 16:14; 24:14; 26:12–15; Num. 15:15–16; 35:15) to the point that anyone who does not respect the rights of the stranger will be cursed (Deut. 27:19). The New Testament and Jesus himself also have very specific exhortations to show goodness to the stranger, not only because it is a recognition of our fundamental Christian identity as strangers but, most especially, because Jesus himself, by His incarnation and by being an itinerant preacher, took on the conditions of a stranger. Moreover, Jesus advocated for the care for the stranger (Mt. 25:36).

The stranger and/or hospitality to the stranger is a fundamental paradigm in the Christian tradition,<sup>17</sup> particularly in the Gospel or biblical message.<sup>18</sup> As such, theological construction of the self or of ourselves as Christians cannot be separated from the acceptance of the stranger, just as the identity of the Israelites as a people of God is very much linked with the stranger. The God we believe in is a God of the stranger (Deut. 10:17–18; Ps. 146:9). At this time of backlash and xenophobia—a time when strangers, like the migrants, are ostracized, demonized, and vilified—Christian theology cannot but articulate a theology of migration with the “stranger,” particularly the biblical concept of the stranger, as heuristic means. At the same time if this theology is to be in dialogue with the experience of today’s migrants as strangers it has to integrate dimensions of contemporary migrants’ experience that are quite unique compared to the biblical stranger. For instance, whereas the stranger in the Bible already has laws put in place for his/her protection, migrants have to actively seek, negotiate, and fight for such laws as existing laws either do not consider their rights or work against them.<sup>19</sup> Whereas there is a “preferential option”

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lection of the Torah in the Face of New Nationalism and Xenophobia,” *Concilium* 4 (1993): 95–109 for a more detailed discussion on this.

<sup>17</sup> See Mike Purcell, “Christ the Stranger: The Ethical Originality of Homelessness,” in *Concilium* 2008/5: *Migration in a Global World*, eds., Solange Lefebvre and Luis Carlos Susin, (London: SCM Press, 2008): 61–73.

<sup>18</sup> See John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); Thomas Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger: Dimensions of Moral Understanding* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); and Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999) for a more comprehensive treatment on this topic.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Graziano Battistella, “Human Rights of Migrants: A Pastoral Challenge,” in *Migration, Religious Experience and Globalization*, 76–102.

for the biblical stranger there is structural marginalization of migrants. Even if the usual biblical stranger has laws in place for him/her, s/he is more significantly constrained and is still very much at the mercy of his/her host or his/her host community (cf. Gen. 19:1–11). The DHs, on the other hand, have more sources and resources to draw from and these make them, to a certain extent, more empowered than biblical strangers. Economically, they have regular legislated wages and even have extra jobs. Politically, they have internal (family, friends, etc.) and external (regional and umbrella groups, Church, NGOs, etc.) means of support. Socially, they have their local, national, and transnational networks. Religiously, they are relatively free to practice their own religion.<sup>20</sup> As such, today's theological reflections on the stranger must be a nuanced version of the biblical stranger.

To speak of the stranger also entails speaking about the religious notions of “pilgrimage” and “exodus.” As a people, the Israelites' history is highlighted or defined by the journeys of individuals, e.g. Abraham and Moses, and their journey as a people, e.g. journey to the Promised Land. Jesus himself traveled from place to place relying on the hospitality of people along the way for rest and nourishment. His utterance “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” is not just rhetoric but something that was very concrete for him. As a microcosm of the human condition the situation of contemporary migration touches upon these biblical themes of pilgrimage and exodus. The multiple and multi-directional transforming journeys that migrants undertake today remind us of the character of Christian life as a pilgrimage and exodus—as a constant coming and going; of a continuous departure and arrival; of Christian life as a process. This challenges us to rediscover the God of revelation in the context of leaving, of going out to other places as Abraham did. This is because for the in-between, like the migrants, reality is always someplace else. As a people of faith,

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<sup>20</sup> A. Lacocque, “The Stranger in the Old Testament,” 50–1 says the Old Testament stranger, particularly the “ger”—the most common term used to refer to the stranger—has no other choice than to accept the religious and cultic obligations of the house of Israel. In fact, the “gerim” were required to submit themselves to circumcision to enjoy all the rights of sharing fully in the house of Israel. While Frank Crusemann, “‘You Know the Heart of the Stranger’ (Exodus 23:9): A Recollection of the Torah in the Face of New Nationalism and Xenophobia,” 104 says somewhat otherwise, the significant degree of religious assimilation of the “gerim” still stands in stark contrast to contemporary migrants' greater freedom and assertion to practice their religion.

we are a people on the move. Migrants are like Israel in the wilderness that embarked on a journey believing that the promised rest lies ahead. This journey that forces them to survive and, for a few, thrive in strange places is a journey of hope and faith. This is an important aspect of the migrants' lives that Christian theology has yet to articulate.

### *The Call to Hospitality*

Undeniably, loneliness and homesickness are given problems when one migrates. Nevertheless, as the DHs have shown, there are a number of alternatives to assuage or combat these. But what if domestication through regulation and discrimination of difference, that was so much a part of the life of the DHs as migrants in H.K., worsens the situation? How can Christian theology offer a way of dealing with this imposed human misery? What sources from the Christian tradition can it make use of to apprehend migration from the perspective of liberation?

The Christian tradition of hospitality, I believe, can serve as a source. Hospitality is a way of life that is fundamental to the Christian identity. While it is often regarded in its tame and pleasant dimension, i.e., welcoming only friends and acquaintances, hospitality in its "subversive countercultural dimension"<sup>21</sup> can provide a framework for critiquing xenophobia. This radical hospitality is the opposite of cruelty. It entails welcoming socially undervalued persons, like migrants. It means challenging "other-ing" and paving the way towards the respect for and visibility of strangers. Hospitality, in this way, becomes resistance for or towards humanization rooted in the power of recognition. Matthew 25:31–46 where Jesus says "Come...inherit the kingdom prepared for you...for I was hungry and you gave me food...thirsty and you gave me drink...a stranger and you welcomed me" offers a very good basis for this. It goes to show that the hospitality that recognizes the stranger is a kindom<sup>22</sup> value that is actualized in the recognition of a

<sup>21</sup> Christine Pohl, *Making Room*, 61–2.

<sup>22</sup> I take "kindom" from Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz who uses it instead of the usual word "kingdom" for two reasons: First, she argues "kingdom" is a sexist word. Second, she reckons that, today, the concept of kingdom—as is the word "reign"—is both hierarchical and elitist. Kindom, on the other hand, makes it clear that when the fullness of God becomes a day-to-day reality in the world at large, we will be sisters and brothers—kin to each other—and will, indeed, be the family of God. See endnote no. 8 in Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, "Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the 21st Century,"

neighbor in the stranger and/or, most especially, in the recognition of Jesus in every stranger.

Hospitality, as a practice that integrates respect and care, recognizes and enriches human dignity. It does not only create a safe and welcoming space for the guest but also provides an enriching experience for the host. Parker Palmer points at this common grace in hospitality: "... Through the stranger our view of self, of world, of God is deepened and expanded... we are given the chance to find ourselves... and God finds us and offers us the gift of wholeness in the midst of our estranged lives."<sup>23</sup> Hospitality in this way is seen in terms of what John Koenig describes as "partnership with strangers." But I find this limited in articulating the depth of hospitable encounters. For one, the idea still carries elements of at best charity and at worst patronage or paternalism.

The DHS' new image of God as a host provides a way of revolutionizing this. It destabilizes the usual roles (with the migrant as the usual guest and the citizen as the usual host) and the unbalanced order of relations these roles spawn. God as a host presents, instead, both the migrant and the citizen as guests and, consequently, as both strangers. It could serve theology well to articulate this change in the ordering and dynamics of relations. It is a more egalitarian way of looking at the experience of hospitality. In fact, it is very much Christian as exemplified in our experience of creation, grace, healing, forgiveness, etc. as God's gifts. This means that whenever we receive or practice hospitality we are actually sharing in God's hospitality. This challenges theology to go beyond the notion of partnership *with* strangers to partnership *of* strangers and from hospitality *to* strangers to hospitality *of* strangers. Lastly, this means Christian theology must go beyond *koinonia*, or communion among Christians, to the more egalitarian and inclusive community that Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza describes as *ekklesia* or discipleship of equals.<sup>24</sup>

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in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, eds., Susan Brooks Thislethwaite and Mary Potter Engel (New York: Orbis Books, 2004): 306. Usage of the word "kindom" from hereon, in this research, takes Isasi-Diaz's position as reference point.

<sup>23</sup> Parker Palmer, *The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America's Public Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 70 quoted in John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 145.

<sup>24</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza speaks of the *ekklesia* as the assembly/movement of free citizens who determine their own and their children's communal, political, and

*The Implications of Migrant Religion*

*How could we sing the Lord's song in a strange and alien land? (Ps. 137:4)*

Religion has, arguably, never gone through so much significance, dynamism, expansion, transformation, and even revolution as in the context of contemporary migration.<sup>25</sup> One can see this in how the DHs have their own religious groups, conduct regular fellowships, and have their liturgies in their own language complete with clergy or religious leaders from their native country. The DHs' religious groups (especially charismatic movements) even coordinate with their counterparts in the Philippines and invite speakers and retreat masters from there for their gatherings. Away from their home country and in search of company, pleasure, and intimacy they feel more free and compelled to go to a Protestant church even if they are Catholics and convert to Islam or other Christian denominations and then go back to Catholicism (or Christianity) anytime they want. Even historians and sociologists point out the salience of religion in the lives of migrants and contend that any study of migrants that ignores the role of religion will most likely be incomplete and skewed. In 1978, for instance, sociologist Timothy Smith went as far as to say that immigration itself is a "theologizing experience" since immigrants often make sense of the alienation that is inherent in migration in religious terms.<sup>26</sup> Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, in *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations*, eloquently argued for and described this. Hence, it would be a tragedy if Christian theology does not put this phenomenon under closer scrutiny.

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spiritual well-being. See Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-Logos of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1993) for an elaboration on this.

<sup>25</sup> See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) and Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (London: Sage Publications, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> As early as 1960 Will Herberg pointed out how the early U.S. immigrant would "sooner or later . . . give up virtually everything he had brought with him and the "old country"—his language, his nationality, his manner of life—and will adopt the ways of his new home" except his religion for "it was largely in and through his religion that he, or rather his children and grandchildren, found an identifiable place in American life." See Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960) as quoted in Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2000), 7.

So what are the theological implications of migrant religion given the experience of the DHs in H.K.? What is the face of a Christian theology that takes into account the new or more pronounced issues and questions put forward by migrants' experience and practice of religion? Lastly, what are the areas in Christian theology that needs re-elaboration, re-definition, and re-orientation if it is to dialogue with migrant religion?

Religion obviously plays a crucial role in the identity negotiation, particularly ethnic identity, of the DHs. It is so bound up with the reproduction and maintenance of their ethnicity, that one can say their experience also falls under the perception that migrant religion is, to a certain extent, "ethnoreligion." Yet religious conversion cannot also be denied as a phenomenon in the DHs' lives. Based on the DHs' experience these heavily religious aspects of their struggle largely have to do with the dislocation and the lack of recognition for cultural and religious pluralism within and across religious traditions.

Key to attending to the challenges of migrant religion and/or religious identities in the context of migration, then, is the articulation of a Christian theology of religious pluralism<sup>27</sup> (both intra or internal and inter or external) in dialogue with cultural pluralism. Based on the experience of the DHs, and as illustrated in the report of the diocese of H.K., cultural pluralism and (in the case of the DHs) plural class identities have significant effects among worshipping Christian communities. Both local and migrant congregations face formidable challenges in finding a way to worship together. There is also the issue of active evangelization and conversion across Christian denominations, which Catholic leaders in H.K. tend to view negatively. I believe these issues can be addressed by a Christian theology of religious pluralism. The same is true with the question of external pluralism or the reality of religious plurality in most migrant-receiving countries which has implications on migrants' religious identities. As the DHs' struggle shows, exposure to or immersion in other religious traditions, particularly in the context of labor out-migration, may not only pose limitations in practicing one's religion but opens up more strongly the possibility of conversion. A Christian theology of religious pluralism

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<sup>27</sup> James Kroeger, *Exodus Series 9: The Challenge of Religious Diversity in Migration* (Quezon City, Phils.: Scalabrini Migration Center, 2005) provides a good discussion on this.

which recognizes and respects the integrity of other religious traditions can respond to such changes and situations.

Such changes also challenge Christian theology to explore more deeply the catholic character of the Church and/or Christianity itself in articulating a Christian theology of religious pluralism. Robert Schreiter, for instance, argues in “Catholicity as a Framework for Addressing Migration” that the Christian concept of catholicity could address the new religious configurations (e.g. greater presence of Islam in Europe), hybrid forms of religiosity, and the resurgence of forms of religiosity that had been thought to be part of the past.<sup>28</sup> Catholicity is “the ability to hold things together in tension with one another.”<sup>29</sup> As a heuristic means it can help in situating ethnicity in the context of the radical universality that is humanity’s call and deepest identity. As it is about “wholeness and fullness through exchange and communication”<sup>30</sup> catholicity can address the questions raised and/or experienced by migrant religion in view of internal and external pluralism. By focusing on wholeness as the physical extension of the Church, catholicity strikes at the exclusivity that could arise as a response, either wittingly or unwittingly, among migrants and between migrants and the local people, whether they share each other’s religion or not. By speaking about fullness as orthodoxy in faith it (catholicity) allows more room for doctrinal re-appropriation or re-interpretation as particular traditions of a religion interact with one another hence addressing the problems or difficulties posed by internal pluralism. Lastly, and most importantly, catholicity as “exchange and communication”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Schreiter, “Catholicity as a Framework for Addressing Migration,” in *Migration in a Global World*, Concilium 2008/5 ed., Solange Lefebvre and Luiz Carlos Susin (London: SCM Press): 32–33.

<sup>29</sup> Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1985) quoted in Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 128.

<sup>30</sup> Siegfried Wiedenhofer, *Das katholische Kirchenverständnis* (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1992), 279 quoted in Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 128.

<sup>31</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 128 says this needs to be strengthened, especially in terms of intercultural communication and its meaning for culture itself, in the face of global integration. The transnational character of migrant religion as illustrated by Jehu J. Hanciles, “Migration and Mission: Some Implications for the Twenty-first Century Church,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* Vol. 27, No. 4: 150; 152 in the case of migrant Pentecostal churches bolsters this. In the said article Hanciles reveals how migrant Pentecostal churches make use of their transnational networks to facilitate migrant movement and recruit so much so that churches initiated by them often become veritable centers of transmigration and transnationalism.



provides a theological framework for dealing with the interaction or relations among the members of a multi-ethnic church or congregation. Authentic Christian catholicity calls us not only towards openness to but also towards embracing social diversity. As Miroslav Volf writes a catholic personality is “a personality enriched by otherness, a personality which avoids exclusivism and, at the same time, transcends indifferent relativism. It does not simply affirm the otherness, as otherness, but seeks to be enriched by it.”<sup>32</sup>

This becomes especially urgent since, as Paul Schotsmans says, catholicity is not often the case in Christianity, especially in Roman Catholicism. In his article *Ethnocentricity and Racism: Does Christianity have a Share in the Responsibility?* Schotsmans says church language itself prompts intolerance towards other views of faith and those who put these views into practice.<sup>33</sup> Roman Catholicism’s harassment and even excommunication of its own theologians attests to this.<sup>34</sup> According to Schotsmans this tendency for “totalizing religious dogmatism” encourages ethnocentrism even more.<sup>35</sup> This theoretical and practical stance cannot hold not only because of the changes presented by a globalizing world but, most especially, because it negates the very character of the church as catholic and as the people of God.

The migrant congregations’ dynamic spirituality, particularly in terms of worship, also presents a challenge to Christian theology in terms of its reflections on the liturgy. Migrant churches’ vitality and dynamism in their faith celebrations stand in stark contrast to the boring rituals of organized or institutional religion. In a globalizing world where the need to communicate and connect in an embodied way is sought for in religion by migrants and (almost always) with their fellow migrants the less-participatory and clergy-centered Roman Catholic liturgy, for instance, could be alienating for migrants. Migrants “need

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<sup>32</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 51.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Schotsmans, “*Ethnocentricity and Racism: Does Christianity have a Share in the Responsibility?*” *Concilium* 4 (1993): 88.

<sup>34</sup> See Edmund Chia, *Towards a Theology of Dialogue: Schillebeeckx’s Method as Bridge between Vatican’s Dominus Iesus and Asia’s FABC Theology*. Unpublished Dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, 19, November 2003, 29–52 for examples on this.

<sup>35</sup> Schotsmans cites, as an example, a research comparing the behavioral patterns of Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and non-believers, where the Catholics have been found to react in a more ethnocentric or racist way than the other groups. Paul Schotsmans, “*Ethnocentricity and Racism,*” 87, 89.

that sense of family in order to survive in an alien world; they need to celebrate God's future in the midst of an oppressive and alienating present"<sup>36</sup> and liturgical celebrations is one of the ways in which they seek and/or express these.

In relation to this, the fact that religion, as experienced by the DHs in H.K., serves as both comfort and challenge also has theological implications, especially in terms of how Christian theology deals with popular religion. This is because migrant religion, especially the DHs' Catholicism, is steeped in popular religion. Undoubtedly, this is a tricky task for Christian theology.<sup>37</sup> For a long time "popular religion" has been associated with the unlettered masses, magic, superstition, and religious ignorance which had somehow not been "christianised." Today, although there is a theological re-evaluation of this phenomenon by looking at it as a source not only of oppression<sup>38</sup> but, possibly, also of liberation<sup>39</sup> this line of thinking has yet to be more deeply and openly articulated.

Popular religion tends to be the religion of the vanquished, the religion of the oppressed. This seems to hold true among migrants too. In the first place it is usually the marginalized from the sending country, e.g. poor or poor(er) women, who migrate and bring with them their

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<sup>36</sup> These are the words of Justo Gonzalez, "Hispanic Worship: An Introduction," in *Alabado! Hispanic Christian Worship*, ed., Justo L. Gonzalez (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 20–2 quoted in Aida Besancon Spencer, "God the Stranger," 96 to describe and explain the *fiesta* spirit of Latino worship.

<sup>37</sup> Ernest Henau, "Popular Religiosity and Christian Faith," *Concilium* 186 (1986): 79 says this has to do with the fact that as a religion that is lived and experienced; not expressed in formulae; and transmitted by means of other forms, popular religiosity leads to insights and intuitions which cannot be adequately contained within the framework of formulated logic. It can, therefore, be easily dismissed as subjective and emotive—attributes that are downplayed in mainstream theology, which is highly rational and logical.

<sup>38</sup> Because it is subject to socio-historical conditions popular religion can be ambivalent. Moreover, because it is tied up with individual and collective identity it can also be the cause of the most profound alienation and oppression. It can hold people in the grip of irreversible regression and can have pathological and destructive effects. As such, Christian theology must grapple with it by judging it on its own merits. It must expose and point out the various mechanisms of oppression, in Church and society, which have penetrated it, and critically distinguish the various ways of dealing with it so that its liberating potential can be surfaced. Puebla 450 quoted in Norbert Greinacher and Norbert Mette, "Editorial," *Concilium* 186 (1986): ix–x.

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Enrique Dussel, "Popular Religion as Oppression and Liberation: Hypotheses on its Past and Present in Latin America," *Concilium* 186 (1986): 82–94 and Ada Maria Isasi Diaz, *En la lucha: Elaborating a mujerista theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 34–61.

icons, novenas, devotions, etc. They literally carry with them many symbols of popular religions, which become their “weapons” to make sense of their oppression and assert their identity in their host society. The Puebla document contends that popular religion “can give coherence and a sense of direction to life; it is a central factor in creating and maintaining individual and collective identity and could even be an expression of discipleship.”<sup>40</sup> It could serve as a protest against the official [read: dominant or institutional] culture and religion and at the same time contribute to the symbolic resolution of real-life contradictions.<sup>41</sup> Through it unsatisfied longings of hope or people’s deepest hopes and aspirations find expression making it a means of comfort and, at the same time, a means of protest or resistance.

*A Gendered Subject: Integration of Women’s Experience and Perspective in Theological Reflection*

*Are Women People Too?* This small book by E. David Cook, I believe, is a very appropriate way to introduce what is at the heart of what the three succeeding sub-themes in this cluster pose to Christian theology. Cook hits the nail right on the head by asserting that Christian theology must take personhood or humanity as the basic category in view of how the other half of humanity, i.e., women, are systematically marginalized.<sup>42</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza echoes Cook’s position, with her preferred definition of feminism, as “the radical notion that women are people.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the refusal or failure to recognize women’s humanity is the fundamental problem in the structural discrimination and exclusion of women even in religion and even in Christian theology. While there have been advances made by feminist theologians the integration of women’s experience and perspective in theological reflection, which is a key factor in addressing the gender issue, remains a challenge. There are three key ethical themes that the experience of the DHs, once again, brings to Christian theology to

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<sup>40</sup> Puebla 450 quoted in Norbert Greinacher and Norbert Mette, “Editorial,” ix.

<sup>41</sup> Cristian Parker, “Popular Religion and Protest Against Oppression: The Chilean Example,” *Concilium* 186 (1986): 28–35 writes on how popular religion is, indeed, the religion of the oppressed and, at the same time, a form of symbolic protest.

<sup>42</sup> E. David Cook, *Are Women People Too?* (Bramcote, Nottingham: Grove Books, 1978), 8–9.

<sup>43</sup> A quote taken from a bumper sticker. See Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, “Introduction: Feminist Liberation Theology as Critical Sophialogy,” xvii.

challenge its myopic treatment of women's experience and perspective. These have to do with questions on embodiment, suffering, and, the most basic of all, justice.

*Gendering the Quest for Global Economic Justice*

As shown by the experience of the DHs, gendered labor migration is intensified and abused by global capitalism—the emblem of globalization. The prevailing market economics is hegemonic as it cuts or disregards any ties with other institutions such as religion, family, and politics and even usurps the power of the nation-states. It is exploitative as it tends to look at everything in terms of cost, benefit, and exchange value at the expense of human dignity, especially of the vulnerable in society. H.K. laws and policies, for example, serve the interests of employers and the larger state apparatus. They deter workers from pursuing their rights, ensure the continued availability of an affordable pool of foreign workers, and aim at maintaining domestic workers as temporary and docile migrants, thereby reinforcing not just class but gender inequalities as well.

In short the prevailing market economics is unjust, especially for women. For instance, the global market, with its new international division of labor, simply overlays 'female' roles defined in terms of sexuality, reproduction, and domesticity with a market ethos of commodification, moral relativism, and the dominance of those who already possess resources. Moreover, it views women as not productive or competitive and are therefore not considered to be entitled to a full share in or control over available social resources.<sup>44</sup> It starts in the economy of the household or the family where the 'female' roles are ingrained; picked up in the job-market by assigning or leaving women with jobs that are gender-specific; reinforced in the workplace with incidents of sexual harassment and sex-discrimination in terms of wages and promotion;<sup>45</sup> and intensified in the 'service industries',

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<sup>44</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Justice, Gender, and the Market," *Concilium* 2 (1997): 133–42.

<sup>45</sup> Women are mythically viewed as economic dependents. They supposedly work for pin-money until they get married and then for extra money to complement the salaries of their husbands. As such, women's active economic participation is not encouraged. If they do work, discriminatory pay-scale awaits them. Such a discriminatory pay-scale is also found in the New Testament. The Pastoral Epistles, for instance, stipulate that the widow/elder should receive only half of the payment or honor which is due to the male presiding elder. While male elders and officers of the community should be remunerated independently of their family status and income, wid-

where women's nurturing capacities are turned into commodities. In the global ontological capital women are both consumer and consumed, properties and commodities.

The worse of the lot falls on women migrant workers since migrant labor is not integrated into the global economy. That is why its reputation is that of needed but not wanted, cheap, and exploitative labor. This structural denigration of migrant labor has serious repercussions, especially for women migrant domestic workers, whose occupation is at the bottom of the hierarchy of migrant labor. Their work is rendered "invisible" because it is done within the confines and "privacy" of a particular family or household. It is also not usually reflected in labor statistics and is marginalized if not excluded altogether from labor laws. If it does get accorded some kind legislation, e.g. minimum wage, as is the case of the DHs in H.K., it is not only that they are the lowest-paid, but also the first to be victimized in times of economic slowdown.

Where does Christian theology figure in all of this? How can it make sense of the prevailing market economics from a faith perspective? Most importantly, how can it come up with a discourse that takes migrant women's well-being, especially economic well-being, into account?

Feminist theologians believe that there is an interaction of the three-fold exploitation or oppression of women, namely gender, race and class, in the politics of economics. There is "structural interconnections between the gendered economic system of capitalist patriarchy, its racist underpinnings, and women's global poverty" and this "must be seen as due to the global colonialization and systemic exploitation of women's labor in production and reproduction."<sup>46</sup> This is very much apparent or strong for colored women like the blacks [and the brown Filipinas for that matter] and especially for "the domestic workers who have to sell their very persons as the condition of their labor."<sup>47</sup>

Since the global economy is forged on unjust relations that have roots in socio-political and religio-cultural relations justice must be

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ows/elders should only receive financial support from the community when they are absolutely without family support (1 Tim. 5:3–16). Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "The Endless Day: Introduction," *Concilium* 194 (1987): xx.

<sup>46</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "The Endless Day," xviii–xix.

<sup>47</sup> Shawn Copeland, "Interaction of Racism, Sexism and Classism in Women's Exploitation," *Concilium* 194 (1987): 24.

the primary theological category for Christian theology in responding to the challenges. Usually, theological discourse in view of economic justice is drawn from Latin American liberation theology, which conceptualizes justice as “preferential option for the poor.”<sup>48</sup> Although it offers considerable theological basis to address the plight of women as victims of economic injustice this theological discourse has limitations. First of all the generic term “poor” is problematic as it totalizes the “subject.”<sup>49</sup> Lumping women with the category “poor” does not necessarily integrate the fact that there is a “woman face” to poverty<sup>50</sup> or to global economic injustice. This failure to integrate the gendering of economics in its discourse on the politics of economics then marginalizes women’s experience and perspective.

As it is the DHs suffer not just because they are poor but also because they are women. Justice as option for the poor then must be an option for poor women<sup>51</sup> and should, first and foremost, be construed as “equality of equals.” Part of this construction of justice as “equality of equals” is the unmasking of the mechanisms of oppression against women, particularly the dichotomy between the private and the public, which constructs, controls, disciplines, confines, excludes, suppresses, and, consequently, domesticates gender and sexual difference and, in effect, upholds patriarchal power structures. Shattering this persistent dichotomy would mean a lot to migrant domestic workers as it is a major reason why they get crumbs or nothing at all in terms of economic rights and opportunities in their home country and are, then, forced to migrate (to other countries), where economic marginalization remains their fate.

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<sup>48</sup> See Ismael Garcia, *Justice in Latin American Theology of Liberation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987).

<sup>49</sup> It must be noted here, however, that a more recent article by Gustavo Gutierrez, where he speaks of migrants as the new poor and the option for migrants as constitutive of the option for the poor, begins to address the problem. See Gustavo Gutierrez, “Poverty, Migration, and the Option for the Poor,” in *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*, eds., Daniel Groody and Gioacchino Campese (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008): 76–86.

<sup>50</sup> Elina Vuola, *Limits of Liberation: Feminist Theology and the Ethics of Poverty and Reproduction* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) gives an eloquent critique on this.

<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, Ivone Gebara, “Option for the Poor as an Option for Poor Women,” in *The Power of Naming*, 142–58. See also Elina Vuola, *Limits of Liberation*, 141–55.

Secondly, justice as option for poor women must be constructed and understood in the context of love. As can be seen in the case of the DHs, economic injustice to women is rooted in relationships that are often in the realm of the private. Hence, speaking of justice in the context of love will strike at the “emotional capital” of such injustice, that is, the patriarchal and romanticized notion of love, particularly love for others that keeps women enslaved in their own and in other women’s homes. Isabel Carter Heyward asserts:

Love is justice. It is not necessarily a happy feeling or a romantic attachment. Love is a way of being in the world, not necessarily an emotional affect. . . . Justice is the moral act of love. Love is actually justice. . . . Where there is no moral act of love, no justice, there is an evil situation. Evil is the act of un-love or in-justice. It is the doing of moral wrong, specifically of breaking the relational bond between ourselves in such a way that one, both, or many parties are dis-empowered to grow, love, and/or live.<sup>52</sup>

Justice in the context of love relationships must not be equated or confused then with complementary relations. Complementarity is token equality. Complementarity could make use of gender difference as a tool for oppression. It could be exploitation in the guise of affection just as DHs are persuaded or “conscientized” to migrate for the sake of their families, as in the case of Elsa, who was convinced by her father into migrating as a DH by capitalizing on her responsibility and sense of sacrifice as a daughter and/or sister. Justice in the context of loving relationships is characterized, instead, by mutuality understood as equality without significant difference. Mutual relations enable or empower others to discover and develop their capabilities to make their contributions, while simultaneously making one’s own.<sup>53</sup> It is about sensitivity and solidarity, affinity and facilitation.

Gendering the quest for global economic justice then entails expanding the usual feminist analytical categories of women, e.g. gender, class, and race, to take into account the case of migrant women workers. This is particularly true for migrant domestic workers who suffer

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<sup>52</sup> Isabel Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (New York: University Press of America, 1982), 18.

<sup>53</sup> Isabel Carter Heyward, “Mutuality,” in *An A-Z of Feminist Theology*, eds., Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996): 155 insists that mutuality is about power sharing whereby each participant is called forth into becoming who s/he is, that is, a whole person with integrity.

distinct forms of oppression by virtue of being migrant workers in a gendered job or simply by being female migrants. This entails, first and foremost, gendering the migrant worker particularly the domestic worker and nuancing race discourses by putting a colored woman's face to it. The challenge for Christian theology is to find an analytical category that could help in viewing the economic situation of women in labor migration from a faith perspective. Pope Benedict XVI articulates this increasing role and vulnerability of women in contemporary migration in the following excerpts from his 2006 World Migration Day Message:

With regard to those who emigrate for economic reasons, a recent fact deserving mention is the *growing number of women involved* (“feminization”). In the past it was mainly men who emigrated, although there were always women too, but these emigrated in particular to accompany their husbands or fathers or to join them wherever they were. Today, although numerous situations of this nature still exist, *female emigration tends to become more and more autonomous*. Women cross the border of their homeland alone in search of work in another country. Indeed it often happens that the migrant woman becomes the principal source of income for her family. It is a fact that the presence of women is especially prevalent in sectors that offer low salaries. *If, then, migrant workers are particularly vulnerable, this is even more so in the case of women*. The most common employment opportunities for women, other than domestic work, consist in helping the elderly, caring for the sick and work in the hotel sector. These, too, are areas where *Christians are called to dedicate themselves to assuring just treatment for migrant women out of respect for their femininity in recognition of their equal rights*.<sup>54</sup>

While it is inadequate Rosemary Radford Ruether's suggestion to take the household or the *oikos* as a theological framework in apprehending the issue on the economy could actually shed some light. Ruether argues that there is a cooperative economy where women have worked outside the constraints of male dominance, which she refers to as

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<sup>54</sup> As quoted and emphasized in Johann Ketelers, “Migrants To and From Asia, And Their Families: Responses To New Challenges in Advocacy,” in *The Migrant Family in Asia: Reaching Out and Touching Them*, ed., Anthony Rogers, FSC (Manila: Office for Human Development, 2007): 127. Olivia Ruiz Marrujo highlights this vulnerability in the case of undocumented women in “The Gender of Risk: Sexual Violence Against Undocumented Women” in *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*, eds., Daniel Groody and Gioacchino Campese (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008): 225–239.



“household economy.”<sup>55</sup> She maintains that, historically, there is an oppressive patriarchal grip on economic power. Even the church, Ruether says, is guilty of economic violence against women by gendering and then subjugating women’s work or by glorifying unpaid work, e.g. domestic work as self-fulfilling work which could actually be alienating work. Oftentimes, the church accomplishes this by linking such work with “service”<sup>56</sup> which the global economy also capitalizes on by putting domestic work as part of the “service sector.” Ruether’s main contention, however, is that women have historically resisted economic violence. To the extent that labor migration constitutes an act of resistance on the part of the DHs against economic marginalization and that it accords the DHs some degree of economic and political independence Ruether’s contentions provide a critical contribution. It shatters the myth of economic dependency that shrouds women.

While Ruether’s “economy of the household” can be a significant means of giving justice to an unarticulated aspect of women’s economic experience, i.e., economic resistance, I rather think it still leaves the gendered politics of economics in the household unquestioned. While she does not glorify the family I find it simplistic and incomplete to use “household” to critique economic injustice against women without looking at the other side of the coin. Even resorting to differentiating the family from the household is not enough. The family and the household, which theological discourse does not also make clear distinctions of, is/are significantly responsible in the production and re-production of gendered ideologies and practices which mold the DHs to be DHs and influence them to migrate as DHs. It is important that Christian theology exposes these mechanisms of oppression for these are also very much a part of the politics of the DHs’gendered migration and gendered transition. As Hope Antone contends:

women have been socialized early in life to do multiple responsibilities in the home—for their siblings, their parents, the elderly, and sometimes even others in the community. This ideology of domesticity is so ingrained that many Asian women feel it is their fate or destiny to

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<sup>55</sup> See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 74, 219–27 as cited in Stephen Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (London: Routledge, 2000), 108–111.

<sup>56</sup> See Monique Dumais, “Must a Theology of Service for Women Make Them into Second Class Citizens?” *Concilium* 194 (1987): 102–9 for an elaboration on this in relation to women in ministry.

sacrifice in order that those who depend on them can have a better life. Migration then becomes an option not only for mere economic reasons but also for the ideological-cultural factor of gender socialization into the ideology of domesticity and multiple responsibilities.<sup>57</sup>

This socialization of women into domesticity is reinforced through a “theology of woman” or a “feminine theology,” which advocates that woman’s nature and vocation is to be loving housewife and self-sacrificing mother. Because it relegates women to the home (and housework is not counted as remunerative work) this theology makes possible men’s economic development and advancement at the expense of women’s.<sup>58</sup> For the DH mothers who did not even have the luxury to stay home to take care of their own children this theology is like a millstone hanging around their neck as it intensifies their guilt. Hence, this theology doubly victimizes poor women like the DHs since it only reflects the realities of middle-class women who can afford to stay in their own homes and/or not work.

Gendering the quest for global economic justice then necessitates covering *different* women’s experience and perspective in two areas: the productive and reproductive work.<sup>59</sup> Work outside the home means economic independence and, to a certain extent, political independence. Yet, this is still very much hinged on the oppressive reproduction ethics that have existed for centuries in the realm of the private. In fact, as the DH transnational mothers exhibit, the power of these constricting ideologies and practices transcend borders and territories. And with their (DHs’) plight in mind, gendering the quest for global economic justice is, ultimately, not just a question of whether women are *free* to work but also a question of whether women have *freeing* work.<sup>60</sup> More concretely, it is about how the global economy

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<sup>57</sup> Hope S. Antone, “Asian Women and the Globalization of Labor,” *The Journal of Theologies and Cultures in Asia* Volume 2 (2003), 102. See also Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, “The Endless Day: Introduction,” xxii.

<sup>58</sup> Hannelore Schröder, “The Economic Impoverishment of Mothers is the Enrichment of Fathers,” *Concilium* 194 (1987): 17 describes how this is worse in the case of married women, especially those with children.

<sup>59</sup> Carol S. Robb, “Principles for a Woman-Friendly Economy,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* Vol. 9, Nos. 1–2 (Spring/Fall 1993): 147–60 makes a good case for this.

<sup>60</sup> Anne Carr, “Women, Work and Poverty,” in *The Power of Naming*, 87. See also Armand Larive, *After Sunday: A Theology of Work* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 127–46 on what constitutes “good and godly work.”

can serve as a means not just for our stomachs' satisfaction but also for the creation of living conditions that lead to authentic liberation.

### *Em-Body-ing Theology*

DH. This inscription encapsulates the experience of oppression of the DHs in H.K., i.e., domestication. It brings out the fact that domestic work—a physically strenuous work—is for poor women of color, particularly the Filipina. It is at the heart of the reasons why the DHs have become no-bodies.

The experience of the DHs, once again, sheds light on one of the enduring problems in Christian theology: the lack of accordance of dignity to the human, particularly the female, body. Body, in Christian theology, is buried in layers and layers of ambiguity, suspicion, antagonism, and outright denigration fortified by a host of dualisms. To this day, celebrating the body, especially the female body, remains far from reality. Classical Christian theology, first, undermined the worth of the body through the body-soul dualism where the former is regarded inferior.<sup>61</sup> This translated into the idealization of the spiritual (symbolized by the soul) over the material (symbolized by the body) so much so that the body came to be seen as the source of sin (sins of the flesh) with human sexual capacity labeled as the worst aspect of human bodiliness.

The second problematic engagement of the body by classical theology is associating it with women.<sup>62</sup> Because women regularly menstruate, lactate, and get pregnant, they were regarded to be more “bodily”. The selective use of the first creation story (where Eve was created from the rib of Adam) to further the idea of man's superiority and woman's material dependence on him all the more left the woman to be associated with the inferior and sinful body. Hence the dualism expanded into body/women-soul/men gave rise to a host of other dualisms that disadvantaged women, e.g. heart vs mind, emotion vs. reason, culture vs. nature, etc., with the former associated with the

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<sup>61</sup> Augustine and Aquinas are criticized on this. See Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), 64–72. See also Kari Elisabeth Borresen, *Subordination and Equivalence* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995); and K. Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine's Writing on Women* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1995) as quoted in Anne Spalding, “The Place of Human Bodiliness in Theology,” *Feminist Theology* No. 20 (January 1999): 71–3.

<sup>62</sup> Susan A. Ross, “Body” in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, eds., Letty Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1996): 32.

women and the latter with men. The consequent association of procreation with women served as a prop to the wide range of oppressive stereotypes imposed on women. These include procreation's attendant tasks of care work, e.g. mothering, and the marginalization of singlehood as a state/vocation in life, making marriage and having children the be-all and end-all of women's existence.

Mainstream Christianity has evolved a thoroughly unambiguous and oppressive perspective and disposition towards women's bodies such that women's bodies are, on the one hand, the expression of corruptible body and, on the other, the pure, virginal body, like that of Mary or of victims of violence turned saints like Maria Goretti.<sup>63</sup> As such the female body is negated in physical form and yet it is appropriated in spiritualized form. Women, in short, have been effaced into flesh. And despite the Church's increased sensitivity and openness the marginalization of women's bodies continue to filter into its teachings, particularly through the advocacy of complementarity,<sup>64</sup> a theology that reinforces the dualisms and their oppressive stereotypes.

How can Christian theology contribute to the "dignification" of the human body, especially the female body, without falsely reifying it? How can it take into account the repression of the bodies of women, like the DHs, who have become no-bodies under male domination and the body-killing structures of foreign domination, state repression, militarism, racial strife, and capitalism?<sup>65</sup> Chung Hyun Kyung writes that "the text of God's revelation was, is, and will be written in our bodies and in people's everyday struggle for survival and liberation."<sup>66</sup> Hence, the body must be a primary theological category. Doing theology, in other words, must begin and be constantly grounded in our experience of embodiment.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Mary Ann Rossi, "Misogyny" in *An A-Z of Feminist Theology*, 146.

<sup>64</sup> John Paul II's body theology echoes this paradigm, particularly through his "equal but different" stance. See, for example, *Familiaris Consortio* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1980); *Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the Book of Genesis* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1981); and *Letter of John Paul to Women* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1995) as quoted in Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology*, 73–5. See also Gregory Baum, "Bulletin: The Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*," *Concilium* 206 (December 1989): 144–9.

<sup>65</sup> Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 39.

<sup>66</sup> Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 22–52.

<sup>67</sup> Melanie May in *A Body Knows: Theopoetics of Death and Resurrection* provides an eloquent example of this based on her own experience of her body as the "first body of knowledge" and as an active witness to the passage of life.

One very important theological framework for an embodied theology which has not been deeply explored in Christian theology is the Incarnation.<sup>68</sup> Theological reflections on it often focus and/or end in the idea of God's love without taking into account the concrete act and form of that love: taking on human flesh in the person of the historical Jesus. "Central to re-claiming the dignity and power of women over their bodies is a radical understanding of incarnation that places the divine solidly in the world and challenges any notions of dualism."<sup>69</sup> How much more dignified can the flesh get than with the Divine inhabiting it?

The Incarnation, indeed, gives the body a sense of integrity that is yet to be deeply articulated in Christian theology. To talk about bodily integrity, for instance, would mean making biological or body processes holy so much so that the sexual act becomes a symbol and sacrament of erotic power, a foretaste of wholeness.<sup>70</sup> It would also mean cutting right through the issue of violence against women not just in its glaring physical forms, e.g. rape, but also in its subtle forms, e.g. the "violence of un-rest."

In this day and age of profit-driven and survival mode rat race the frail, limp, battered, wasted, and dis-membered bodies of people who have multiple jobs and who barely get rest, particularly that of women, who carry much of the burden of the world cry out to the Lord of the Sabbath not just for much-needed justice but also for often-denied physical rest. Women's bodies, as in the case of the DHs, are sacrificed on a daily basis at the altar of work whether productive or reproductive or both. Hence, at the risk of discounting or glossing over it because of its daily-ness (which to me makes it all the more serious) I think it is

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<sup>68</sup> The Incarnation seen as God taking on human form to dialogue with humanity also presents the body in a relational way. It is important to use the Incarnation since body theology must also be relational theology. As John A.T. Robinson, *In The End, God...: A Study of the Christian Doctrine of the Last Things* (London: James Clarke and Co., Ltd., 1950), 86–7 quoted in Melanie May in *A Body Knows*, 103 maintains: "The body... is the symbol, not of individuality, but of solidarity. It is that which binds every individual, divinely unique..., in inescapable relatedness with the whole of nature and history and the totality of the cosmic order. It is the bond of continuity and unity between [human beings] and [their] environment, between individual and community, between generation and generation."

<sup>69</sup> Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology*, 132.

<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, "Bodiliness," in *An A-Z of Feminist Theology*, 24.

equally important to subject to scrutiny this gendered disembodiment that happens everyday.<sup>71</sup>

Where and how could the sacred encounter and witness happen in this slow death? Christian theology should take into account the seemingly mundane, boring, or routinary things, e.g. cooking and bathing, that are done through the body, as part of the em-body-ing of theology. Manual work, especially housework, must be reflected upon. On the one hand, this will enable theology to unmask the body-based mechanisms employed to oppress women. On the other hand, it can serve as a springboard to talk about bodily integrity in a way that celebrates the body. In terms of women's spirituality, for instance, this means a shift from a spirituality marked by rigidity to one that is characterized by flexibility and spontaneity. Moreover, it means shifting from repressive to liberative spirituality.<sup>72</sup> Mary John Mananzan eloquently describes what it means to celebrate the body in women's spirituality: "Women's spirituality should be risky rather than secure, joyful rather than somber, active rather than passive, expansive rather than restrictive, more given to feasting than to fasting and to letting go than restraining, more like Easter than Good Friday."<sup>73</sup>

### *Re-thinking Suffering*

The Jesus-event ended with God's glory and triumph through the resurrection. But Christian theology seems to convey the opposite with its heavy rhetoric on why we have to suffer. Consider the following reflections on Christian suffering:

the gaunt agonized face and mutilated body of Christ on the crucifix expresses eloquently the salvific potential of suffering....for the Christian, the self can be defined ever more fully through suffering...the more we suffer, the more we clearly experience the self.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Gemma Tulud Cruz, "Our Bodies, Ourselves: Towards an Embodied Spirituality for Women," *In God's Image* Vol. 22, No. 2 (June 2003): 3–4.

<sup>72</sup> Gemma Tulud Cruz, "Our Bodies, Ourselves: Towards an Embodied Spirituality for Women," 4–6.

<sup>73</sup> Mary John Mananzan, "Theological Perspectives of a Religious Woman Today—Four Trends of the Emerging Spirituality," in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed., Ursula King (New York: Orbis Books): 347–8 quoted in Gemma Tulud Cruz, "Our Bodies, Ourselves," 5.

<sup>74</sup> Phillip Mellor, "Self and Suffering: Deconstruction and Reflexive Definition in Buddhism and Christianity," *Religious Studies* Vol. 27 (1991), 62.

Jesus' command to 'take up your cross and follow me' is tautological: being and doing like him—following him—leads to taking on what he took on—the cross. In this sense, 'cross' means the suffering and death that follow from defending the oppressed and struggling against injustice, and it derives from the will to immerse oneself in the conflictivity inherent in unjust situations.<sup>75</sup>

Suffering as a Christian calling...suffering as redemptive. These are the basic themes that run through one of Christian theology's favorite topics: suffering. The theology of the crucified God,<sup>76</sup> for example, makes us believe that God knows and understands our pain hence God is with us in our pain. This and the Christian theological reflections that glorify the cross<sup>77</sup> make us believe that suffering is acceptable and good. In suffering we supposedly unite ourselves with our Lord, the victim par excellence: Jesus.

Liberal theology presents Jesus' suffering and death on the cross as an act of self-sacrificing love, making the cross the core symbol of redemption. Jurgen Moltmann, for instance, advocates active suffering or "suffering in the name of love"<sup>78</sup> and justifies it in the name of the cross and the sacrifice of Christ: "The man who loves and is made to suffer because of that love and therefore experiences the mortality of death inevitably enters the 'story of God.' If he recognizes that his abandonment is made to cease in Christ's abandonment by God, he can 'abide in love' in communion with Christ's giving himself up."<sup>79</sup>

Christian theology on martyrdom does not also help when its approach to martyrdom tends to exalt martyrs or gives the impression of martyrdom as one that should be the desired or ideal end for an encounter with God or for Christian discipleship. In reflecting on Ignacio Ellacuria's concept of the "crucified peoples",<sup>80</sup> for instance,

<sup>75</sup> Jon Sobrino, "Martyrs: Appeal to the Church," *Concilium* 1 (2003): 147.

<sup>76</sup> See Jurgen Moltmann, "The 'Crucified God': God and the Trinity Today," in Johann Baptist Metz and Jurgen Moltmann, *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995): 89–99.

<sup>77</sup> Christina Manohar, "The Problem of Suffering: A Theological Analysis," in *Persecution and Suffering: Christian Reflections and Responses*, ed., Mark T.B. Laing (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002): 78 is an example of this.

<sup>78</sup> Moltmann argues that when one loves one suffers and insists that one's capacity to love could be measured by one's capacity to suffer. Jurgen Moltmann, "The 'Crucified God,'" 92–3.

<sup>79</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God," 97.

<sup>80</sup> Crucified people is defined by Ellacuria as that collective body which, as the majority of humankind, owes its situation of crucifixion to the way society is organized and maintained by a minority that exercises its dominion through a series of

Kevin Burke presents the crucified peoples as “light for the nations” whose very negativity of suffering and death is charismatic and revelatory in that it could provide believers “access to a saving encounter with the crucified Lord.”<sup>81</sup> But can a God of love really allow or bless suffering? Can acts of martyrdom categorically and definitively save us? Do they truly and fully constitute responsible action in the face of oppression? In the case of the DHs their suffering (for the sake of their family) or accepting and modeling their servanthood with Jesus’ servanthood may have minimized some of their problems or made them feel good and treated as heroines (at least while they are working and sending money) but they do not truly and fully eliminate the violence, discrimination, and alienation of domestication in a lasting way. A number end up without savings, betrayed by their siblings who don’t finish their studies and/or marry early, or end up alone and at the mercy of their family who may not have been truly lifted out of poverty.

Ellacuria’s concept of “crucified peoples” per se is not problematic.<sup>82</sup> I understand that by viewing the death of Jesus in light of the oppression of the crucified peoples (and vice versa) the concept does not encourage people to directly seek to be crucified. I also understand that Ellacuria himself mentions that his soteriological approach to the “crucified people” is not about the “sweetening” and “mystification” of the passion and death of Jesus nor “an expiatory masochism of a spiritualization sort” of the cross.<sup>83</sup> I rather think it is the strand of servant Christology that informs this concept that might pose problems, especially in relation to women’s experience, e.g. the DHs’ experience and interpretation of their work as servants and/or their suffering.

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factors which, taken together and given their concrete impact within history, must be regarded as sin. While Ellacuria contends that this is not a purely individual way of looking at every person who suffers he also argues that that this does not exclude an individual perspective. Ignacio Ellacuria, “The Crucified People,” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, eds., Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino (New York: Orbis, 1993): 590.

<sup>81</sup> Burke also argues that “the dramatic and quasi-scandalous image, ‘crucified people’, unites the marred faces of the victims with the battered countenance of the suffering messiah.” Kevin F. Burke, “The Crucified People as ‘Light for the Nations: A Reflection on Ignacio Ellacuria,’” *Concilium* 1 (2003): 123, 128.

<sup>82</sup> Daniel Groody, for example, even finds it useful (and rightly so) in reflecting on the conditions of contemporary migration. See Daniel D. Groody, “Jesus and the Undocumented Immigrant: A Spiritual Geography of a Crucified People,” *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 298–316.

<sup>83</sup> Ignacio Ellacuria, “The Crucified People,” 582, 586.



Drawing from the biblical salvation theory represented by the servant of Yahweh in Second Isaiah Ellacuria holds that “we gain life when we surrender it to others.” For him the servant willingly accepts his burden, even though it brings him to the threshold of death. According to Ellacuria the servant triumphs because he sacrifices his life for the sake of others and it is for this reason that “he shall be raised and greatly exalted” (Is. 52:13). Ellacuria maintains, on the one hand, that God is on the side of the oppressed and against the oppressor (which is in itself good news) but says, on the other, that “the Lord actually wished to crush the Servant with suffering, and deliver his life over in expiation for sin.”<sup>84</sup>

While there definitely is truth to the above mentioned claims such an understanding of servanthood inevitably raises questions. This is especially true among feminist theologians who have some problems with similar approaches to suffering in Latin American liberation theology. Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Ann Parker, for example, argue that although classical liberation theologians reject suffering, their talk about the inevitability of suffering in the work for justice actually smuggles in an element of heroism to make sense of, justify, and even advocate suffering<sup>85</sup> and, in effect, violence.<sup>86</sup> For Brown and Parker this reflects a certain kind of dualism.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ignacio Ellacuria, “The Crucified People,” 592–598.

<sup>85</sup> Brown and Parker does say that Latin American liberation theologians focus on the cross as an example of commitment to justice and liberation is understandable and is part of the critical tradition in understanding suffering. They argue, however, that “to sanction the suffering and death of Jesus, even when calling it unjust, so that God can be active in the world not only serves to perpetuate the acceptance of the very suffering against which one is struggling. The glorification of anyone’s suffering allows the glorification of all suffering. To argue that salvation can only come through the cross is to make God a divine sadist and a divine child abuser.” See Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker “For God So Loved The World” in *Violence Against Women and Children*, eds., Carol Adams and Marie M. Fortune (New York: Continuum, 1995): 53.

<sup>86</sup> Michael Lee points out, for instance, that in Ignacio Ellacuria’s earlier collection of essays titled *Teologia Politica* the third part generated the most attention and controversy because it dealt with the notion of violence and did not unconditionally condemn the use of revolutionary violence as an option for victims of oppression. See Michael Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation: The Soteriology of Ignacio Ellacuria* (New York: Crossroad, 2009), 76.

<sup>87</sup> This view is also shared by Sally Purvis who posits that the critique that Brown and Parker articulate are faithful representations of the sensibilities of many Christian feminist thinkers, e.g. Carter Heyward. See Sally Purvis *The Power of the Cross: Foundations for a Christian Feminist Ethic of Community* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 84–85.

Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker in the meantime takes Jon Sobrino to task when he presents those who voluntarily suffer in their struggle against injustice as “models” and “saviors” of the world and their blood a seemingly essential “tool” if not “food” for the struggle.<sup>88</sup> Echoing the sentiment behind the feminist uneasiness with such an approach toward suffering Walter Wink argues that “as part of the myth-making on redemptive violence this motif of the “suffering hero/ine” actually reinforces the system of domination” and goes further by saying this “myth of redemptive violence is the simplest, laziest, most exciting, uncomplicated, irrational, and primitive depiction of evil.”<sup>89</sup> A question that could be raised, for instance, is: Aren’t the martyrs actually twice oppressed and twice victimized by the violent nature of their death?

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<sup>88</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 39 specifically points at the following statement by Sobrino: “[The crucified people] make it possible for this world to recognize itself for what it is, sinful, but also to know that it is forgiven... The crucified people... make Christ present first and foremost through the fact of being massively on the cross... [They] make him present because like the Lamb of God, they carry the sin of the world and by carrying it they offer light and salvation to all.” This is not to say, however, that this quote that is being problematized by Brock and Parker is representative of all of Sobrino’s writings. The same is true, I would say, as far as Ellacuria is concerned. I am aware that these questions that feminist theologians raise do not give full justice to the breadth and depth of Sobrino’s and Ellacuria’s writings. Moreover, I understand that (1) there is a difference in context, i.e., Sobrino’s and Ellacuria’s context is that of a continent in which the majority of the people suffered enormously; (2) they have denounced the suffering of the crucified people as the sin par excellence; (3) they have consistently pointed to the fact that if there are people who are executed there must also be executioners that have to be uncovered, named, and fought against; and (4) they are firm advocates of justice, peace, and conversion. I thought, however, that it would be understandable to mention the problem raised by feminist theologians here not just because the writings (by Sobrino and Ellacuria) in question touch directly on suffering but also because the abovementioned feminist theologians are not alone in raising such or related questions. In looking at Sobrino’s theology of human suffering, for instance, Paul Crowley explicitly mentions criticisms to Sobrino’s earlier work in terms of focusing too much on the cross and not enough on the resurrection. In fact Crowley believes that the second volume of Sobrino’s Christology (published in English as *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*) is Sobrino’s “long-awaited treatment of the resurrection—his response to those critics who complained of too heavy an earlier emphasis on the cross and the sufferings of the crucified people.” See Paul Crowley, “Theology in the Light of Human Suffering: A Note on Taking the Crucified Down from the Cross,” in *Hope and Solidarity: Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed., Stephen Pope (New York: Orbis, 2008): 23–25, especially 25.

<sup>89</sup> Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Domination and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 13–31, especially 22.

How do we, indeed, make sense of suffering when it threatens our very existence? How do we address the very oppression that it brings? Anyone who reverences the sacred presence of human beings and embody such presence themselves will desist and resist violence. “Violence denies presence and suffocates spirit. Violence robs us of knowledge of life and its intrinsic value; it steals our awareness of beauty, of complexity, of our bodies. Violence ignores vulnerability, dependence and interdependence.”<sup>90</sup> In the context of resistance, “it is not the violence done to those who resist much less their deaths that bring about transformation but the very struggle of these people, their refusal to be a party to injustice that transforms and liberates. Making the pain of backlash and repression positive cloaks perpetrators. Perpetrators should not be hidden by language that praises the death of martyrs as nourishment for the world. Courageous resistance and hope nourish and change the world. This is what redeems and transforms.”<sup>91</sup> Those who resist oppression risk opposition. This is true. But the violence directed against activists and revolutionaries must evoke grief not adulation.

Indeed, obedience, self-sacrifice, and surrender as they are articulated in Christian theology fragment the wholeness of life and diminish freedom as well as our dignity as human beings. A truly religious person is one that does not endure suffering stoically and hope for a reward but one who struggles to live with integrity in the larger framework of life, trust his/her own feelings and experiences, and be faithful to himself/herself. This becomes very important when viewed from a gender perspective because suffering in the context of sacrifice is destructive, especially for women. Most of the DHs risked leaving the Philippines for the first time to take up a denigrated job for the sake of their family. They sacrificed some, if not all, of their own hopes, dreams, their own physical well-being, and sometimes their very own lives for the people they work for and, especially, those they love. Worse, they tried as much to bear all the burdens that came with it on their own and in silence<sup>92</sup> in their desire to spare their family and

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<sup>90</sup> Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 9–10.

<sup>91</sup> Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 40.

<sup>92</sup> Silence is another aspect of suffering and sacrifice that needs to be unmasked for its deceiving oppressiveness. Oftentimes, it is peddled as, at best, neutral and, at worst, virtuous. But it can actually be “a sin of omission.” Melanie May, *A Body Knows: Theopoetics of Death and Resurrection*, 82–3.

friends of the pain. They themselves became the sacrifice, the victim of the love, which pushed them to migrate and work as a DH.

Is this just? Where is mutuality in a situation where we give love to others but we are not supposed to or we cannot claim the right to comfort, understanding, or self-development for ourselves because we are just doing our duties as mothers, daughters, and sisters? “The practice of loving involves more than obeying an ideal, applying a principle, or imitating a model. Loving acts emerge from the grace we have come to know in the presence of one another. It is by being faithful to the power of presence that we learn to love. Loving resists violence by introducing *in the flesh* the truth that violence denies. . . .”<sup>93</sup> The problem is that love and violence are often linked in Christian theology at the expense of women, especially when suffering, propped up by the cross and sacrifice, is wedged in between.

Indeed, Christianity’s romance with suffering has taken a heavy toll on its most vulnerable victim, i.e., women, since it comes with the socialization for women to be other-oriented or self-effacing, especially in the name of love. In her book, *Sharing Her Word*, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza devotes one whole chapter [*The Justice of Wisdom Sophia: Love Endures Everything—Or Does It?*] to discussing the fatal consequences of the central Christian principle of love, which “has been not only trivialized and individualized but also *deeply genderized* (emphasis mine).” She says it is the first culprit in the creation of a pattern of domination or subordination, which becomes all the more powerful when supported by Christian teachings, which fortify cultural values on romantic love, feminine calling, and sacrificial service. Countless women, indeed, have endured and/or have been made to endure all kinds of physical, emotional, sexual, and economic violence because of love. Even liberation theology’s attempt at deflating its negative image by making spiritual heroines out of them or, in the context of the DHs’ experience, being called *bagong bayani* (new hero/ines) or *martir* (martyrs) does not really make it more sensible nor acceptable. I dare say it intensifies the oppression by helping the DHs internalize and bury themselves deeper into their domestication.

Women need a theology and a church that desists from further valorization of suffering and condemns all forms of suffering, especially those done to them. They need a theology that encourages them to

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<sup>93</sup> Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 110.

resist against demonization and scapegoating. Most of all, they need a theology that recognizes and celebrates their humanity in all its beauty, potential, and creativity. While we must never ignore suffering as it is woven into the fabric of our existence we must not accept it either but continue to resist it. As Kristine Rankka offers, in *Women and the Value of Suffering: An Aw(e)ful Rowing Toward God*, theology needs to dialogue with and incorporate the insights of feminist theory, cultural studies, etc. to apprehend a response to suffering that keeps our humanity and dignity in place. After all despite all appearances and our own immediate knowledge we live in a world where tragedy is not the final experience.<sup>94</sup> Suffering is there; it will always be there. We cannot deny it; we must not run away from it. BUT this is not all there is to it. Just as the Jesus event did not end with his death but with his resurrection we must not only be able to speak about the harsh and sordid reality of suffering but also affirm that life is the final experience.

*An Expanded Category: Shifting Identity and Subjectivity as  
Challenges for 21st Century Theology*

Who am I? Who are you? Who are we/they? Never before has these seemingly simple questions taken center stage than in this era of globalization. With global economic and cultural integration, unprecedented migration, and state-of-the-art technology, different people with experiences of various contexts are not left with much choice but to share shrinking spaces. The inevitable interaction of contexts that ensue from this are putting traditional and cherished markers of identity to the test and are forcing people to either preserve, relinquish, or transform their identities in the process. Whatever the case may be, one thing remains certain: a crisis of identity is confronting migrant humanity. It is there in the debates, court cases, and legislation of policies that have to do with things that mark people's cultural and religious identities, in the emergence of ultra nationalist parties, and in the rise of fundamentalist movements, some of which engage in terroristic activities. Most of all it is there in the socio-cultural and religious identity de-formation, re-formation, and trans-formation inherent in contemporary migration.

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<sup>94</sup> Kristine Rankka, *Women and the Value of Suffering: An Aw(e)ful Rowing Toward God* (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1998) gives a very good survey and analysis of the various theological models of suffering.

Like identity, subjectivity, which I employ here in relation to one's capacity to be an agent of one's own liberation, is one of the pressing issues of our time. The global rise of alternative social movements and the increase in contestation by marginalized peoples of repressive policies across borders can be considered as one of the defining developments of this century. While the World Social Forum—a global resistance movement against the negative effects of globalization—serves as the best example for the former, migrants like the DHs, with their everyday forms of resistance and/or transformational struggle, are proving to be a good example for the latter. And when one talks of subjectivity, discourse on power is not far away. In fact, power could serve as the most significant category of analysis for subjectivity.

What could be the Christian contribution to this more pronounced reality of changed and changing identity and subjectivity? In the same way, how do these definitive changes challenge the method and content of Christian theology? Lastly, what could be the face or contours of a Christian theology that takes these developments seriously, hence respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century? Central to the response(s) to these questions is Christian theology's need to expand its analytical categories. Based on the experience of the DHs, I see three possible areas where this expansion is needed: 1) to broaden its way of looking at identity from fixed and specific to multiple and dynamic; 2) to expand its discourse on power from the usual power of the powerful to the power of the power-less; and 3) to widen its interrogation of cultural and religious pluralism from “multi” to “inter”.

#### *From Fixed and Specific to Multiple and Dynamic Identities*

Undoubtedly, identity is a major issue for the DHs both in an oppressive and liberating way. The word “DHs” alone is a collective identification that has served not just as an indication of their type of work but as a racialized stereotype as well. It can also be recalled that, as discussed in Chapter 1, the DHs were oppressed as migrant Filipino women, as migrant Filipinos, and as migrant domestic workers. But these are not just the identities they have or were made to have. They are also a lot of other things: mothers, daughters, sisters, friends, relatives, *kababayan* (compatriot), club/union members or leaders, church group members, part-time workers, etc. They have multiple identities and while a lot of their identities bring problematic consequences, they, at the same time, struggle using these very identities. Then, as their experience also shows, the DHs do not inhabit their identities in a static way but simultaneously and fluidly.

What does Christian theology have to say on the question of identity/identities? What are the challenges for it? As I see it, the DHs' experience offers three challenges to Christian theology in terms of expanding its analytical category with regard to identity. These include: 1) including migrants as subjects in the theological reflections on identity from the perspective of the margins; 2) giving a broader perspective of people's multiple and shifting contexts and experiences and, consequently, their multiple and shifting marginal identities; and 3) finding a way to articulate a theology on "woman's identity" and experience that captures not just women's multiple and shifting marginal identities but also the dynamics of the encounter between and among contexts that shape or transform identities. In other words, I argue for an expansion in Christian theology's way of looking at identity, particularly marginal (women's) identity, from fixed and specific to multiple and dynamic.

The first strikes at one of the key markers of the identity of the DHs, that is, as migrants. While the interpretive frameworks the DHs employed in the production of meanings for their personal lives and social identities as DHs in H.K. were drawn primarily from their social identities and shared cultural values as Filipinos, the marginalization wrought by their status as migrants had significant repercussions on how they saw and presented themselves individually and collectively. Where, from the wellspring of Christian theology, can we draw words, images, and messages to give meaning to this? Where lies our source for a theology on marginal identity with the migrant's face? I believe the Bible can be a possible source for this. The Old Testament, as the story of making a people (Israelites) out of a non-people, is actually the history of marginal identities. The biblical God served as a companion in the identity—formation of the Israelites—a people without identity and power—from the time God prompted and accompanied the migrant Abraham, to their journey through the desert, to the time they have to rise from the ashes of the exile. Moreover, the vision, world-view, and praxis of Jesus of Nazareth, the itinerant preacher and prophet who was not welcomed or accepted in his own hometown, was to help in the construction of the suppressed identities of the *anawim*.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Felix Wilfred, "Identity: Suppressed, Alienated, Lost," *Concilium* 2 (2000): 37.

Hispanic theologians argue that theologically responding to the plight of “foreigners,” “exiles,” and “aliens” entail reading the Bible from the perspective of the rejected and oppressed as well as discovering how Jesus functioned in relation to his history and culture. Virgil Elizondo, who is known for developing the theology of *mestizaje*, proposes the Galileean identity of Jesus or the “Galilee principle” as a key for a theology in the context of the experience of Mexican-Americans who have always been treated as “others” and/or people who live in the borderlands between cultures.<sup>96</sup> Elizondo posits that by coming from Galilee where nothing good is expected to come out of, the Incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Jesus, put forward the fundamental message that, to bring divine blessings to all, God chooses what the world rejects.<sup>97</sup> According to him, the “Galilee of the Gentiles,” as it is referred to in Matthew 4:15, implies a pluralistic society (both Jewish and Gentile), an amalgam of two societies meeting at the crossroads of humanity. Moreover, it is a symbol of “multiple rejections,” a region that “witnessed multiple invasions by various groups, and its geographical setting made it a natural crossing place for international travel routes.” Elizondo contends that as a result of this, “a natural, ongoing biological and cultural *mestizaje* was taking place.”<sup>98</sup>

This brings us to the second challenge: What about multiple and shifting marginal identities? As the word *mestizaje* connotes migrants live in-between cultures. Hence, one talks of a hyphenated existence or hyphenated identity, e.g. Mexican-American. But as was pointed out in Chapter 1, today’s migrants, as exemplified by the DHs, are

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<sup>96</sup> *Mestizaje* theology is a theology of liberation for Mexican-Americans, that is characterized by a fundamental search for identity leading to conscientization and liberation. According to Elizondo, the human context of the historical Jesus, who lived and died as a despised Galileean “mestizo” (meaning of mixed character) is analogous to the sociohistorical context of the Hispanics who, as a people, have always been treated as foreigners in their own countryside and exiles who never left home (they are rejected in Mexico as “pochos” and rejected in the US as “Mexican”). Virgil Elizondo, *The Galileean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (New York: Orbis Books, 1983), 52; and Virgil Elizondo, “Mestizaje as a Locus for Theological Reflection” in *Mestizo Christianity: Theology from a Latino Perspective*, ed., Arturo J. Bañuelas (New York: Orbis Books, 1995): 9 quoted in Daniel A. Rodríguez, “No Longer Foreigners and Aliens: Toward a Missiological Christology for Hispanics in the United States,” *Missiology* Vol. XXXI, No. 1 (Jan. 2003): 52–3.

<sup>97</sup> Virgil Elizondo, *The Galileean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, 91–102 quoted in Daniel A. Rodríguez, “No Longer Foreigners and Aliens,” 52–3.

<sup>98</sup> Virgil Elizondo, *The Galileean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, 56 quoted in Daniel A. Rodríguez, “No Longer Foreigners and Aliens,” 53.



more than this. Contemporary migrants, due to their immersion in multicultural and multireligious cities, as well as to the effects of global economic and cultural integration, have multiple or hybrid identities, e.g. “Filipino”, “women”, “migrant”, “DHs”, “poor”, and “alien”, which are often marginal identities. Today’s migrants also offer us another dimension to theologially ponder on. The DHs simultaneously inhabit or oscillate from one oppressive identity to another. They also simultaneously resort to or oscillate from one struggle strategy to another. They re-form and transform their identities as they interact with other cultures and religions. These, I believe, have a lot to say to a Christian theology on identity.

This means, for instance, that difference as a category of analysis is very important in theologially articulating multiple, hybrid, and shifting identities.<sup>99</sup> It is central because the assertion of difference is the way by which marginal peoples come consciously to perceive and acknowledge their collective selves. Furthermore, it is crucial to the construction of their subject-hood as principal agent of their own emancipation.<sup>100</sup> To fully capture this and the many other nuances of hybrid and shifting identities, differences between and among people must not just be recognized. It must also be celebrated and allowed to flourish. I see two interconnected ways of doing this in Christian theology: its continuous decolonization and contextualization.

Spanish religious colonial legacies, especially those that have to do with gender and race constructions, haunted the DHs. It is no secret that much of the world, especially the Third World countries, has been a victim of colonization and that the Christianity the colonizers brought or imposed defaced the colonized territories’ existing religion(s) or ways of apprehending and worshipping the Divine. Colonial theology did not take the colonized people’s cultures and contexts seriously. It also became a tool in promoting resignation to oppression and passive as well as active acceptance of suffering, including those caused by

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<sup>99</sup> See, for instance, M. Shawn Copeland, “Difference as a Category in Critical Theologies for the Liberation of Women,” *Concilium* 1996/1: 141–51.

<sup>100</sup> The untouchables of India, for example, cast aside the condescending name “*harijans*” (people of God) that was given to them by Gandhi. Instead, they named or re-named themselves as “*dalits*” (broken and oppressed people) and re-interpreted the traditional Hindu tenets and symbols in order to re-invent their distinct religious identity as different from the mainline religious tradition. Felix Wilfred, “Identity: Suppressed, Alienated, Lost,” 34–5.

colonialism.<sup>101</sup> As such, being cognizant of the full range of the identity formations and de-formations of the colonized people entails the decolonization of theology. In the case of women, this is all the more imperative due to the widespread use of sexual violence as a strategy of conquest and the role of religion in facilitating such violence.<sup>102</sup>

As most historical colonizations, that had damaging repercussions, come from the West and the colonized people's Christianity is western Christianity a critique of Western theology is part and parcel of decolonizing theology. Of course this idea is not new. In fact, a number, if not most, of Third World theologies do this. But these efforts are mostly on the level of content and are usually done only in a clarificatory manner. Others, as eloquently illustrated by Angela Wong Wai Ching's critique of Asian (feminist) theologians' monolithic depiction of the Asian woman as the "poor woman," end up reproducing nationalist discourses which are in themselves oppressive and even tied up with the West. The cutting edge is sometimes lost in these decolonizing efforts. Wong's critique on the "poor woman", for instance, is significant in that it points to a tendency in the decolonization of theology to level differences by resorting to homogenous narratives. This, Wong says, does not enable new and wider imaginary spaces for differences to emerge among different groups with their different experiences, and their different theologies. Hence, a decolonized theology inevitably takes a postcolonial perspective.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Samuel Rayan, s.j. "Decolonizing Theology," 66.

<sup>102</sup> See, for example, Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis and Marie M. Fortune, eds., *Remembering Conquest: Feminist/Womanist Perspectives on Religion, Colonization and Sexual Violence* (New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 1999) and Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-Lan, eds., *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>103</sup> Wong argues for a postcolonial perspective, particularly in Asian feminist theology, because, for her, the postcolonial subject embodies a self-contradiction as an Asian Westernized subject. See Angela Wong Wai Ching, *"The Poor Woman": A Critical Analysis of Asian Theology and Contemporary Chinese Fiction by Women* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002). See also Angela Wong Wai Ching, "Negotiating for a Postcolonial Identity: Theology of the 'Poor Woman' in Asia," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* Vol. 16, No. 2 (Fall 2000): 5–23. The recent book of Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) presents a critical discussion on this emerging field in theological discourse. Kwok, for example, clarifies the significance of the deployment of a postcolonial perspective in the midst of critiques it might not be correct to do so given neo-colonialisms. Her assertion that "postcolonial" is "not merely a temporal period or a political transition of power, but also a reading strategy and discursive practice that seek to unmask colonial epistemological frameworks, unravel Eurocentric logics,

Decolonizing theologies, however, could lead to another way by which Christian theology can recognize and celebrate differences: the development of contextual theologies. Obviously, Christian theology is not sorely lacking in this department. In fact, it has so much of this that Christian theology today does not just have theologies on gender, e.g. feminist, and color, e.g. black. It also has theologies of nationality, e.g. Vietnamese, and ethnicity, e.g. Hispanic or Latino/a theologies. Some are indigenous-based, e.g. aboriginal, while others have double contexts, e.g. Asian-American.<sup>104</sup> The statement “all theology is contextual theology” is probably a cliché for most theologians already. But, for me, contextual theology remains a potent force for the future of Christian theology. It is at the heart of the second challenge.<sup>105</sup> Even the first challenge can find its answer in contextual theology since a migration theology, or a theology on migrants, can also be considered as contextual theology.

Of all the contextual theologies feminist theology, as a contextual critical theology of liberation for wo/men,<sup>106</sup> would be the most responsive to the experience of the DHs. For one, feminist theological apprehensions of human identity take seriously the struggles for right understanding and practice concerning difference.<sup>107</sup> It exposes and critiques ideological constructs that oppressively identify and marginalize women based on their gender, e.g. ladies, wives, mothers, handmaids, seductresses, etc. It also brings out and reflects on differ-

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and interrogate stereotypical cultural representations” can definitely make a lot of difference in apprehending the DHs’ experience in relation to colonial legacies. Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 2.

<sup>104</sup> See Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharajah, eds., *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000): 88–9; 210–2; 234–5; 212–4; 1–2; 206–8.

<sup>105</sup> Contextual theologies usually make sense of the multiple forms of oppression and the various efforts towards redemption of a particular people by significantly using historical, socio-economic, and religio-cultural sources. These enable them (contextual theologies) to capture not only the various identities but also the shifts in the subjecthood of their subjects. In doing so, they are also able to surface the nuances involved in the identity formation and transformation process of their subjects.

<sup>106</sup> Wo/men is a way of writing used by Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, to destabilize the essentialist notions of woman and indicate that from the perspective and positionality of women who are multiply oppressed, the term is also inclusive of disenfranchised men. But while it concerns wo/men as both women and men its particular use of the experience of women as a starting point for a theological reflection, that takes seriously the well-being and liberating actions of women, makes feminist theology a contextual theology for, of, and by women.

<sup>107</sup> See Christine Firer-Hinze, “Identity in Feminist Theological Debate,” *Concilium* 2 (2000): 113–20.

ences not just between women and men, but also between and among women. The latter, which was actually the result of an intense debate on identity politics,<sup>108</sup> gave rise to feminist contextual theologies that did not only surface women's multiple identities but their multiple forms of oppression as well. From womanist to *mujerista*, African to Asian, to Protestant and Catholic, feminist theology became a theology that was locally responsive and, at the same time, globally intelligible discourse, especially to Christian women.

This significant development was also made possible because feminist theology tries to frame its apprehensions of human identity in the context of the dynamics of power. This, I think, is key to a Christian feminist theology that takes into account multiple and shifting identities as it especially applies to marginalized women like the DHs. Power is the primary force in the construction, inscription, de-formation or domestication as well as the re-formation and trans-formation of identities. Using it as a framework in making sense of identities would serve well in unmasking not only the forces of domination that create and perpetuate marginal identities but also in naming the liberating power that enable domesticated people to resist, re-form, and trans-form their marginalized identities. The problem is feminist theology has limitations vis-à-vis colonial discourses. It also needs to be decolonized insofar as it fails to take into account the fact that in colonial times, women existed both as colonized patriarchal objects and colonizing race-privileged subjects. Closer scrutiny of power dynamics in terms of who does the decolonization<sup>109</sup> and especially on how it

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<sup>108</sup> The debate centered on the use of the categories "women" or "women's experience" in a foundational or normative way. A number of feminist theologians insist that these cannot be used to refer to women's experience in general as these actually only use and speak of the experience of a group of women in particular, namely, the experience of middle-class white women. One of the results of this debate is the employment of the category "woman" to destabilize the previous category and allow the differences of women to surface and be investigated. See Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Continuing the Story, but Departing the Text: A Historicist Interpretation of Feminist Norms in Theology," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition and Norm*, eds., Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997): 198–214.

<sup>109</sup> Some feminist women of color have reservations about how Western feminists engage in it. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, for example, says this could result to the homogenization of non-Western women into one group while maintaining the superiority of Western women over or against the rest. She argues that Western feminists end up being accomplices of hegemonic influences in their postcolonial discourses by imposing Eurocentric feminist categories of analysis on different cultures which

is done is another aspect, that must be given critical consideration. While I am not saying that decolonization of theology be an exclusive privilege of Third World women or women of color, a critical stance must be taken vis-a-vis white or Western women's efforts to do so, since misrepresentation or even reproduction of colonialist or patriarchal discourses is possible in these. Mary Daly's efforts in the influential book *Gyn/Ecology*, for instance, has been widely taken to task by women of color, like Kwok Pui-lan, for her misrepresentation, particularly of Chinese women.<sup>110</sup>

Indeed, a feminist theology of identity that is cognizant of multiple and shifting marginal identities of wo/men cannot but be situated in the context of what Christine Firer-Hinze speaks of as reflective solidarity. While Firer-Hinze describes this in terms of a dialogue between privileged and non-privileged women,<sup>111</sup> which I agree to, I reckon this should be expanded as critical reflective solidarity and be also articulated as a challenge for feminist theologians to engage in a theological dialogue not just across class but across and within race, religion, ethnicity, and borders as well.<sup>112</sup> The global expansion of patriarchy through capitalism and feminization of migration, plus the growing cultural and religious pluralism, the emergence of new and shifting marginal identities, and the rise of cross-cultural counter-globalization movements impel feminist theology to develop a theoretical discourse and analytic framework that can account for the causes and effects of these. It has to evolve strategies that link the local and the global in its social analysis. More concretely, Kwok says, it has to come up with an intercultural hermeneutics that heightens cross-cultural sensitivity

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"limits theoretical analysis as well as reinforces Western cultural imperialism." Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak echoes this by pointing out that Western feminists may also contribute to the further silencing of the subaltern (colonized) woman as they may employ approaches that actually operate within the larger context of imperialist discourses. See Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds., Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 196–220 and 66–111 respectively, as quoted in Musa W. Dube, "Postcoloniality, Feminist Spaces, and Religion," in *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse*, 104, 106.

<sup>110</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, "Unbinding Our Feet: Saving Brown Women and Feminist Religious Discourse," in *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse*, 69–79.

<sup>111</sup> Christine Firer-Hinze, "Identity in Feminist Theological Debate," 116–8.

<sup>112</sup> See Ina Praetorius, "In Search of the Feminine Condition: A Plea for a Women's Ecumene," *Concilium* 6 (1991): 8–10 for more comprehensive arguments on this.

and underscores the relation between cultural-religious production and socio-economic formation by studying more deeply the global connections in women's lives and cultures at the time of colonization for a better understanding of the current phase of globalization, and learning from and engaging in critical dialogue with cultural studies.<sup>113</sup> In expounding on the latter Kwok points out how studies and new theoretical approaches on women's hybrid and diasporic identities, which is exemplified by women migrants, can help feminist theologians construct discourse on cultural difference that takes into account the multiplicity and diversity of identities as well as the formation of new subject positions of women in globalization and the ambiguous areas "in between."

*From the Power of the Powerful to the Power of the Power-less*<sup>114</sup>

Power is a theme that runs through the DHs' lives. It is there in how they are subjected to multiple forms of oppression and in how they struggle day in and day out, individually or collectively, successfully or not. Isasi-Díaz says "power always rests with those who define the norm."<sup>115</sup> At first glance this will not elicit critical comments because it very much reflects prevailing perceptions and sentiments. Power, in traditional Christian theology, has to do with the majority (who may be the minority quantitatively but are given the label "majority" because they are the ones whose voice is heard and whose policies get implemented); with those who wield authority; and with those who dictate the course of his/herstory. In short, power is about domination or those who bring about oppression.

But, does it? I mean does power only have to do with the dominant majority? Is it always the monopoly of the powerful? The strategies for struggle by the DHs challenge this. Given the extensive forms (personal

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<sup>113</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, "Feminist Theology as Intercultural Discourse" in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed., Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 34–5.

<sup>114</sup> I write the term in this way as a critique to the manner in which the word is often used or interpreted with regard to the poor and the oppressed. Because Christian theology has fixatingly but unrealistically equated it with "without" power or the absence of power, the poor and oppressed as power-less are presented as powerless to mean literally without power or terribly and unimaginably oppressed that they do not resist or do not have the means to resist. As the suffix "less" indicates, the poor and oppressed as power-less have power albeit "smaller" than it should be. Moreover, they exercise power. They are not monolithic victims.

<sup>115</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "A Hispanic Garden in a Foreign Land," 98.

and collective), scope (political, socio-economic, and religio-cultural) and dimensions (local, national, and even transnational), not to mention its multiplicity and creativity, the strategies for struggle of the DHs show this is not the case. I believe their experience presents certain angles and faces of power that call for Christian theology to expand power as an analytical category from the power of the powerful to the power of the power-less.

Indeed, one aspect of Christian theology's discourse on power that the DHs' experience puts into question is its fixation with power as domination. Power is often presented as structural or positional power (*auctoritas*) or what the Bible calls "principalities and powers." Power based on authority is another way of describing this concept. But power is not just about authority or domination. It is also about resistance and I mean this not in the binary (either/or) way but as "both/and." Joanne Sharp et. al. describes this as the domination/resistance couplet. They contend that power operates in "myriad *entanglements*" and emphasize that "wound up in these entanglements are countless processes of domination and resistance which are always implicated in, and mutually constitutive of one another."<sup>116</sup> Power, as a dynamic interplay between resistance and domination and as played out in spatial conditions, endlessly circulates. Power then is exercised or practiced not only by the powerful through domination but also by the power-less through resistance. The notion that the poor and oppressed are power-less, taken to mean "without power," is a myth. And Christian theology is guilty of peddling this myth by its tendency to present the poor as "utterly" and "hegemonically" powerless or, in the case of women, as "dependents" and "victims." This should be critiqued not only because it is not fully representative of reality but also because it can be a self-serving agenda of the dominant elite. What I mean to say is, this kind of rhetoric can be utilized by those who dominate to keep the poor and oppressed in their place. In the case of the DHs, the H.K. Chinese's perpetuation of the "*amah*" and the "*muijai*" myths and calling the DHs "*banmui*" is part of keeping the DHs in their place.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Joanne Sharp et al. "Entanglements of Power: Geographies of domination/resistance," in *Entanglements of Power: Geographies of domination/resistance*, eds., Joanne Sharp et al. (London: Routledge, 2000), 1.

<sup>117</sup> Exalted by the Chinese as "superior servants" the *amahs* were actually the live-in migrant domestic workers from the Canton Delta before 1945 who took on

When it is not lambasting power based on position or authority Christian theology resorts to effacing it by situating it in the discourse on powerlessness, e.g. “There is power in powerlessness.” While this may seem to be meant to present power positively, the way it is done still presents power negatively since this has been used to legitimize passivity and even acceptance of oppression.<sup>118</sup> Hence, when I say power on the DHs’ part I am not talking about it in terms of “power in powerlessness” or “power as powerlessness.” Kyle Pasewark, in *A Theology of Power: Being Beyond Domination*, points out that if we want to articulate a theology of power beyond the discourse of domination we should refrain from this transvaluation or going to the other extreme and simply redefining power as weakness.<sup>119</sup>

The power exercised and manifested by the DHs, particularly in their strategies of resistance, is transforming power and not the power mired in talks about victimization, suffering, the cross, the crucified God, and the crucified people. It is not the romanticized power that is supposed to come out of patiently and passively bearing with the economic, political, and personal “limitations” of our situation and cultivating “the strength that is made perfect in weakness” or the “energy” that supposedly sustains (but actually chains) people in their weakness as Moltmann states and portrays in *Power of the Powerless*.<sup>120</sup> While I

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iconic proportions for the Chinese slaveholding population because of their “adherence to the classical standards of the master-servant relationship” and unquestioning dedication of their lives to their master’s family. The *muijais*, on the other hand, are young girls purchased from their families to be “used” as domestic servants. They are considered as properties and even concubines. See Andrea Sankar, “Female Domestic Service in Hong Kong,” in *Female Servants and Economic Development: Michigan Occasional Papers in Women’s Studies 1*, ed. Louise Tilly et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Women’s Studies Program), 54 and Maria Jaschok, *Concubines and Bondservants: The Social History of a Chinese Custom* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1988), 8, 45, 70, 72 quoted in Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 50 and 45 respectively.

<sup>118</sup> Even God, especially in Jesus, is a victim of this theologizing. God’s power is presented in an alienating way. He is either the all-mighty, all-powerful God—someone “up there” who should be appeased and be approached with fear and trembling—or the utterly powerless (read: helpless) Jesus on the cross. By emphasizing God’s greatness and sinful humanity’s littleness and unworthiness, theology has diminished one of God’s primary characteristics, which is love. Moreover, its *theologia crucis* cripples the human spirit and buries the cross in life-negating meanings (see section on Rethinking Suffering).

<sup>119</sup> See Kyle Pasewark, *A Theology of Power: Being Beyond Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>120</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Power of the Powerless* (London: SCM Press, 1983), ix–x.



recognize personal power<sup>121</sup>—that inner wisdom rooted in moral sensibilities, equilibrium, and serene disposition that we will overcome whatever trials that come our way—I have reservations about power couched in the language of weakness or powerlessness. More often than not, I find discourses along this line escapist and lull victims into a false sense of security and virtue that do not really empower them to address the cause of their suffering. In the above mentioned book by Moltmann, for instance, he discourages the power-less from being angry because if they do so, they will just “run [their] heads against the wall.”

What is wrong with being angry, anyway? Anger is neither right nor wrong. It is what we do with it that makes it right (Do we fight injustice because of it?) or wrong (Do we kill because of it?). It is, I think, one of the most under-estimated and maligned Christian virtues. Anger can be sacred, particularly when it serves as an impetus to critique and transform unjust relations. Anger can be transformative, especially when it is the passion that is born out of injustice; the outrage that longs, calls, and struggles for respect for humanity. “Anger denied subverts community. Anger expressed directly is a mode of taking the other seriously, of caring. The important point is that where feeling is evaded, where anger is hidden or goes unattended, masking itself, there the power of love, the power to act, to deepen relation atrophies and dies.”<sup>122</sup> Insofar as the work of love is the work of justice, anger, then, is a basic component of resistance. It is anger against the unjust practices of their employer that make the DHs refuse to finish or renew their contract, sign blank receipts, file cases, etc. It is outrage at the anti-migrant DH policies of the H.K. and Philippine government that drives them to the streets and to the Philippine consulate to protest. It is the passion for justice that emboldens them to take their case even to the higher authorities like the United Nations. And this anger, as a moving force for resistance, is power.

Power as can be exercised by the minority and as can be evinced from the DHs’ achievements out of their resistance strategies is not

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<sup>121</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock, “Understanding Personal Power and Discerning Structural Power,” *Voices from the Third World* Vol. XX1 No. 2 (December 1998): 69–78 discusses this in detail.

<sup>122</sup> Beverly Wildung Harrison, “The Power of Anger in the Work of Love: Christian Ethics for Women and Other Strangers,” in *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed., Carol S. Robb (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985): 15, 16.

the lame, passive, and weak power of defenselessness but of the active, liberative, and transforming kind. Christian theology has to take this into account if it is to give justice not just to the full meaning of the term but also to the struggle of the oppressed for justice. Pasewark contends that for contemporary theology to view power beyond domination it must look beyond politics as starting point since political theory is greatly responsible for the stagnation of power in the realm of domination. For Pasewark an acceptable notion of power must recognize power as omnipresent and not simply exercised occasionally by a few; productive and not simply repressive or destructive;<sup>123</sup> private and not just public; consistent with human freedom; and related to justice, love, and ethics.

Power needs to be construed as power-in-relation. This entails expanding the usual depiction of power as “power over” into a conception of power as “power with”. In doing so, the discourse will be much more wholistic in that “power with” not only captures the relational, oscillating, and shifting character of power. It also brings with it the notion and, especially, the experience of power from the perspective of the poor and oppressed.<sup>124</sup> This is the face of power that has not gotten much attention and elaboration in Christian theology, except in liberation theologies. But then again even liberation theologies, particularly classic Latin American liberation theology, are still limited in this aspect.

Classic Latin American liberation theology, for example, talks about the irruption of the poor or “poor power” but there never really has been a clear articulation on the “how” of this and the extent of the participation of the poor themselves, especially by women. Much of the writings focus on the analysis or exposition of what and who are the poor and oppressed and not so much on how the oppressed are combating oppression. Moreover, we only get to read and listen on behalf of the poor not so much from the poor themselves.<sup>125</sup> Elina

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<sup>123</sup> This has to do with the perception that power is something that should be neutralized, feared, hated, or destroyed. Of course, the fixation with power as domination either as the “evil forces” that oppress or the contemptible power of the oppressor is mainly responsible for this.

<sup>124</sup> Anna Karin Hamar, “Some Understandings of Power in Feminist Liberation Theologies,” *Feminist Theology* No. 12 (May 1996): 10–20 maintains that redefining power as “power with” also entails looking at power as “co-powering” and cooperation.

<sup>125</sup> Because of its preoccupation with power as economic and political power that is heavily based on institutional politics, classic liberation theology has not fully mined

Vuola asserts in *Limits of Liberation: Feminist Theology and the Ethics of Poverty and Reproduction* that this disadvantages women, especially since most prominent liberation theologians are clerics, highly educated, male, and of European ancestry. While stated to argue for the expansion of the generic term “poor” Vuola’s statement “If liberation theology has largely been the ‘voice of the voiceless’, now, those without voice are finding it and expressing themselves”<sup>126</sup> is, to me, a crashing indictment of classic liberation theologians’ underestimation of the many faces of the poor and their practice of power.

Power as power-in-relation will put in a lot of the missing pieces of the power puzzle. For one, it will open up the private realm where silent, various, intense and yet uncriticized women domestication, e.g. sexual abuse, takes place. And as the personal is made political, love—a much-neglected component of power as justice—is stressed. God’s power itself is experienced in companionship and mutual relationship. When power as a theological category is expanded this way, its richness, complexities, possibilities, and responsibilities are fully mined and surfaced. The discourse will not just be about justice as equality but justice as love and mutuality, as well.

#### *From Multicultural to Intercultural Theology*

The DHs suffer from segregation and discrimination due to their cultural and religious difference. But while culture and religion have been factors for their oppression these have also been primary means for their struggle. As can be gleaned in the “historic” “Battle of Chater Road,” the report of the Diocese of H.K., and the religious conversion, especially to Islam by the DHs something significant happens when two or more cultures and religions come face to face with each other, which theology has not adequately articulated, even with its talk

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the richness and possibilities that come from the poor and the oppressed themselves. While it talks about the irruption of the poor and empowerment of the poor, one gets the impression that the power practiced by the poor is heavily external in origin. It is as if it is something ascribed or given to them from the outside by the theologians who speak for them or conscientize them. This takes away the internal aspect or the struggle of the poor themselves as they, in their day-to-day life of relating with people, who either oppress them or suffer like them, construct their own power and lay claim to it even without much conscientization or mobilization of NGOs or church people. In fact, we have so many of these “unarticulated liberation theologies” born out of the dominated’s everyday negotiation and struggle against their oppression.

<sup>126</sup> Elina Vuola, *Limits of Liberation: Feminist Theology and the Ethics of Poverty and Reproduction*, 61.

about multicultural theology. There is an active and dynamic process that goes on in the meeting of cultures and religions that theology, as a “multicultural” discourse, does not sufficiently capture. Hence, I suggest an expanded way of looking at cultural and religious pluralism from the perspective of “multi” to the perspective of “inter.”

“Multi” is a prefix, which means “having many”, “more than two” or “many times more than.”<sup>127</sup> Hence, “multicultural” may refer to a situation where one or more cultures and or religions live beside the other or another and exist in a detached manner from each other. Moreover, “multi” can also be a shortened word for “multiple” which is actually another word for “two or more”, or “plural” cultures. Hence, to say “multicultural” is to simply refer to the existence of two or more cultures or religions in a society or to a state of plurality of cultures or religions. Hence, to speak of a “multi” phenomenon is just capturing the surface and not the currents underneath. It could just signify, indicate, or denote the presence of two or more things or people, in this case, cultures and religions, in a certain place without necessarily speaking of the dynamics involved. To say, for instance, “multicultural H.K.” may just mean a place inhabited by people with different cultures or religions and not necessarily refer to the set of relations, the inter-action, or the dynamics in the interaction that happens, when these different people have to see, speak, touch, smell, or hear each other in buses, trains, shops, markets, cinemas, etc.; work together in offices; live right next to each other; or live under the same roof.

Meanwhile, “inter”, which is also a prefix, means “between”, “among” or “with” each other. Most importantly, it means “mutual.”<sup>128</sup> To speak of “inter,” I believe, is to grasp what is in between; to discover whatever it is that is born out of the inter-action between cultures. To view cultures and religions based on the “inter” perspective is to capture the encounter, whether positive or negative, superficial or deep, between and among cultures and religions. To look at it the “inter” way is to probe the depth and bring out the subtleties in the meeting of the two powerful and fundamental markers of people’s identity, i.e., culture and religion. To view, for example, the DHs’ experience in H.K. from an intercultural perspective could mean surfacing the tensions and

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<sup>127</sup> As defined in *Webster’s New World Dictionary School and Office Edition*. Philippine Edition.

<sup>128</sup> As defined in *Webster’s New World Dictionary School and Office Edition*. Philippine Edition.

maneuverings to domesticate the DHs' culture and religion and the changes or transformations that happen in the process of the encounter between the DHs and H.K. society, particularly the Chinese. As Kwok Pui-lan says, to do theology the intercultural way is to attend to "the interaction and juxtaposition, as well as tension and resistance when two or more cultures are brought together sometimes organically and sometimes through violent means."<sup>129</sup>

Doing theology the intercultural way is actually a very important challenge and calls for theology today to be able to truly and fully capture what is really happening in societies and in a world that is increasingly marked by cultural and religious plurality. While looking at it from the "multi" perspective can be just quantitative, regarding it from an "inter" perspective can be both quantitative and qualitative. While the former can be just descriptive, the latter can be evaluative. As such, the latter, I believe, is the more faithful way to a theology with a view to (and done in the spirit of) justice, hospitality, mutuality and, ultimately, catholicity.

Kwok, in arguing for an intercultural approach to feminist theology, gathers the points I am trying to put forward when she says that, "feminist theology is not only multicultural or rooted in multiple communities and cultural contexts, but is also intercultural because different cultures are not isolated but intertwined with one another."<sup>130</sup> This much is true not just due to colonialism and the cultural hegemony of the West, as Kwok says, but more so because of the global cultural integration that is happening side by side with the globalization of religion, politics, and economics.

If theology is to be contextual it must attend to this growing context of human experience. If it is to be an articulation of and in dialogue with the human experience it must take as its starting point for reflection the multiculturalism that marks many societies, like H.K., today. If it has to offer a vision especially that of and for the kingdom of God it must reflect on this multiculturalism the intercultural way. As it attends to a context that is local and at the same time global, this new way of doing theology can also be another way of theologically articulating a new catholicity that I have argued for in my discussion on the

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<sup>129</sup> Kwok Pui-Lan, "Feminist theology as intercultural discourse," 25.

<sup>130</sup> Kwok Pui-Lan, "Feminist theology as intercultural discourse," 24–5.

implications of migrant religion.<sup>131</sup> And this brings me to the greatest challenge for the development of a truly intercultural theology, that is, the articulation of a theology that is not just about the superficial coming together of cultures and religions, where one is superimposed or juxtaposed on the other or assimilated by the other, but a theology informed by the kindom values of justice, equality, and mutuality; a theology where one (culture or religion) is not superior over the other; a theology where the migrant's culture and religion is not forced on its knees to assimilate but is allowed to freely breathe and flourish.

To affirm plurality is to recognize catholicity. When plurality is approached from the perspective of catholicity it becomes accepted as richness. This is a task where dialogue becomes a way of life as it is precisely through intercultural dialogue that we become most clearly aware of our own categories of thought.<sup>132</sup> Theology, in this way, becomes doing theology from the interstice or the places-in-between. Rita Nakashima Brock, a Japanese-American feminist theologian (thus an example of one who inhabits two cultures and religions), proposes what could be a foundation for an intercultural theology, i.e., interstitial integrity. While Brock speaks of this interstitial integrity as a category for theological anthropology in the context of a Christian theology of identity I would like to mine here its significance for intercultural theology. In the first place, the question of identity is at the heart of the need for developing an intercultural theology. Moreover, interstitial integrity as the refusal to rest in one place and make constricting either/or decisions<sup>133</sup> is a fundamental attitude of an intercultural person. By living in the interstice people do not only become keenly aware of cultural [and religious] expressions as they develop

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<sup>131</sup> As Frans Wijsen, "Intercultural Theology and the Mission of the Church," <http://www.sedos.org>, accessed January 19, 2005 clarifies, intercultural theology is not a new discipline but a new perspective and a new method in theology. Broadly conceived, it is the theological reflection on the localization and globalization of contexts and/or the interaction between cultures, in particular between Christianity and the different world cultures (including their religions). In a word, it is the theological reflection on the "intercultural encounter."

<sup>132</sup> Michael Amaladoss, "Conclusion," in *Globalization and Its Victims: As Seen by its Victims*, ed., Michael Amaladoss (New Delhi: Vidjayoti Education and Welfare Society, 1999), 229.

<sup>133</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock, "Interstitial Integrity: Reflections toward an Asian-American Women's Theology," in *Introduction to Christian Theology: Contemporary North American Perspectives*, ed., Roger A. Badham (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 90 quoted in Kwok Pui-lan, "Feminist theology as intercultural discourse," 32.

and change over time and in place<sup>134</sup> but also find diverse cultural [and religious] resources for their spiritual empowerment and sustenance. In this way interstitial integrity provides the ground on which people who live amidst cultural and religious plurality are able to deal with, recognize, and accept differences in order to be able to live in harmony with diversity. Ultimately, plurality is not a problem to be solved but a mystery and a reality to be lived.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The chapter began the journey of meaning-making and sense-making by detecting and describing the theological themes that arise from the DHs' experience of struggle. Succinctly, the search yielded three themes, which struck at the heart of the issues raised by the struggle of the DHs. First, there is migration which emerged as *locus theologicus* by virtue of its re-definition of the human condition. Identity and subjectivity also arose as themes of concern as possibilities or new ways to apprehend them appeared more clearly in the struggle of the DHs. Last but not the least is the gender issue, which remains the critical theological challenge given the fact that the age-old bone of contention on justice for women, particularly in relation to the (female) body and suffering appeared again and have mutated and expanded into the global scene based on the struggle of the DHs.

Given such immense and complex challenges it is imperative for theology not to be stuck where it is at the moment. It must move on. As the chapter's opening quote exhorts "theology is always on the way." Hence, it should be able to expand its boundaries and open up spaces. It must be able to go beyond being an exercise of "faith seeking understanding" into a task of faith seeking *empowering* understanding. It must not only attend to the festering wound, that is, the gender issue. It must allow itself, as well, to be challenged by the significant developments of the twenty-first century and enter into a dialogue with other cultures, religions, and theologies. Lastly, Christian theology should expand its boundaries and create more spaces by not emphasizing that which enslaves but that which saves and by speak-

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<sup>134</sup> Susanne Scholz, "Theologizing from the Interstice: A German Diasporic Perspective," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* Vol. 18, No. 1 (Spring 2002): 87-91 gives an example of this.

ing not just about the metaphysics of but the aesthetics of existence as well. It must insist that in God's great economy of salvation love and life not suffering and death are the Christian's final experience. These notions provide the rationale for the next endeavor which is to explore particular hermeneutical frameworks, that will serve as the DHs' conversation partners, and, consequently, as guides toward articulating the features of a theology of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration.





## CHAPTER FOUR

### EXPLORING THEOLOGICAL MARKERS: DELORES WILLIAMS' THEOLOGY OF SURVIVAL QUALITY OF LIFE AND JUNG YOUNG LEE'S THEOLOGY OF MARGINALITY

Thus, it is important to look for spaces within which theology as a form of “practical wisdom” might take place...in order to transform and redeem the world.

—Elaine Graham—<sup>1</sup>

#### INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 3 we began the journey towards “faith seeking empowering understanding” by traveling to the boundaries and seeking to expand them. More specifically, we identified and discussed theological challenges and perspectives that arise out of the struggle of the DHs. The present chapter continues the journey by exploring two hermeneutical frameworks that can serve as theological “markers,” through which the previous chapter’s theological challenges and perspectives can be more systematically reflected upon. These “markers” consist of Delores Williams’ theology of survival quality of life and Jung Young Lee’s theology of marginality.

The chapter unfolds in four sections:

The first presents a theological profile of the African-American<sup>2</sup> womanist theologian Delores Williams. This profile consists of a sketch of the four elements of Williams’ theological method followed by a description of the *leit motif* of her theological thought, i.e. womanist theology in-between Black liberation theology and feminist theology.

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine Graham, “From Space to Woman-Space,” *Feminist Theology* No. 9 (May 1995): 33.

<sup>2</sup> This will be used interchangeably with “Black.”

The second revolves on the discussion and critique of the key themes of Delores Williams' theology of survival quality of life. The section opens with an exposition on surrogacy as Black women's oppression. Williams reckons surrogacy defiles Black women as it tames, controls, and violates Black women's bodies and ruptures and obliterates their spirit and sense of self. But she also contends Black women struggle against their surrogacy. Hence the discussion moves on to Black women's strategies to survive their surrogacy. This survival struggle and/or the struggle for survival quality of life is, what Williams identifies as, the basic character of Black women's lives. At this juncture the discussion proceeds to describe the traditional and cultural sources that are at the heart of Williams' womanist God-talk. It starts with the cross and atonement, whose problematic interpretation and utilization, particularly by conventional African-American churches, help clarify Williams' articulation of Jesus' ministerial vision as the locus of redemption. What follows is that of the wilderness and/or wilderness experience, which Williams advances as the more relevant and inclusive representation of the experience of Black people, especially for Black women. Within the struggle for survival and embedded in Black peoples' wilderness experience is the Black church. As such, a description of the Black Church—the core symbol of African-Americans' struggle for survival—segues into the discussion. Then, a general appreciative critique and my own over-all appreciation and critique of Williams' theology of survival quality of life serve as a closure to this section.

The third follows the format of the first section, this time with the profile of Korean-American theologian Jung Young Lee. It begins with a sketch of the basic feature of Lee's theological method, i.e., contextual approach then proceeds into a presentation of the *yin-yang* way of thinking, which makes up the *leit motif* of Lee's theological thought.

The fourth and last section tackles Jung Young Lee's theology of marginality as the key to multicultural theology. The section opens with a discussion on its key themes beginning with Lee's conceptualization of marginality as "in-between," "in-both," and "in-beyond" then proceeds to how and why Jesus is the marginal person *par excellence*. What follows is a presentation of the implications of marginality to following Jesus, particularly in relation to the church and/or what it means to be a marginal church. The section ends with a general appreciative critique and my own over-all appreciation and critique of the said key themes.

## DELORES WILLIAMS: A THEOLOGICAL PROFILE

Now retired as the Paul Tillich Chair in Theology and Culture at Union Theological Seminary (New York) Delores Williams has not published much but she has left a significant legacy. Her landmark work *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* is considered “a classic.”<sup>3</sup> She is called the “proto-womanist” and “premier womanist.”<sup>4</sup> Her “powerful critique of the biblical, social, cultural and political constraints on even the most liberal thinking about the nature of God and what such ideas about God mean for human agency and human relating”<sup>5</sup> is considered a remarkable feat. “Against the traditional standards of the history of Christian thought” Williams came up with an innovative theology that served to “expose and repair major cleavages between theory and method, faith and reason, race and gender, and history and culture in Black theological scholarship.”<sup>6</sup> Hence, tributes in her honor are very much in order, especially upon her retirement.<sup>7</sup>

The grand-daughter of a former slave, who grew up in the southern part of the U.S., Delores Williams witnessed the violent discrimination of the Black race by the white populace which, according to her, continues to exist today in different ways. Hence, as a theologian, her context as an African-American and, most especially, as an

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<sup>3</sup> See Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993). As of May 2002 this has gone on its seventh printing.

<sup>4</sup> Williams is credited not just for being the first to use the word “womanist” in theological reflections but also for the critical exploration and elaboration of the theological method and content of womanist “God-talk.” Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 133.

<sup>5</sup> Joanne Marie Terrell, “‘Something of God’ in Delores Williams: Poet, Prophet, Premier Womanist,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review: Festschrift for Delores Williams* Vol. 58, Nos. 3–4 (2004): 1.

<sup>6</sup> Dianne M. Stewart, “Womanist God-Talk on the Cutting Edge of Theology and Black Religious Studies: Assessing the Contribution of Delores Williams,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review: Festschrift for Delores Williams* Vol. 58, Nos. 3–4 (2004): 65 identify five of these “innovations”: 1) womanist approach to God-talk; 2) use of Hagar as a biblical narrative of hope and survival; 3) womanist approach to the problem of theodicy; 4) deconstruction of the theological invitation to partake in suffering within Christian traditions (atonement theory); and 5) attention to the motif of Africa in African-American religion and culture.

<sup>7</sup> Aside from the festschrift mentioned above the holding of a conference celebrating her work that was attended by prominent feminist theologians across race and religious traditions, e.g., Kelly Brown Douglas, Judith Plaskow, M. Shawn Copeland, Carter Heyward, Kwok Pui-lan, and Letty Russell, is also worth noting here.

African-American *woman* and the realities of other Black women, largely informs her “text.”

*Basic Features of Williams’ Theological Method*

The method of doing theology, which has African-American women’s experience as a primary theological source, is at the heart of Delores Williams’ theological method.<sup>8</sup> She modestly confesses to particularly using the first of what she views as the two-step method of womanist theology, that is, providing pieces of fact and providing pieces of vision subjected to the critical reflection of the particular theologian.<sup>9</sup> Within this approach African-American women’s literature and her own experience also figures as an important source for Williams. This theological approach of hers evolved four particular features or elements of a womanist way of doing theology.<sup>10</sup>

First, Williams does theology multidialogically. She draws from and engages not just her very own experience as an African-American woman but from a diversity of sources, e.g., novels, plays, spirituals, slave narratives, poems, autobiographies, testimonies, blues, jazz. She engages not just the classic sources, e.g. Scripture and Christian tradition, but non-traditional ones, as well, particularly folk religion and culture. Moreover, she utilizes biblical texts or personalities, that are not often discussed or never used as sources, particularly in feminist theological discourses,<sup>11</sup> and engages other hermeneutical frameworks within the field of theology, e.g. feminist theology,<sup>12</sup> and those outside the theological discipline, e.g. sociology, anthropology, history, literature, and even music.

Secondly, Williams theologizes with liturgical intent. More specifically, she does theology in a way that it serves as a critique of the

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<sup>8</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, xi.

<sup>9</sup> The second step is constructing theology. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Delores Williams, “Womanist Theology: Black Women’s Voices,” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History* Volume Two: 1980–1992, ed., James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (New York: Orbis Books, 1993): 269–71.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, how she appropriates the stigmatized biblical character Jezebel in Delores Williams, “Gospel, Culture, and Women in an African-American Context,” in World Council of Churches, *Women’s Perspectives: Articulating the Liberating Power of the Gospel* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996): 19–20.

<sup>12</sup> Unless stated otherwise feminist theology is used in this chapter to refer to white/Western feminist theology or the feminist theology evolved by white/Western middle class women, particularly North American women.

thought, worship, and action of the church, particularly African-American churches. This is because, for her, it is important for theology to search for new interpretations that can honor oppressed people's experiences and struggles, particularly in identifying and elaborating justice-based or justice-oriented approaches to worship and praxis.<sup>13</sup>

Thirdly, Williams does theology didactically. Convinced that theology must not only be descriptive but transformative, Williams uses and reflects on issues of moral and ethical choice, particularly justice, survival, and quality of life, in much of her writings. For her, theology must be a place of teaching and learning in the Black church or, that it should teach Christians new insights about what it means to be Christian. This feature of Williams' theological method is noticeable in how she often ends her writings with the contributions and suggestions for practical applications of the concept or issue in question.<sup>14</sup>

Lastly, Williams does theology imaginatively. As a theologian she believes theology must be engaged in a way that it becomes a commitment both to reason *and* to validity of female imagery and metaphorical language. Not surprisingly, Williams' writings are imbued with imaginative or symbolic language and are a rich linguistic exercise utilizing female imagination, metaphors, and myths. Such imaginative words include "demonarchy," "defilement," and "lifeline politics."

#### *Leit Motif in Williams' Theological Thought*

Williams' theological imagination is deeply shaped by her experience as an African-American, particularly as an African-American woman. Her experiences and that of fictional and real African-American women as well as her passion for justice, equality, and mutuality primarily inform and orient her theology. Significant influences on her

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Delores Williams, "Rituals of Resistance in Womanist Worship," in *Women at Worship: Interpretations of North American Diversity*, ed., Marjorie Procter-Smith and Janet Watson (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Press, 1993): 215–23.

<sup>14</sup> Delores Williams, "Women's Oppression and Lifeline Politics in Black Women's Religious Narratives" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* Vol. 1 (1985): 59–71 and Delores Williams, "Straight Talk, Plain Talk: Womanist Words about Salvation in a Social Context," in *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation, and Transformation*, ed., Emilie M. Townes (New York: Orbis Books, 1997): 97–121 are good examples of this.

include Paul Tillich<sup>15</sup> and Alice Walker.<sup>16</sup> But, as a theologian, womanist theology,<sup>17</sup> in-between Black liberation theology and feminist theology, is the basic motif of Williams' theological thought.

For Williams, theology from a Black woman's perspective cannot but be "womanist."<sup>18</sup> It should bring Black women's experience in the discourse and work in the churches and into the discourse of *all* Christian theology, from which it has previously been excluded. At the same time, Williams contends it is imperative for womanist theology to dialogue with Black liberation theology and feminist theology.

Womanist theology itself emerged as both an affirmation and a counter-narrative to Black liberation theology and feminist theology. Thus, it is organically related to both. Williams affirms this relationship saying

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<sup>15</sup> See Stephen Butler, "Socially Relevant Theology and the Courage to Be: The Influence of Paul Tillich on the Womanist Theology of Delores S. Williams," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* Vol. 58, Nos. 3-4 (2004): 95-111.

<sup>16</sup> Alice Walker's influence primarily has to do with her definition of womanist in *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*. See Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi as cited in Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 243 (footnote no. 5).

<sup>17</sup> This is a form of theological reflection by African-American women as a response and critique to the sexism within the Black movement and racism and classism within the women's movement. It specifically arose in the 1980s in the U. S. among Black women religious scholars who called themselves "womanists" (and their theology, womanist theology) based on Pulitzer-prize winning novelist and activist Alice Walker's definition of the term ("womanist"). Womanist religious scholarship began with essays from Delores Williams and Toinette Eugene and the publication of three important texts by Katie Cannon, Renita Weems, and Jacquelyn Grant. See Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 55-7, 60-3, 67-77.

<sup>18</sup> Drawing from Alice Walker's definition Williams writes on the "womanist" as one who: 1) is informed by the guidance and counsel that mothers offer their daughters; 2) is anti-colorist (especially in view of Black men's preference for white-skinned women) and names poor Black folk as the locus of its values; 3) values women as leaders in the African-American community, demonstrates a concern for survival and for the building and maintenance of community, and is concerned about the whole human community; 4) loves feast and celebration as she loves her folks, art, music, dance, food, the spirit, and herself "regardless"; 5) is able to appreciate her blackness and her body, particularly her roundness; 6) does not bear more than her share of the burden in the struggle for justice; 7) is also concerned with her own well-being; 8) values mothering and nurturing; and 9) does not encourage divisions based on homophobia, colorism, or classism. In a nutshell, a womanist, according to Williams, is one who is committed to and struggles for selfhood, survival, and quality of life among her people as well as for the survival and wholeness of humanity. Interestingly, Williams adds hospitality to Walker's list of objects of women's love in Delores Williams, "Womanist Theology," in *Women's Visions: Theological Reflection, Celebration, Action*, ed., Ofelia Ortega (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995): 119.

womanist theology identifies and critiques Black male oppression of Black females while it also critiques white racism that oppresses all African-Americans, female and male. Like white feminist theology, womanist theology affirms the full humanity of women. But womanist theology also critiques white feminist participation in the perpetuation of white supremacy, which continues to dehumanize Black women.<sup>19</sup>

Williams, indeed, asserts persistently that Black liberation theology, with its claims of the blackness of God and God's preference for Black people was a stepping stone for the development of womanist theology. For example, she points at how Black liberation theologians, e.g. James Deotis Roberts, have been very helpful in expressing the depth and pain Black people have experienced because of racism in North America, and how much of the racial analysis of womanist theology is based on Black liberation theology. But she also insists there was not "enough material" in Black liberation theology to make it fit Black women's experience. In her own words:

Black male theologians provided only masculine images of God. Their illustrations of the character of racial oppression in the United States were primarily drawn from male authors and from male experience. Black women's intellectual, cultural, political, aesthetic and social ideas had not been used by Black male theologians to construct the ideas in Black liberation theology. Womanist theology had to include more than an analysis of white racism.<sup>20</sup>

Williams, then, reckons Black liberation theology could dialogue with or learn from womanist theology in terms of theological method and content. In the area of method, for instance, womanist theology contributes to Black liberation theology's enlargement of its methodological perspectives, particularly in biblical appropriation/interpretation on God's liberating activity on behalf of all the oppressed. Black liberation theology subscribes to the liberationist tradition of biblical appropriation. But, Williams reckons, the female-centered tradition within African-American biblical appropriation, which Williams

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<sup>19</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, xiv.

<sup>20</sup> Williams, "Womanist Theology," in *Women's Visions*, 121. In Williams, "A Womanist Perspective on Sin," in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed., Emilie M. Townes (New York: Orbis Books, 1993): 146-7, for example, she points out that unlike Cone's concept of sin, the womanist notion of sin takes seriously the human body and its sexual resources as well as Black women's depleted self-esteem. The womanist understanding of sin is unique, she says further, because it makes parallels between the defilement of Black women's bodies and the defilement of nature.



names “survival/quality of life tradition,” and has the story of Hagar as narrated in the Old Testament and as she was referred to by Paul in the New Testament as the validating paradigm, challenges Black liberation theology’s liberation tradition of biblical appropriation, which has the exodus event and Luke 4 as the validating biblical paradigm from the Old and New Testament. Williams avers the “survival quality of life tradition” opens up more possibilities for African-Americans, in general, and African-American women, in particular, because it lifts up female activity (hence more inclusive) and de-emphasizes male authority. She also contends the liberation tradition’s normative claim that God is the liberator of the poor and oppressed is problematic. She insists, as Hagar’s (and Black women’s) story shows, God does not always liberate all the oppressed. And in the face of the historical and continuing threats to African-Americans’ survival as a people, Williams asserts, Hagar and her wilderness experience is a more adequate and inclusive paradigm for speaking of God’s liberating activity for African-Americans in general.

In the area of content womanist God-talk, according to Williams, challenges Black liberation theology’s understanding of incarnation, revelation, Jesus Christ, and reconciliation. Her critique on the atonement, for example, challenges Black liberation theology’s articulation of the incarnation and the cross.<sup>21</sup> With regard to the incarnation, she thinks if Black liberation theologians remove their sexist lens they can see, that God’s self-disclosure happened not only in Jesus Christ but also in a woman, that is, Mary. Moreover, Williams reckons womanist theology nuances the meaning of “means” in the ethical principle supporting the struggle for liberation. She contends some Black male liberation theologians have, on occasion, endorsed an ethical principle of “liberation by any means necessary,” which insinuates that the oppressed are free of all predetermined and moral constraints. But, she says, while the womanist “means” of survival and a positive quality of life may be free of moral constraints imposed by alien social forces, “the design and character of the means of the struggle are governed by Black women’s communication with God through prayer, by their faith

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<sup>21</sup> More on Williams’ critique of the atonement and the cross later in this chapter. Suffice it to say here that Williams is convinced Black women’s experience of oppression challenges Black liberation theology’s understanding of the cross, particularly that of James Robert Deotis, because it reinforces Black women’s suffering by virtue of its conflation with reconciliation. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 168–9.

in God's presence with them in the struggle, by their absolute dependence upon God to support resistance and provide sustenance."<sup>22</sup>

In the case of feminist theology Williams also acknowledges that it has contributed a lot to the development of womanist theology. She names, for instance, Rosemary Radford Ruether's normative principle of the "full humanity of women" as a critical contribution to womanist theology.<sup>23</sup> She, however, also unwaveringly writes on the unexamined and unacknowledged racism of white women and how they can learn from womanist God-talk.

One possibility for dialogue between womanist and feminist theology, according to Williams, consists in the understanding of the meaning of "what is acceptably female" in various cultural contexts. Williams argues that this will not only lead to a real critique of the biblical text's provision of female models and the limitations of female appropriation of these models in different cultures. It will also unmask oppressive cultural constructions of acceptable female identity. With regard to Mary, for instance, Williams thinks it is problematic to uphold her as an ideal for womanhood, especially for Black womanhood, because she (Mary) has been co-opted for the advancement of white supremacy.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, Williams proposes an assessment of feminist theological anthropologies insofar as these use white women as the exclusive models of female humanity.

Another talking point concerns the revision of the term *patriarchy*. Williams maintains though many white feminists speak of multi-layered oppression (racism, sexism, and classism) they do not give serious attention to the ways in which they participate in the oppression of Black people.<sup>25</sup> Williams suggests broadening the feminist understanding of women's experience by adding a third pole, i.e., "women's relational experience with women."<sup>26</sup> She believes this is important to

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<sup>22</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 176–7.

<sup>23</sup> Williams herself unabashedly reveals in *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 10 how she still needs to dialogue with the work of other white feminist theologians, e.g. Carter Heyward's position on "mutual relation" and "righting relationships" and Beverly Harrison's work in women's reproduction rights.

<sup>24</sup> Williams also thinks Mary's description of herself as a servant does not make her viable as a model for free womanhood since this female servanthood language can be socially appropriated in patriarchal societies to make women's "servanthood" look like "women's choice." Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 179–83.

<sup>25</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 185.

<sup>26</sup> Williams, "Women's Oppression and Lifeline Politics in Black Women's Religious Narratives," 70.

examine women's positive and negative participation in the culture of women and so new redemptive possibilities could emerge for *all* women and the boundaries of feminist theology could be extended beyond the social and religious concerns of Anglo-American middle-class women.<sup>27</sup>

Lastly, the differing and sometimes opposing hermeneutical positions can also be a subject for dialogue between womanist and feminist theologians. In using the Bible, for instance, Williams declares that while womanists engage it with a hermeneutic of suspicion the way feminists do, they also approach it with a hermeneutic of affirmation. This means that not-commonly used data, especially data from cultural tradition other than those of white females and white males,<sup>28</sup> should be used for feminist theological reflections.<sup>29</sup>

#### DELORES WILLIAMS' THEOLOGY OF SURVIVAL QUALITY OF LIFE

Within Williams' womanist God-talk the struggle for survival quality of life by Black women is a dominant theme. In fact, throughout her writings Williams steadfastly interrogates and reflects on the struggle for survival of Black people, in general, and Black women, in particular. This systematized reflections of Williams about how Black women survive the threats to their well-being and/or the ethic of survival and quality of life, that characterize their lives, is what is embedded in her theology of survival quality of life.

#### *Key Themes*

Williams' method of doing theology, as providing pieces of fact and pieces of vision, is illustrated beautifully in the key themes of her theology of survival quality of life. These critical "pieces" namely surro-

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<sup>27</sup> Williams, "Women's Oppression and Lifeline Politics in Black Women's Religious Narratives," 70.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, "Black Women's Literature and the Task of Feminist Theology," in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, eds., Clarissa W. Atkinson et al. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985): 102. See also Williams, "Women's Oppression and Lifeline Politics in Black Women's Religious Narratives," 70.

<sup>29</sup> Williams makes a case for this based on the womanist task of taking into account the "African" part of the African-American culture as this means not only dialoguing with contemporary African women but also critiquing the Afrocentric biblical tradition. Williams thinks oppressed people living in diaspora put different emphasis upon biblical texts and identify with different biblical stories.

gacy, survival strategies, the cross and redemption, wilderness, and the Black church come together like a mosaic that eloquently weaves partial facts about Black women and partial visions of the missing parts of Black women's experience.<sup>30</sup> The following discussion of these key themes sheds light on this.

### *Surrogacy*

According to Williams' theology of survival quality of life Black women experience oppression as (social-role) surrogacy. This surrogacy comes in two modes: coerced and voluntary. Coerced surrogacy, which primarily occurred in the antebellum period, refers to the condition in which people and systems more powerful than Black people forced Black women to function in roles that ordinarily would have been filled by someone else. This pervaded three areas in the lives of Black women: nurturance, field labor, and sexuality.

The abuse of nurturing functions is best imaged by the southern black mammies. These female house slaves were made to fill in the role of the slave-owner's wife. They attended to domestic matters or usually did "women's work," e.g. cleaning, cooking, sewing, and tending children. They were the premier servants devoted to nurturing the entire white family, including teaching and instilling values in white children. But while they held some kind of value and exerted some kind of power in the southern households,<sup>31</sup> they were often not treated well in their old age. Many were abandoned while some were turned out to die.<sup>32</sup>

Slave women, who worked in the field or plantation and were forced into doing work ordinarily done by men,<sup>33</sup> meanwhile, illustrate coerced surrogacy in the area of labor. They hauled logs, drove out

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<sup>30</sup> Diane Stewart, "Womanist God-Talk on the Cutting Edge of Theology and Black Religious Studies," 67.

<sup>31</sup> Williams reckons the mammy role was probably the most powerful and authoritative role Black women slaves were able to fill as many of them were given full charge of the household. The story of the mother of Katherine Epps, who was very well-liked by her mistress, that she (mistress) dismissed the overseer who whipped "the woman whom everyone called 'Mammy' depicts this. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 63.

<sup>32</sup> See the case of Frederick Douglass's grandmother cited in Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 64.

<sup>33</sup> These masculinized female slaves were less respected than the mammies; given no recognition for their service; seldom realized the endearment of the white folks (as did some mammies); got worse food and clothing; and often received more brutal punishment.

hogs, set posts into the ground for fences, drove ox wagons, tended mills, plowed, planted, and harvested crops just like men. Some were made to work longer hours than men in a phenomenon Black feminist scholar bell hooks calls the “masculinization of the black female.”<sup>34</sup> Others suffered worse as they were constrained to doing tasks associated with both male and female roles at the same time.<sup>35</sup> Like some of the mammies, slave women in the field sometimes met death in the hands of their owners.<sup>36</sup>

Coerced surrogacy in the area of sexuality, in the meantime, saw Black women being made to stand in place of white women in providing sexual pleasure for white male slave-owners. Because of the then existing Victorian ideal of true womanhood, whereby sex between white men and their wives is supposed to be for procreation and not for pleasure, many white males turned to slave women for the latter. Propped up by the “fancy trade,”<sup>37</sup> which institutionalized female-slave/master sexual liaisons, slave women were turned (often deceived) into mistresses and, worse, as “breeders.”<sup>38</sup> But making Black women

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<sup>34</sup> bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 22 cited in Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 65.

<sup>35</sup> Consider, for example, the case of Hetty, as narrated in Mary Prince, “The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave,” in Henry Gates, *Six Women's Narratives* (first published in London, England by F. Westley and A.H. Davis, 1831), 6 quoted in Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 65–6. Hetty was taxed to her utmost. After milking the cows she puts the sweet potatoes on for supper. She then fetches the sheep and pens them in the fold; drives home the cattle and stakes them about the pond side; feeds and rubs down the master's horse and gives the hogs and cows their supper; prepares the beds, undresses the children, and lays them to sleep; gives Mary Prince, her fellow slave, her supper and a blanket to sleep upon, which she spreads for her in the passage before the door.

<sup>36</sup> After one of the cows got loose a pregnant Hetty (mentioned above) was stripped naked and was flogged by her master so hard till she was covered with blood. She got such a terrible beating she untimely gave birth to a dead child. She herself later died after her body and limbs swelled and was left to die on a mat in the kitchen. Mary Prince, “The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave,” 7 quoted in Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 66.

<sup>37</sup> This was a special kind of slave trading whereby beautiful black women are sold or bought for the sole purpose of becoming the mistresses of wealthy slave-owners. Some of these, however, were also sold to be slaves in other plantations. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 69–70.

<sup>38</sup> Breeder women are often made to give birth until they were no longer able to have children. Margaret Walker, *Jubilee* (New York: Bantam Books, 1966), 4 quoted in Williams, “Women's Oppression and Lifeline Politics in Black Women's Religious Narratives,” 60 cites a breeder named Hetta, who died at the age of twenty-nine after siring fifteen children for her master. When beating, overworking, raping, and making breeders out of Black women do not work slave-owners hire men called “Negro

breeders was not just for the slave-owner's sexual pleasure. It was also for economic reasons, i.e., there will be more slaves to work on the farm, or slave-owners can earn from selling the children as slaves to other white men.

These three forms of coerced surrogacy, Williams claims, are partly responsible for the negative stereotypes on Black women in contemporary America. The mammy role has given rise to the image of Black women as perpetual mother figures—religious, fat, asexual, loving children better than themselves—the masculinized Black women gave birth to the idea that Black women are superwomen—women who are not feminine and with far more physical strength and greater capacity for pain than white women—; and the slave-woman/slave-owner sexual liaison contributed to the image of Black women as “loose, over-sexed, erotic, readily responsive to the sexual advances of men, especially white men,” or “as ‘fallen’ woman, the whore, the slut, the prostitute.”<sup>39</sup>

These forms of coerced surrogacy also undermined slave women's self-esteem and self worth. The appropriation of their sexuality, labor, and their capacity to nurture by the white ruling class, to provide economic benefits and personal comforts for white men and women, and the continual violence this entailed, destroyed the bodies and spirits of many Black women. But Williams contends religion also has a role in it. The oppressive interpretations of the gospel the slaveholders brought to the slaves<sup>40</sup> contributed to the slaves' oppression and, consequently, Black women's coerced surrogacy. Williams also argues, that based on

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breakers” or “Spirit breakers” to break the spirit of slaves who seemed to have too much self-esteem, too much sense of independence, and who seemed to be “uppity.” Williams, “Sin, Nature and Black Women's Bodies,” in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, ed., Carol J. Adams (New York: Continuum, 1994): 25–7.

<sup>39</sup> bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman?*, 52 quoted in Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 71 maintains this white, antebellum image-making about black women's sexuality contributed greatly to the process of devaluing black womanhood.

<sup>40</sup> These include 1) God ordained and intended the perpetual enslavement of Black people; and 2) Black slaves were not in the image of God and so could not have equality with whites in the Christian community. Williams, “Gospel, Culture and African-American Women in Context,” 15. Delores Williams, “African-American Women in Three Contexts of Domestic Violence,” in *The Power of Naming: A Concilium Reader in Feminist Liberation Theology*, ed., Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Orbis Books, 1996): 40–2 sheds more light on this. Here she takes to task the Ariel literature which, using Noah's story, peddled the idea that the origin and nature of the Negro (female and male) is that of beasts because s/he was not a descendant of Ham, who was white.

the mammy's activities (which are very much in keeping with the ideals of Victorian womanhood that prevailed in America in the 19th century), slavery was a tool for converting some "heathen" Black women into "civilized" models of womanhood, and that she (mammy) was living proof that the conversion could be accomplished.<sup>41</sup>

After emancipation<sup>42</sup> surrogacy still reared its ugly head in the lives of Black women, this time voluntary, due to social conditions or realities that force them to continue to substitute for some roles. Poverty and the nature of work available forced many Black women to choose to continue the mammy role<sup>43</sup> and the role of substituting female power and energy for male power and energy. They either engaged in some of the most strenuous work, e.g. metal industries and farm work, or took on employment as domestic workers for white families, where they were also subjected to abuse, e.g. sexual harassment.<sup>44</sup> In Black communities, as well, Black women did not have much choice but to take on the role of heads of household in the absence of male energy and presence. Even Black males, like white males, asserted themselves by insisting the wives spend more time in home management and demanding that mothers care for their children.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 64.

<sup>42</sup> Today, surrogacy is propped up in America by *demonarchy* or the oppression that white American social institutions, directed by both white men and white women, exert upon the lives of Black women. Williams avers these white-controlled social institutions, which feminists have characterized as patriarchal, have positive effects that white women enjoy (but not Black women). She says these institutions tend to preserve and save the lives of the children of white women but are not strongly inclined to do the same for Black women's children. Delores Williams, "The Color of Feminism," in *Feminist Theological Ethics*, ed., Lois K. Daly (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Press, 1994): 46–54.

<sup>43</sup> The nature of the role changed slightly in cases when they served Black people instead of white families and when domestic workers (who took on the role of the mammy) were allowed not to spend the night in their white employers' houses. See Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 73–8. The institution of the Black Mammy Memorial Institute—a school that trained Black women in the skills of nurturing and caring—and of the "mothers of the church" in post-slavery America also reinforced the mammy role. Like the slave mammy, the mother of the church is often called upon to be healer of relationships (within the congregation). She is well-versed in passing along the values for living the Christian life but does not challenge the power and authority of the patriarchal head of the church, who is usually a male preacher. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 79.

<sup>44</sup> Williams, "African-American Women in Three Contexts of Domestic Violence," 38.

<sup>45</sup> Joel R. Williamson, "Black Self-Assertion Before and After Emancipation," in *Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience*, vol. 1, eds., Nathan I. Huggins et al. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), 232–3 cited in Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 78.

Williams argues these acts, that destroy Black women's bodies, are sin since these deny that Black women are made in the image of God. She adds these acts—propped up by American capitalism—are comparable to human attacks upon creation that ravish, violate, and destroy it. Williams calls these acts the sin of defilement.<sup>46</sup> For her the concept of defilement captures not just “the exploitation and control of the production and reproduction capacities of nature, and the destruction of the unity in nature's placements,” but also “the obliteration of the spirit of the created,”<sup>47</sup> particularly Black women. She asserts this controlling, taming, and devaluation of Black women's bodies and sexuality, erodes their self-worth, depletes their self-esteem, and ruptures their spirit.<sup>48</sup>

### *Survival Strategies*

Though surrogacy pervades Black women's lives, Williams writes they have not been passive victims, and that they often made a way out of no way, as expressed in the stories, anecdotes, even songs of real and fictional<sup>49</sup> Black women. Among real-life Black women, for instance, Williams names three strategies that they use(d) to survive surrogacy. These include: 1) governing their lives according to their mother's counsel or advice; 2) the search for religion; and 3) concrete resistance activities. During slavery, the first strategy, also known as the passing on of the “doctrine of resistance” by (slave) mothers to their children, is embodied in the “doctrine”: “Fight, and if you can't fight, kick: if you can't kick, then bite.” Today, Williams says, Black mothers still

<sup>46</sup> Williams, “Sin, Nature and Black Women's Bodies,” 24–5.

<sup>47</sup> Williams, “Sin, Nature and Black Women's Bodies,” 25.

<sup>48</sup> See Williams, “A Womanist Perspective on Sin,” 130–49. See also Williams, “Sin, Nature and Black Women's Bodies,” 27 and Williams, “Women's Oppression and Lifeline Politics in Black Women's Religious Narratives,” 60, 62.

<sup>49</sup> In her analysis of Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Margaret Walker's *Jubilee*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* in Williams, “Women's Oppression and Lifeline Politics in Black Women's Religious Narratives,” for example, Williams identifies four political strategies used by Black women to counter their oppression. These include 1) assuming defiant attitudes and developing physical strength; 2) forming strong bonds with other women and with men to increase self esteem and develop new possibilities for mutual relationships; 3) distancing themselves from the source of their oppression; and 4) examining and changing their consciousness about the meaning of values that have been fundamental to Black women's early conditioning and to the ethical, moral, and religious foundations of the African-American community. See also Williams, “Black Women's Literature and the Task of Feminist Theology,” 88–110 and Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 49–56.



pass on to their children “doctrines of resistance” in the form of a particular and consistent advice or words of wisdom, e.g. that they would have “nobody in the world to look up to but God.”<sup>50</sup>

Religion strongly figures in Black women’s survival strategies. They turn to it to make sense of and cope with their oppression. They infuse life events with religious meanings and seek God’s support in/through, what they call, their “wilderness experience.”<sup>51</sup> This religious means for survival develops in accord with their radical obedience to, what they understand to be, God’s word speaking to their struggle. God becomes the element of necessity. Trust in God is complete and the final word.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, they made use of religion to transform the negative character of social processes. They manifested a risk-taking faith as a result of their oppressive experiences and encounters with God.<sup>53</sup>

The concrete resistance strategies during slavery, that Black women employed, are various and range from subtle, silent, to dramatic. In the struggle for emancipation these included agitating fellow slaves, fanning the flames of revolt in plantations (and joining such revolts), burning buildings, poisoning their masters, running away from slavery, participating in slave conspiracies and insurrections, killing their own children to keep them from a life of enslavement, petitioning courts, pressing charges, organizing themselves, exercising their right to vote, and joining protests and other activities during the civil rights movement.<sup>54</sup> After slavery, resistance strategies, particularly for domestic workers, include refusing to stay overnight in their employer’s homes; taking frequent breaks during the day to check things at their own homes; taking food and other things from their employers saying these

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<sup>50</sup> Williams herself speaks of what her own mother and grandmother passed on to her: “Wear a smile on your face, a prayer on your lips and hope in your heart.” Williams, “Spiritual Mentors: ‘Keep on climbing up,’” *The Christian Century* Vol. 110, No. 27 (1993): 927.

<sup>51</sup> This will be elaborated in the succeeding section.

<sup>52</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 177, 239.

<sup>53</sup> Harriet Tubman, also known as “Moses” among African-Americans, is said to have relied solely upon God for help and strength for her courageous liberation of over three hundred slaves, amidst a price on her head. She drew her conviction for her mission from the belief that God liberated her so she can liberate others. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 109; 121.

<sup>54</sup> Ida Wells Barnett, who devoted much of her life and work monitoring lynchings, Jenny Slew who successfully sued her Massachusetts owner for unlawfully holding her in slavery, and the many others who engaged in explicit defensive measures like kicking, biting, fighting, and other acts in defense of the self and the community give a face to these resistance activities. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 133–9.

rightfully belonged to them as the descendants of slaves; refusing to enter through the back or kitchen door; and resisting any kind of discipline their employers tried to impose on them.<sup>55</sup>

One strong factor for these resistance activities, that ought to be noted here, is their networks of female support and resistance.<sup>56</sup> During slavery adult female cooperation and interdependence was part of female slave life. After slavery, Williams says, this was extended to the African-American denominational churches and into, what is known as, the club movement among Black women. But, no matter what kind, form, or mode the strategy is Williams points out that Black women's survival strategies employ an art of cunning (with the use of skill and imagination), an art of encounter (involving resistance and endurance), an art of care (manifested in commitment and charity), and an art of connecting (through networking).<sup>57</sup>

Reflecting on Black women's survival strategies in relation to their surrogacy Williams posits Black women's experience is about survival.<sup>58</sup> Black women often have to struggle for their own survival. Due to systemic classism, racism, and sexism they usually do not have much choice but to "make a way out of no way," and it is their acts of resistance, that have given them and the African-American community's survival-oriented life some semblance of quality. That is why "survival quality of life" makes up the very fabric of Black women's lives and, consequently, God-talk. Traditionally, the activity of God, who enables Black women with such vision for survival, has been described as God's sustaining activity. But, Williams thinks, given the above mentioned context, God is a God of survival and quality of life, a God of sustenance who provides vision in the midst of oppression.

Vision, indeed, plays an important role in Williams' theological construction in relation to survival strategies. She drives this point

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<sup>55</sup> Dolores Janiewski, "Sisters Under Their Skins: Southern Working Women, 1880–1950," in Hine, *Black Women in the United States History* vol. 3, 787–8 cited in Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 128.

<sup>56</sup> This kind of networking even included parenting. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 58.

<sup>57</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 236–7. She uses the word "art" here in recognition of the high level of skill Black women developed as they created and adapted strategies.

<sup>58</sup> It is important to point out, however, that Williams does not use "survival" in the sense of the "survival of the fittest" type. Rather, it indicates a form of survival that includes healing, wholeness, community building, and faith. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, ix–xii, 5–6, 20–2.

home using the story of Hagar. According to Williams, Hagar shows that the capacity to envision resources for survival in the midst of scarcity involves more than the human will alone (Genesis 21:18–19). She adds it involves revelation from a God that provides insight and vision into one’s socio-historical and geographical situation (particularly for survival resources), and that while there is always a potential for despair the gift of vision allows for renewed hope in the midst of wilderness experiences.<sup>59</sup> Hagar’s story also takes on greater relevance for Williams in that Hagar’s experience shows the layer of oppression not surfaced in Black theology of liberation and feminist theology, i.e., oppression among women by other women (as manifested by Sarah’s oppression of her fellow woman Hagar). For Williams, Hagar’s story sheds light on the different plight of those who are regarded as “oppressed of the oppressed.”

That is why Williams is wary of using the Exodus story, in view of the fact that those who were granted exodus from their oppressors turned out to be oppressors, creating the “oppressed of the oppressed,” e.g. non-Hebrew natives, Hebrew slaves, and Hebrew women. She thinks the God of the Scripture, who is also the God of the Exodus, does not always liberate the oppressed and/or does not liberate *all* the oppressed. Hence, she suggests re-interpreting the Exodus as a holistic story rather than an event, and shifting the liberation starting point of “Black experience” to the “wilderness experience.”<sup>60</sup>

### *The Cross and Atonement*

One critical theme within Williams’ theology of survival quality of life, particularly in relation to Black women’s experience of surrogacy, is that of the cross and atonement. Williams contends mainstream Protestant churches educate believers that Jesus is the surrogate *par excellence*. They make the faithful believe, that Jesus took human sin upon himself, and that his death on the cross (instead of sinful humankind) made possible humankind’s redemption. This, Williams points out, sacralizes surrogacy, thereby, rendering questionable the saving power of God for Black women.<sup>61</sup> Williams, then, explores schools of thought

<sup>59</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 28–32.

<sup>60</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 159.

<sup>61</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 162.

within the Christian idea of atonement namely ransom, satisfaction, substitution, and moral theories of atonement.<sup>62</sup>

From this exploration, Williams posits Black women's salvation does not depend upon any form of surrogacy made sacred by traditional and orthodox understanding of Jesus' life and death. Rather, their salvation is assured by Jesus' life of resistance and by the survival strategies he used to help people survive the death of identity also experienced by African women and men brought to America and enslaved.<sup>63</sup> Williams contends, as well, the cross is a problematic symbol for redemption for Black women in light of their experience of surrogacy. For her, what is most significant about Jesus is not his suffering and death on the cross but his life, particularly his ministry to the poor and the outcast, or those whose survival is in jeopardy. She argues that a more adequate symbolization of Jesus for Black women is that of Jesus' promise of healing, survival, and abundant quality of life, as evident in his ministry to women. Drawing from the synoptic gospels, as well as Jesus' own words in Luke 4 and his ministry of healing the human body, mind, and spirit, Williams surmises "Jesus did not come to redeem humans by showing them God's 'love' manifested in the death of God's innocent child on a cross... Rather, the texts suggest that the spirit of God in Jesus came to show humans *life*—to show redemption through a perfect ministerial vision of righting relations.... [and that] God's gift to humans, through Jesus,

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<sup>62</sup> The ransom theory by Origen posited that Jesus' death on the cross represented a ransom God paid to the devil for the sins of humankind. The satisfaction theory, associated with Anselm, claimed that since God did not want to punish humans forever for their sins and since humans had no means to render satisfaction to the injured honor of God, the deity, Godself, made restitution for humanity by sending God's Son to earth in human form to, ultimately, die on the cross. Abelard's moral theory of atonement, meanwhile, emphasized God's love in the work of atonement and that when humans look upon the death of Jesus, symbolized by the cross, they see the love of God manifested. Lastly, the reformers' substitution theory advocated that God, in God's mercy, provided a substitute for the sin of humans, which deserved infinite harsh punishment, and that Jesus offered himself to be the substitute. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 162–4. See also Delores Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption," in *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions*, eds., Paula Cooney et. al. (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 9–10.

<sup>63</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 164.

was to invite them to participate in this ministerial vision of righting relations.”<sup>64</sup>

Williams particularly balks at how conventional African-American churches make connections, especially in sermons, between Jesus’ suffering (especially in relation to the cross) and Black women’s suffering, to the point of glorifying suffering (whether by Jesus or by Black women).<sup>65</sup> For her, the image of Jesus on the cross is the image of human sin in its most desecrated form, i.e., sin of defilement. It is the symbol of the defilement of the body of Jesus himself. Moreover, it is a gross manifestation of collective human sin, a reminder of how humans have tried throughout history to destroy visions of righting relationships that involve transformation of tradition and transformation of social relations and arrangements sanctioned by the status quo.<sup>66</sup> Williams points out that too much focus on the cross has obscured what she maintains as central to the Jesus story. She contends Jesus’ life and ministry and/or the kingdom of God theme in his ministerial vision, and his resurrection, which are all committed to the well-being of others, is the real testimony to the glorious power of God. These provide Black women with the knowledge that God has, through Jesus, shown humankind how to live peacefully, productively, and abundantly in relationship.<sup>67</sup>

While Williams does not want Black women to forget the cross, she is insistent about not glorifying it, as doing so brings problems. She says presenting and viewing Jesus as the ultimate surrogate figure is noxious to the psycho-spiritual health of Black people, particularly Black women, who have been historically conditioned and socialized to bear the bloody crosses of surrogacy, violence, and abuse “for” their community. She says the cross, particularly as it is depicted in the sacrificial atonement theory of Jesus’ substitutionary death, renders surrogacy sacred and encourages Black women to accept their suffering. Hence, to glorify it is tantamount to glorifying sin, as it condones Black women’s exploitation.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Italics in original. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 164–5.

<sup>65</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 213–7.

<sup>66</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 166–7.

<sup>67</sup> Williams then concludes humankind is redeemed through Jesus’ life and not through Jesus’ death. Williams, “Black Women’s Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption,” 12–3.

<sup>68</sup> See Williams, “Black Women’s Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption,” 13.

### *Wilderness*

Wilderness and/or “wilderness experience,” particularly in relation to the story of Hagar, also occupies a key place within Williams’ theology of survival quality of life. Williams mainly uses “wilderness” and/or “wilderness experience” to refer to a near-destruction situation, in which God gives personal direction to the believer and helps her make a way out. Hence, “wilderness experience” is a religious experience. This meaning, however, is rooted in two understandings of the term “wilderness.” The first, which can be traced to the pioneers of American civilization, refers to wild country or a hostile place that needs to be conquered rather than lived with in reciprocal relation. The second, originating from the Romantic Movement, is associated with beauty, godliness, freedom and solitude.<sup>69</sup>

African-Americans experienced both these notions of wilderness, albeit often in opposition to the prevailing understanding in American society. Contrary to the preponderant negative concept of it by the whites before emancipation, for instance, the slaves experienced wilderness as a positive place, particularly as a free and friendly space. In the antebellum period, slave women, in particular, were often the most arduous in the search and effort to undergo the wilderness experience, be it in the haystack, where God “overshadows” them, or in the forest, which also served as a friend that sheltered and fed them, whenever they run away from slavery. The basic religious aspect of wilderness/wilderness experience is best reflected in the spiritual songs.<sup>70</sup>

After emancipation, a negative side was added to Black women’s experience of wilderness because of economic insecurity, social displacement, and the new forms of oppression former slaves faced in a “free” world. It became not just the place for meeting God but also the wide, wide world (a hostile place), where they must go to seek a living for their families. Williams contends these two understanding of wilderness came together in the appropriation of the biblical Hagar for, like African-American women, Hagar and her child are alone without resources for survival.<sup>71</sup> In fact, Williams believes Hagar and

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<sup>69</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 113–5.

<sup>70</sup> One song exhorts the “mournin’ brudder, weepin’ Mary, ‘flicted sister, half-done Christian”, etc. to “go in de wilderness” if s/he “want[s] to find Jesus, be a Christian, get religion, spec’ to be converted”, etc. for Jesus is waiting to meet him/her there. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 110–1.

<sup>71</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 118.

African-American women are sisters in the wilderness struggling for life, and by the help of their God, come to terms with situations that have destructive potential.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, at the heart of this identification with Hagar by African-American women is the inextricable relation between religion and social life, and between survival quality of life and faith. They themselves claim “God helped them make a way out of no way.” This goes to show that God is involved not only in their struggle, but that God also supports their struggle for quality of life, which “making a way” suggests.

Williams also believes wilderness or “wilderness experience,” understood in the context of Hagar’s story, can serve as the nexus between Black women’s experience and the Black community’s experience. In fact, she presents it as a more appropriate starting point to speak of Black experience mainly because it is inclusive. It not only represents Black women’s experience<sup>73</sup> and the experience of the entire community, male and female simultaneously. It also holds together Black women’s and the community’s past history, present situations, and intimations of hope for a better future.<sup>74</sup>

### *The Black Church*

The Black church also occupies a crucial place in Williams’ theology of survival quality of life. In fact, Williams declares any attempt to discern the meaning of African-American women’s faith and action would be incomplete without reflection upon it [Black Church] and the African-American denominational churches.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 5–9. Hagar herself shares a number of significant similarities with Black women. These include: 1) African heritage; 2) experiencing slavery and surviving it; 3) brutal experiences in the hands of employers, particularly the slave-owner and his wife; 4) lack of control over their body and sexuality; 5) resistance to slavery; 6) expulsion by the “master” and being left out in the cold; 7) single parenthood; and 8) serious personal and salvific encounters with God which help in their struggle for survival for themselves and their families. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 3.

<sup>73</sup> For Williams the “Hagar in the wilderness” symbolism provides a historically realistic model of non-middle class Black womanhood (in contrast to the Anglo-American ideals about “true womanhood”) with qualities such as defiance; risk-taking; independence; endurance when endurance gives no promise; the stamina to hold things together for the family (even without the help of a mate); the ability, in poverty, to make a way out of no way; the courage to initiate political action in the public arena; and a close personal relation with God.

<sup>74</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 118.

<sup>75</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 204. In “Straight Talk, Plain Talk: Womanist Words about Salvation in a Social Context,” 102–3 Williams contends the threats and

Williams makes it abundantly clear the Black church is not, or is more than an institution. As the core symbol of the four-hundred-year-old African-American struggle against white oppression, Williams sees it (Black church) as the heart of hope in the black community's experience of oppression, survival struggle and its historic efforts towards complete liberation. She declares it is classless, and is sacralized by the pain and resurrection of thousands upon thousands of Black victims. She insists it came first to the community of slaves, is 'homo-hetero' amalgam, and is about equality and perfect justice.<sup>76</sup>

The Black church cannot be restricted to one special location because it can move fast everywhere, but slowly enough to comfort burdened souls, put love in broken lives, and bring moments of liberation to a troubled people. In "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices," for example, Williams expresses:

In the Black church, women (and men) often judge the effectiveness of the worship service not on the scholarly content of the sermon nor on the ritual nor on orderly process. Rather, worship has been effective if "the spirit was high," i.e., if the spirit was actively and obviously present in a balanced blend of prayer, of cadenced word (the sermon), and of syncopated music *ministering to the pain of the people....* (emphasis mine)<sup>77</sup>

The Black church is invisible, Williams says, but Black people know it, when they see their children conquering death from addiction, and their poor mothers successfully raising children on their own with God's help. It is there, she adds, in the many men and, especially, women, who have played key roles in African-Americans' struggle for

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attacks to Black churches through burning and vandalism (with racial slurs) are an attack on the core of Black Christian spiritual life and the center of Black society and impinge on the survival of African-Americans as a people. See also Delores Williams, "Afrocentrism and Male-Female Relations in Church and Society," in *Living the Intersection: Womanism and Afrocentrism in Theology*, ed., Cheryl J. Sanders (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995): 43–56 for more discussion on the centrality of the Black church and African-American denominational churches for salvation in the African-American context.

<sup>76</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 205. The origins of Black Christianity in slavery is a critical component on Black reflections on the Black church. In Delores Williams, "Rituals of Resistance in Womanist Worship," 220–1, for example, Williams extols the hush harbor churches—religious gatherings held by slaves in the woods at night despite slave-owners' prohibition of church services by slaves—which helped the slaves to worship God and to stay alive.

<sup>77</sup> Delores Williams, "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices," in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, eds., Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ (New York: Harper and Row, 1989): 185–6.



survival quality of life, e.g. Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, and Mary McLeod Bethune. It is “felt” in (Black) communities. It comes as “God-full presence”; as moral wisdom from the old folks; as folk-faith; and as spiritual songs, and blues, and gospel and rap, that help them creatively fight for justice. It is there, in other words, in oppressed people’s struggle for freedom with the help of the community. For God, Williams affirms, works through it (and its community essence) in behalf of the survival, liberation, and quality of life of oppressed people.<sup>78</sup>

Williams also makes it abundantly clear the Black church is different from African-American denominational churches. The former is invisible and the latter visible. Moreover, the former is an icon of African-Americans’ resistance against oppression, while the latter is tainted with oppression-reinforcing acts against Black women. On the positive side, Williams says, the African-American denominational churches have been psycho-social places where Black women could find some relief from the terrible burdens in their lives. She refers here to those that “told Black women they were ‘somebody’ in a society that hated their race and spurned their womanhood.... [the] places where Black women, aside from venting their pain in emotional response, have come for decidedly theological reasons.... to celebrate the great work of the spirit that brings and sustains whatever is positive in their lives.”<sup>79</sup> But there are also those that suppress and help to make invisible Black women’s thought and culture. “Through their uncritical use of the Bible and through their patriarchal theology... [these] prohibit Black women from asking many critical questions about women’s oppression and about the support and reinforcement of that oppression by the Bible and by the Christian church in all its male dominated forms.”<sup>80</sup> These churches, Williams says, are guilty of a “multitude of

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<sup>78</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 205–6.

<sup>79</sup> Hence the shouting and rhythm in churches are part of Black women’s faith statement, celebrating and giving thanks to God and the spirit for working in their hearts and lives. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, xii–xiii.

<sup>80</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, xiii. The other sins include: 1) sexism that denies Black women equal opportunity in leadership roles; 2) immorality among male church leaders; 3) collusion between some Black male preachers and the anti-Black political forces in America; 4) sexual exploitation of Black women by some preachers; 5) failure to consolidate resources to respond to the various problems crippling Black communities in the U.S., including the problems of Black prisoners; 6) encouragement of homophobia; 7) unproductive response to AIDS (by denial); and 8) luxurious

sins” which include indoctrinating Black women to be self-sacrificing and emotionally-dependent upon males, and emotionally exploiting Black female parishioners, as ministers provoke emotional reactions to proclamation rather than thoughtful questions and responses.

Williams lifts up, instead, the Black spiritual churches. In the early times these churches were founded in the cities by Black migrants from the rural areas, who did not find acceptance or were not comfortable in the mainstream African-American denominational churches. These churches are syncretistic<sup>81</sup> and stand out as unique because of the tradition of female leadership that characterizes them.<sup>82</sup>

### *Appreciation*

The theological scholarship of Delores Williams has been acknowledged as a unique enterprise unto itself, and as a contribution of immense worth. But this remarkable feat did not come without questions from other theologians. Indeed, inasmuch as Williams reaped praises for her innovative reflections in her theology of survival quality of life, she was also on the receiving end of stinging questions from her fellow theologians. This section is devoted to these critical appreciations followed by my own (over-all critical appreciation).

#### *General Appreciation*

One aspect of Williams’ lifeline politics that elicited a number of accolades is her choice and utilization of sources. The white theologian Catherine Keller, for example, considers Williams’ choice and use of biblical texts “brilliant biblical theology” as she (Williams) does not force the *relevance*, but solicits the *resonance*.<sup>83</sup> Womanist Karen Baker-Fletcher, in the meantime, commends Williams’ good choice

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church buildings (in the midst of poverty), which do not have feasible programs that respond to the needs of Black women and the Black community. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 208–9.

<sup>81</sup> The early stages of syncretism included elements of Spiritualism, Roman Catholicism, and Voodooism. See Hans Baer, *The Black Spiritual Movement: A Religious Response to Racism* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 110–59 as cited in Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 221

<sup>82</sup> The case of the Universal Hagar’s Spiritual Church in Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 225–34 illustrates this very well.

<sup>83</sup> Italics in original. Catherine Keller, “Delores Williams: Survival, Surrogacy, Sisterhood, Spirit,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review: Festschrift for Delores Williams* Vol. 58, Nos. 3–4 (2004): 87.

and appropriation of non-traditional sources. Baker-Fletcher particularly expresses agreement on Williams' use of the character Celie in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.<sup>84</sup>

Womanist Renee K. Harrison, meanwhile, challenges Williams' use of Hagar as a model for Black women. She claims Williams gave too much weight on Hagar's agency, when she (Hagar) was actually a voiceless protagonist. Harrison points out: "We never hear from Hagar what her needs are. Her oppressors decide *her* needs are enslavement and 'surrogacy' and God decides *her* needs are enslavement and a vision of a well encompassing a future fulfillment of *quality of life*. Nation-building and quality of life only comes as a result of Hagar bearing a son. Hagar never questions her existence or God's actions."<sup>85</sup>

Williams' reflections on the cross, Jesus' suffering, and atonement in relation to Black women's experience of social-role surrogacy, however, are the ones that evoked much reaction. Hee An Choi, for example, questions Williams' critique on Jesus as surrogate. Choi maintains one cannot totally reject the surrogacy experience of Jesus as "the society made Jesus a surrogate. [And] because Jesus was a surrogate, whether chosen or not, not Jesus' surrogate role, but Jesus' surrogate experience should be recognized."<sup>86</sup>

Black theologian Josiah Young, meanwhile, fires a number of questions, particularly in relation to Williams' negative stance on the redemptive power of the cross and suffering:

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<sup>84</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher and Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher, *My Sister, My Brother: Womanist and Xodus God-Talk* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 74.

<sup>85</sup> Italics in original. Harrison argues Hagar's story sanctions and perpetuates African-American women's oppression. Compared to Celie who resists her oppression and fought her way past survival, Harrison parleys, Hagar's story does not reflect a woman in control of her destiny. According to her the story gives evidence of oppression/survival but it just leaves African-American women stuck in the wilderness. For Harrison Black women must look beyond surviving and value thriving. Unlike Hagar's, Harrison says, Celie's story offers African-American women a well of resources to thrive in the world today and tomorrow. Renee K. Harrison in "'Hagar Ain't Workin', Gimme Me Celie: A Hermeneutic of Rejection and a Risk of Appropriation," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* Vol. 58, Nos. 3-4 (2004): 41.

<sup>86</sup> Hee Ann Choi, "Transforming Power in the Lives of Women as Surrogates: The Dialogue Between African-American and Korean-Christian Women," in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* Vol. 58, Nos. 3-4 (2004): 152. Interestingly, Choi cites Jung Young Lee's discourse on marginality as a possible means for viewing Jesus' surrogate experience as part of his (Jesus') life. See Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995), 29-47 as quoted in Hee Ann Choi, "Transforming Power in the Lives of Women as Surrogates," 152.

If today's justice-seekers face crucifixion as a reality, especially in Third World contexts sated with deadly violence against peace-makers, may the cross-resurrection *not* signify the indomitableness of their struggle? Does the cross, in symbolizing the defeat, as well as the historical reality, of sin, as deadly enmity toward God and neighbor, have *nothing* going for it? Does the unmerited suffering the cross symbolizes so eminently glorify defilement, or reveal the deformity of the unjust, the ugliness of the sin no one escapes?<sup>87</sup>

But Karen Baker-Fletcher agrees with and defends Williams on the questions concerning the cross. She reckons what Williams did is to rethink its actual meaning in history and its symbolic meaning today by redefining it as a symbol of human sinfulness. She declares, Williams "does not ignore the cross in her criticism of theories of substitution, ransom, and surrogacy," but that "she [Williams] reconstructs its meaning even as she deconstructs the rationalizations of abuse surrounding it."<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, Baker-Fletcher surmises, "most would agree with Williams that the Spirit of God in Jesus came to show humans life. This particular interpretation of Jesus is consistent with the symbolization of Jesus in the book of John: who "came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10)."<sup>89</sup> She bolsters these comments of hers as she points out: "It is vital for Christians to focus on the life and ministry of Jesus rather than his death because of the tendency to focus on the crucifixion in necrophilic ways. An emphasis on the ministerial life and sustaining vision of God as Spirit in Jesus points to a life-affirming promise of deliverance and salvation that de-emphasizes sacrifice."<sup>90</sup>

Black theologian Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher also compliments Williams on this:

it is one of the most specific, thoroughgoing ethical criticisms of how a theological notion can be used oppressively to legitimate unjust behavior. Williams rightfully connects Christologies whose understanding of Jesus' work emphasizes sacrifice with the coercive practices of males demanding that women incarnate Christ's sacrificial role in society. Sacrificial Christologies have been used demonically to imprison abused women in violent relationships. Sacrificial Christologies have indeed borne several

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<sup>87</sup> Italics in original. Josiah Young, "Review: *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*," *Modern Theology* Vol. 10, No. 3 (1994): 316.

<sup>88</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher and Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher, *My Sister, My Brother*, 77.

<sup>89</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher and Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher, *My Sister, My Brother*, 77.

<sup>90</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher and Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher, *My Sister, My Brother*, 77.

deformed and malnourished ethical norms within traditional church teachings about what is considered “normal” Christian behavior.<sup>91</sup>

### *Personal Appreciation*

In my view Williams’ interdisciplinary approach, particularly her engagements of African-American literary works, is laudable. Her turning to history, sociology, anthropology, music, and her innovative and creative blending of these with the diverse forms of African-American women’s literature, offers such a historically realistic grounding of and character to experience, that makes her articulation of a theology of survival quality of life rich and arresting. Her lucid portrayal and reflection on the intersectionality of race, class, and gender as it is played out in the lives of Black women before and after slavery is also incisive.

Content wise, Williams’ characterization of Black women’s experience of oppression as surrogacy is insightful as it is vivid and compelling. The same is true with regard to her investigation of Black women’s survival strategies, which I find noteworthy, as it goes beyond the tendency in theology to construct and depict the oppressed as monolithic victims. Moreover, her treatment of the survival strategies is keen and pragmatic. It gives the idea of survival an identity and worth of its own; that it is not just *merely* survival and/or not just a *front* for liberation, but that it is also about faith and hope, responsibility and community, vision and emancipation. I do not wish to romanticize it, but this notion, for me, depicts a reality of our experience of God’s reign in the world—it is here and/yet not yet here.

Equally sharp and perceptive is her interrogation of the Black church, as well as wilderness and/or wilderness experience, in the socio-political, economic, and religious lives of African-American women. The distinctions she makes between the Black church and the African-American denominational churches will be very useful for the concept of church in a theology of women domestic workers in the context of migration, as I reflect on how “church” also happens outside the building or the institution for the DHs.

I also agree with Williams’ revisionist approach on the cross. I believe Christian theology’s fixation on the cross and too much ram-

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<sup>91</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher and Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher, *My Sister, My Brother*, 103.

ming down of the interpretation that it constitutes Jesus' act of atonement has done more harm than good, especially when we take into account the co-optation of this interpretation to keep the oppressed, especially women, in their place. Williams' de-stressing of the cross and emphasis on Jesus' ministry and resurrection comes across to me, then, as not just about correcting the theological imbalance. It is also about giving voice to what is really at the heart of the message of Jesus and Christianity as whole, i.e., the good news that, ultimately, brings hope. These thoughts of Williams on the cross are important because, as I will develop later on, suffering ought not to be the last word, but the struggle against it.

I have reservations, however, at how Williams tackles the subjectivity of Black women. Are all of them purely innocent victims of patriarchy and demonarchy? Aren't they guilty of some kind of complicity in their own oppression, as well as that of their fellow Black people? Is resistance their only means of survival? Or does complicity or submission, not just through internalization of oppression, serve as a means of survival, as well? Did not some of them, for instance, willingly play into the hands of their oppressors for their own advantage and not just survival? Williams herself talks about Blacks, women included, who colluded with the white people to perpetuate Black people's oppression. She mentions, for instance, Samuel Harris—principal of Black Mammy Memorial Institute. She also refers to “race women”—Black women involved in the work of racial uplift—particularly the Baptist women “caught up in the *trend* of appropriating the Victorian true womanhood ideals to describe the ideal womanhood and proper work for African-American women”<sup>92</sup> (emphasis mine). Interestingly, however, even if it was supposed to have been a *trend*—prevalent enough to merit considerable attention<sup>93</sup>—Williams does not substantially reflect on this trend, as if this trend and these (race) women are “materials that do not fit.”

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<sup>92</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 124–7.

<sup>93</sup> Bell hooks, for example, maintains the 19th century “cult of true womanhood” was embraced by (enslaved) Black women after emancipation such that they did not advocate social equality between the sexes. Hooks maintains: “By completely accepting the female role as defined by patriarchy, enslaved black women embraced and upheld an oppressive sexist social order and became (along with their white sisters) both accomplices in the crimes perpetrated against women and the victims of those crimes.” bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman*, 48–9.

Moreover, her discussion on the survival strategies by Black women particularly by those who resist and the acts of complicity, especially by the “race women,” was done in some kind of an “either-or” manner. The Black women she talked about are either resisters or accomplices. Is it really as unambiguous as this? Didn’t Black women (both resisters and accomplices) simultaneously submit to, resist, and accommodate, their oppression, as well? It is my observation, then, that Williams fails to theorize and/or reflect more adequately on the moral ambiguity of Black women’s subjectivity. While she does not fall into the trap of discussing women as monolithic victims she tends to sharply divide Black women into agents and victims and, consequently, fails to capture the bifurcation, tensions, contradictions and fluidity of Black women’s subjectivity.<sup>94</sup> To me, such deceptively smooth and unambiguous treatment leaves the complexity and fluidity of Black women’s experience unexamined.<sup>95</sup>

#### JUNG YOUNG LEE: A THEOLOGICAL PROFILE

Considered as one of the most productive Asian-American theologians,<sup>96</sup> Lee published about twenty books and fifty articles in English, some of which were translated in Korean. There are also a few publi-

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<sup>94</sup> Ruth L. Smith, “Relationality and the Ordering of Differences in Feminist Ethics,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* Vol. 9, Nos. 1–2 (Spring/Fall 2003): 214 cautions the shift from morally silenced to the morally vocal does not of itself mean that oppressed and subordinated groups are automatically morally good. She avers feminists should reject out of hand the move from women as morally pathological to morally emblematic, since the one version implies the other and both deprive women of agency.

<sup>95</sup> Ethnographic accounts of daily resistance such as Bonnie T. Dill, “Making Your Job Good Yourself: Domestic Service and the Construction of Personal Dignity,” in *Women and the Politics of Empowerment*, eds., A. Bookman and S. Morgan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988): 33–52 where Dill argues the extreme deference to which Black women domestics perform their subservient roles is part of a conscious effort to negotiate power within the confines of an otherwise oppressive domestic employer relationship illustrates this complex and ambiguous subjectivity of Black women. Deference here can be construed as both strategic resistance and forced compliance.

<sup>96</sup> Some of his most significant works include: *The I: A Christian Concept of Man* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971); *Cosmic Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978); *The Theology of Change: A Christian Concept of God in an Eastern Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 1979); *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995); and *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1996).

cations about his theology<sup>97</sup> and a host of other tributes in his honor while he was still alive, and after his untimely demise in 1996.<sup>98</sup> But who is Jung Young Lee, and why does his Korean-American identity figure prominently in his profile as a theologian?

Lee was born to an upper class family in North Korea, and converted to Christianity in his childhood through the influence of his mother. Life, for Lee, was marked by tragedies and journeys that considerably account for “a life in-between.”<sup>99</sup> In his early twenties, Lee came to America to study—a journey that turned out to be Lee’s journey of journeys for it was here that he grappled deeply with his racial identity:

After years of residence in this country, I began to realize that for me the United States was no longer a land of promise. It had become a land of exile, and I was a stranger in the land where I now hold my citizenship. The color of my skin, the shape of my face, and the peculiar character of my culture alienated me. People still ask, “When will you go back to your homeland?” I have no answer, because I have no homeland to return to.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> See the Bibliography section for the list of dissertations and articles written by other theologians on his theology or certain aspects of his theological works that are cited in this research. See also Hyoung Lee, *A Reinterpretation of God and Evil from the Taoist Perspective* (Madison, N.J.: Drew University Ph.D. Dissertation, 1996); Jae-Sik Shin, *Change, Rhythm, and Spontaneity: Revisioning the Reality of God from East Asian Perspective* (Madison, N.J.: Drew University Ph.D. Dissertation, 1997); and Warren Mc Williams, *The Passion of God: Divine Suffering in Contemporary Protestant Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985) as cited in Jumsik Ahn, *Korean Contextual Theology as Related to Ch’I: An Assessment on the Theology of Jung Young Lee* (Deerfield, Illinois: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School Ph.D. Dissertation, May 2002), 5.

<sup>98</sup> These include the publication of a selection of his students’ writings in 1997 with the title *East Wind: Taoist and Cosmological Implications of Christian Theology* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America) and a series (made up of 9 sessions) of dialogue with Jung Young Lee himself that covered his life and theology. Chan-Soon Yim, *Suffering, Change and Marginality: Post-modern Implications of Jung Young Lee’s Theology* (Madison, N.J.: Drew University Ph.D. Dissertation, 2003), 24.

<sup>99</sup> One of these is the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula that Lee eloquently describes: “We were forbidden to speak Korean and our names have been changed to Japanese, depriving us both our language and names. Our identity was completely erased; we were nobody. We became marginalized.” Jung Young Lee, “A Life In-Between: A Korean-American Journey,” in *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective*, eds., Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999): 30.

<sup>100</sup> Lee, “A Life In-Between: A Korean-American Journey,” 39.



But in typical constructivist Lee fashion, the last word for Lee is never about the tragedy, but about promise and possibility. Hence, at the end of the day, he talks about dreaming and resolving to find a way to realize a “beautiful mosaic” in the U.S.A.: “a promised land, where all kinds of people, small or tall, black or white, yellow or brown, male or female, can live in harmony.”<sup>101</sup>

But how did he arrive at this? What preoccupied his theological imagination? How did he engage theology? The ensuing discussion on his theological method and thought will provide answers to these queries.

### *Basic Features of Lee’s Theological Method*

From a general perspective, Lee’s theological methodology can be classified under what Hesselgrave and Rommen calls as “the liberal dialogical method,” which pursues “new truth” through “non-disputational dialogue” (called by Lee a ‘trilogue’), that consequently brings “a new syncretic gospel” as its result.<sup>102</sup> More specifically, the contextual approach makes up the very fabric of Lee’s theological method. As a theologian, Lee highly values the role of experience in the theological task. He believes, that theological statements are not just born out of “a mere human imagining of the divine but a meaningful correlation of human imagination with a human experience of the divine. . . . Thus, theology as a symbolic quest of divine reality begins with human experience rather than with a propositional statement.”<sup>103</sup> As an inquiry into the meaning of God based on a certain experience, theology then, for Lee, inevitably leads to contextual theology. In his own words:

Contextualization is inevitable in theology, because the task of theology as a symbolic quest is to seek the meaning of divine reality rather than the divine reality itself. The symbol that gives meaning always participates in the living experience of community, which produces and sustains the symbol. The symbol becomes meaningless when it is no longer in touch with the context of living experience which it represents.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Lee, “A Life In-Between: A Korean-American Journey,” 39.

<sup>102</sup> As cited in Jumsik Ahn, *Korean Contextual Theology as Related to Ch’I: An Assessment on the Theology of Jung Young Lee*, 300.

<sup>103</sup> Lee, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective*, 13.

<sup>104</sup> Lee, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective*, 14.

Indeed, much of Lee's theology engaged concrete contexts. Two of these run through his theological works. The first is the Asian context or, what Jumsik Ahn points out in his assessment of Lee's theology as, the use of Asian methodologies, values, and categories.<sup>105</sup> In most of his writings, Lee used resources not only from Christianity but, very significantly, from various Asian, particularly East Asian religions and/or religious traditions, that include Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and, from his own Korean context, Shamanism so much so that his theology is often described not only as an Asian, but also as a Korean contextual theology.

Of the Asian classics the *I Ching* ranks prominently in Lee's sources. He even constructed his own theology based on the East Asian worldview, that had been manifested in the *I Ching*. Charles Courtney explains this theological strategy of Lee:

He has found a problem in existing theology and attempted to use Asian resources for solving it. He takes change, perhaps the most fundamental Asian concept, and brings over its meaning but not all the specific ways in which it is applied or spelled out. That is, he proposes that we can benefit from the idea of change without having to adopt the techniques of divination or the hierarchical societal structures that traditionally have accompanied it.<sup>106</sup>

Lee, indeed, engaged in contextual theology in a critical and constructive way so much so that his theological work became a textual weaving, in which Christianity and East Asian traditions do not lose their uniqueness. He developed this fairly well that he "entered into the discussion of contextual theology on an international level."<sup>107</sup>

The second context that Lee engaged methodologically in theology was his immediate context or life story. More concretely, he used the autobiographical approach as a form of doing contextual theology. He contended, if theology is contextual then the life of an individual

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<sup>105</sup> Citing examples from Lee's works, Jumsik Ahn, *Korean Contextual Theology as Related to Ch'i: An Assessment on the Theology of Jung Young Lee*, 237, 269–70 specifically points at Lee's use of Neo-Confucians and their philosophical concepts, his employment of Laozu as well as the *Tao Te Ching* and the philosophical concepts contained in it, and his utilization of Buddhist and Indian philosophical concepts.

<sup>106</sup> Charles Courtney, "The Thought of Dr. Jung Lee: An Example of Korean Culture Opening into the World," as cited in Chan-Soon Yim, *Suffering, Change and Marginality*, 23.

<sup>107</sup> Jumsik Ahn, *Korean Contextual Theology as Related to Ch'i: An Assessment on the Theology of Jung Young Lee*, 7.

becomes a primary context for theological reflection. Such was his belief that “any meaningful and authentic theology has to presuppose what I am”<sup>108</sup> or that theology is ultimately autobiographical,<sup>109</sup> that Lee had a proclivity to theologize directly from his own story or, at the very least, theologically made connections with his own past and present situation. More specifically, he drew heavily from his Korean, particularly his Korean-American life. Lee’s convictions on the powerful and practical implications of personal life experience in theology was such, that he even came up with the idea for a book, which tells the life-stories of several established Asian-American theologians—a book whose content and method is palpably and typically Lee.<sup>110</sup> As Lee himself said, he would rather see himself as a theologian who searched and embraced the meaning of life, and not so much as one who explained the reality of the world.

#### LEIT MOTIF IN LEE’S THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT

Jung Young Lee started his theological journey as a Neo-Orthodoxian.<sup>111</sup> But his dissertation advisor’s challenge to develop his own methodology, and to deal with a theological issue creatively and differently from western scholars, set him off on a journey towards contextual theology. The theme of the *yin-yang* way of thinking—heavily based on philosophical Taoism and, most especially, Neo-Confucianism—<sup>112</sup> would, then, pervade much of his preoccupation with contextual theology.

Indeed, the *yin-yang* way of thinking can be seen consistently throughout Lee’s theology. Lee believed that Christian theology is problematic because of its roots in the western way of thinking, which

<sup>108</sup> Lee, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective*, 23.

<sup>109</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 7.

<sup>110</sup> See Jung Young Lee and Peter Phan, eds., *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective*, especially vii–ix.

<sup>111</sup> Some of his writings during this period include such articles as “Karl Barth’s Use of Analogy in His Church Dogmatic” (*Scottish Journal of Theology* 22, No. 2, June 1969) and “Bultmann’s Existentialist Interpretation and the Problem of Evil” (*Journal of Religious Thought* 26, no. 2, 1969).

<sup>112</sup> For example, Neo-Confucianists represented by Chu Hsi (A.D. 1130–1200) deeply influenced Lee’s ideas in defining the relationship among *ch’i*, *li*, *yin-yang*, and the Change. See one of Lee’s main works, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective*, 43–4, 130 for this and 39, 41, 43–4, 63–5, 76, 81, 97, 99, 130, 132, and 153 for the influence of other Neo-Confucians as cited in Jumsik Ahn, *Korean Contextual Theology as Related to Ch’I: An Assessment on the Theology of Jung Young Lee*, 269.

he calls as the “either-or” thinking. He argued that this category of thinking, through which much of traditional/classical Christian theology has been articulated, and which has roots in Aristotelian logic, is dualistic, absolutist, and exclusivist.<sup>113</sup> He went on to say that because of this exclusivist philosophy, through which Christian theology was expressed, Christianity was bound to stress conversion of non-Christians rather than cultivation of goodness in whatever guise, and to stress expansion at the expense of other religions rather than cooperation and dialogue with them.<sup>114</sup>

Lee found the “either-or” thinking insufficient as it does not allow the possibility of relativistic qualities. He said it is lacking because it is one-sided. One extreme has to be denied to assert the other. To assert the validity of one is to deny the validity of the other. In much of his writings, Lee advocated and utilized instead a complementary dualism, that embraces a variety of values and orientations as embodied in the eastern logic of “both-and.”<sup>115</sup> More specifically, he argued for the *yin-yang* way of thinking because the “both-and” category of thinking is the basic feature of the symbol of the *yin-yang*.

But what is the *yin-yang* and where does it come from?

Considered as “the most inclusive and integral symbol of ultimate reality” among Chinese worldviews, *yin-yang*, according to Lee, are the two existential modes of *ch’i* or change. The part of *ch’i* which moves is the *yang*, while that which remains quiescent is the *yin*. *Yang* and *yin* represent positive and negative energies in the sub-atomic nucleus, male and female in the sexual distinction, light and dark, hot and cold, south and north, creativity and responsibility, and so on. They can be applied indefinitely to describe the relationship of the opposites in all things. And as they do not espouse conflict but the complementarity

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<sup>113</sup> In Lee, “The Yin-Yang Way of Thinking,” in *Third World Theologies*, eds., Gerald Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 30–1 Lee contends Christianity developed into an exclusive religion because of Christian theology’s proneness to exclusivity through the *tertium non datur* (there is no third) thinking of western philosophy. According to Lee, the seeming difficulty of Christianity to co-exist with other world religions, the formation and promotion of the absolute dogma of God, i.e., God is absolutized by human words, and the devaluation of the non-rational aspects of human life and/or the emotional aspects of religious life, are some of the problems that are born out of this.

<sup>114</sup> Lee, *Theology of Change*, 21. See also Lee, “The Yin-Yang Way of Thinking,” 31.

<sup>115</sup> Lee, *Cosmic Religion*, 37–8. Lee differentiates the two in this way: “either-or” logic is based on “substance” while the “both-and” logic is based on “process”; “either-or” focuses on “being” as substance while “both-and” focuses on “becoming” as process.

of opposites, Lee insisted *yin-yang* “is the category of wholeness rather than partiality...the category of becoming rather than being...[and] the transcendental category of expression, because it transcends the logical and analytical categories of our rational thinking.”<sup>116</sup>

The *yin-yang* symbolism rejects any form of extremism and espouses harmony, particularly harmony of opposites. Inherent in it is the idea that one includes the other as potential, because both opposing sides belong to the wholistic oneness of *ch'i*. They are interdependent, mutually inclusive, and become “background” and “foreground” to each other. Applying this, Lee envisioned religions, particularly Christianity, in peaceful co-existence with other religions through dialogue. In fact, he strongly argued for dialogue with other religions, and considered it as a necessity rather than an option. For him, the theological task “must include other religions, because Christianity is one of many religions... There is no single norm that is applicable to all religions. Thus, what is needed is not the comparative study of religion but mutual dialogue, which helps us understand and enrich the dynamic interactions of different religions in our lives.”<sup>117</sup> Lee went as far as proposing an approach to other religions, which expands dialogue into, what he calls as, “trilogue.” He elaborated this as follows: “Dialogue becomes trilogue because of the connecting principle in dialogue. In dialogue one religion relates to another religion because they are strangers to each other. In trilogue they relate to each other because they are part of each other...”<sup>118</sup> Lee suggested, in other words, that like a true conversation or encounter, “trilogue” with other religions starts with an unconditional acceptance of one another as being a part of myself, based on an organic whole.

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<sup>116</sup> Lee, “The Yin-Yang Way of Thinking,” 34–5.

<sup>117</sup> Lee, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective*, 216. Lee cites, for instance, Christianity’s isolation from other religions in Japan, India, China and other countries where major world religions are dominant compared to how Buddhism has existed very successfully alongside other religions in China, Japan, and Southeast Asia for many centuries because of its middle-way approach to other religions.

<sup>118</sup> It must be pointed out here that trilogue does not eliminate but proceeds from and transcends dialogue. In Lee’s own words: “Trilogue transcends dialogue. It transcends talking, discussing, arguing, comparing, criticizing, analyzing, judging, classifying, or agreeing with each other....[It] is a spontaneous act of communication, which is a direct recognition of the presence of “one in many.” Lee, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective*, 11, 217–9.

Lee also said “*yin-yang* thinking is a way of “both-and” thinking, which includes the possibility of “either-or” thinking. The latter is effective in dealing with penultimate matters, as the former is with ultimate concerns. Since theology is concerned with the ultimate theological thinking must be in terms of “both-and” and, consequently, can be in terms of *yin-yang*. In fact, Lee averred “the *yin-yang* symbolic logic” could be “the most congenial way for the understanding of the Christian truth for universal men.”<sup>119</sup> Some theological issues, where he claimed *yin-yang* thinking can be of help, include those of Jesus’ humanity and divinity, God’s immanence and transcendence, and the relation of the soul and body.

The theological preoccupations of Lee on reality as existential and essential, indeed, found perfect expression in the *yin-yang* way of thinking, that he presented and talked about this assiduously and consistently in his works in theology.<sup>120</sup> In *The I: A Christian Concept of Man*, for example, he used it to explain the relation between faith and reason, fall and creation, sin and salvation, and death and resurrection. In *The Trinity in Asian Perspective*, in the meantime, he utilized it as a basis for re-thinking or re-imagining the mystery of the Trinitarian God. The same is true in *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*, where he made use of it as a way of configuring the situation of the marginal person as “in-between,” “in-both,” and in-beyond.”<sup>121</sup>

#### JUNG YOUNG LEE’S THEOLOGY OF MARGINALITY<sup>122</sup>

One of the strengths of Jung Young Lee’s theology is the way he simultaneously negotiated cultural and social aspects. He systematically did this best in his theology on marginality. Lee believed that marginal

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<sup>119</sup> Lee, *The I: A Christian Concept of Man*, 8 quoted in Jumsik Ahn, *Korean Contextual Theology as Related to Ch’I: An Assessment on the Theology of Jung Young Lee*, 153.

<sup>120</sup> Lee is not alone in seeing the significance of the *yin/yang* in Christian theological thinking. He quotes, for instance, Wilfred Cantwell Smith as saying the *yin-yang* depicts the notion that truth lies not in an either/or, but in a both/and, and Nels Ferré as affirming that there is no place for an excluded middle in theological thinking. Lee, “The Yin-Yang Way of Thinking,” 35–6.

<sup>121</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 64–76. See also the elaboration on the marginal person in the succeeding section.

<sup>122</sup> Its full name is actually “marginality: the key to multicultural theology.” But for purposes of brevity it will just be referred to in this research as “theology of marginality.”

people could be instrumental in a new way of doing theology. Moreover, he asserted that marginality should be the “hermeneutical principle”<sup>123</sup> and “the creative core”<sup>124</sup> for doing theology in the context of a multicultural society.

### *Key Themes*

In his introduction to the book he co-edited with Lee, Vietnamese-American theologian Peter Phan notes how, for Jung Young Lee, the immigrant status or (using Lee’s words) the “marginality” of Asian-American theologians, is the common thread knitting their diverse stories. Lee reveals and describes the strands that make up this common thread of marginality in immigrants’ lives from a faith perspective in his theology of marginality. These strands, named here as key themes, is what this section endeavors to discuss.

#### *The Marginal Person*

As an immigrant in the U.S., Lee saw that then prevailing views on multiculturalism in the U.S., which lean heavily towards assimilation, were reinforcing racism and centralism of one group, and legitimating the status quo. He himself became a total stranger when he set foot in the U.S. The land, people, and language were different; people behaved in a way that embarrassed him. He felt like the dandelion, that he used to symbolize his marginality, not only because of its yellowness, but also because it is known as a useless and dispensable weed. So, using ethnicity and/or racial origin and cultural preference, which he believes are the most important determinants of immigrant marginality based on his experience, Lee adopted the term “marginality”<sup>125</sup> and re-interpreted it from a faith perspective.

According to Lee, racism and/or cultural discrimination is the lot of people of color, especially those in the context of migration. But migrants, particularly with the aid of religious and ethnic com-

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<sup>123</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 71.

<sup>124</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 98.

<sup>125</sup> While it has various interdependent determinants, e.g. race, gender, economic status, politics, education, and age, “marginality” is originally a sociological term normatively understood in relation to ethnic minorities or the personality orientation of those from different racial and cultural backgrounds.

Lee, *Marginality*, 42. Lee draws mainly from the works of social scientists like Robert Park, *Race and Culture* (Glencore: Free Press, 1950) and Everett V. Stonequist, *The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Cultural Conflict* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961).

munities, also survive and live through this. Lee illustrated this very clearly in the case of Asian migrants, in general, and the case of his own people, the Korean-Americans, in particular. In the case of the Korean-Americans, for instance, Lee depicts how they experience a similar pattern of suffering, rejection, and humiliation rooted in what he perceived as Caucasian Americans' bias toward Asians, especially as migrants. But the Koreans survive these because of their strong political interests and their religious affiliation, particularly with Protestant denominations. In fact, Lee maintains they have an advantage, because they retain their sense of community and mutual support through patriotic societies and religious organizations. Moreover, the churches serve as the foci of community life<sup>126</sup> such that they built "Koreatowns" through religious affiliation.

On a more contextual level, Lee drives home the point on the marginalization of immigrants, with his own story (through the parable of the dandelion) and in concrete experiences of discrimination, that he shared all throughout his book on marginality. He reveals, for instance, how he was defined no different from the Chinese by being condescendingly called "Chinaman," or how he was lumped with Korean wives of American servicemen—the Asian image-makers in the area where he used to live—even when he was already teaching in the university. He also shares how the Ohio Conference of the Methodist Church denied him ordination<sup>127</sup> as an elder and full membership to the conference, on account of his race, even when he has met all the requirements.

According to Lee, marginality from a faith perspective has three dimensions. The first one is the "in-between" condition. For migrants, discrimination, often expressed through racism, contributes a lot to their "in-between" condition, or the lot of being "poised in psychological uncertainty between two (or more) social worlds, reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of these worlds."<sup>128</sup> The "in-between" boundaries in these worlds form a marginal condition, not just because the "boundaries" or the "margins" become the migrants' "allocated" positions, but mainly because it leads to "existential nothingness" (one is made to feel like a non-being), and is a root of dehumanization. It creates excessive self-consciousness

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<sup>126</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 23–5.

<sup>127</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 163–4. See also Lee, "A Life In-Between," 35.

<sup>128</sup> Everett Stonequist, *The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Cultural Conflict* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), 8.



and race consciousness, ambivalence, pessimism, sentimentalism and, consequently, self-alienation.<sup>129</sup> This is the classical understanding of marginalization which, for Lee, is the central group's definition.

Basing on Jesus' experience, however, Lee adds another dimension basic to the "in-between" condition, i.e., suffering as symbolized by Jesus' cross. Lee says suffering is inevitable for all Christians, especially marginal people.<sup>130</sup> According to him, a faith without suffering is empty, romantic, and without redemptive value. He acknowledges the negative aspect of suffering, but he insists on its positive aspect, by presenting it as a basic element of love and in relation to the cross. In Lee's words:

Although suffering seems to be a negative experience, it always contains a positive element of creativity because of its embracing love. If there was no love to embrace the world, suffering would be a destructive force. Jesus' suffering was redemptive because it was love that healed and embraced that which caused suffering. For love to embrace and affirm all, it suffers. Love without suffering is unrealistic and has no redemptive value. . . . That is why we cannot talk about God's love without the cross. It is the cross where love becomes truly redemptive.<sup>131</sup>

But marginality as experienced, especially by migrants today, in pluralistic societies, is more than being "in-between," according to Lee. Hence, he proposes a more contemporary self-affirming definition, that he encapsulizes with the term "in-both," or being "part of two worlds without wholly belonging to either."<sup>132</sup> This transforms the perception of the situation. In the case of immigrants while "in-between" carries a negative connotation "in-both" has positive implications, as it complements and balances 'in-between' by bringing out the need to affirm not only one's 'roots' but also one's 'branches.'<sup>133</sup> For Lee,

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<sup>129</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 45–7.

<sup>130</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 162 also says marginal people usually cope with suffering, especially "suffering love", by "finding meaning and support through community fellowship, and believing [in] divine presence". Interestingly, Lee also speaks of humor or laughter as a coping mechanism for suffering of marginal people, particularly Asians. He says satiric humor or laughter is a constructive expression of anger. It "releases pent-up frustration against unjust suffering" as it "often transcends distress and pain. By laughing loudly and often, marginal people escape moments of suffering and reconcile the irony of injustice."

<sup>131</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 94. Lee even maintains one overcomes suffering through suffering.

<sup>132</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 44.

<sup>133</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 49.

indeed, immigrants, who live in-between worlds and affirm both the dominant culture of their residence, e.g. as American, and the ancestral culture of their roots, e.g. as Asian, witness to this dimension of marginality. This means as “in-both,” marginal people are open, inclusive, and pluralistic. They create a new reality that re-imagines and transcends<sup>134</sup> the condition of “in-between,” by living in both or in all worlds.

Not content with “in-both,” Lee gives the marginal condition a more holistic dimension with the idea of the marginal person as “in-beyond”: one who is in-both worlds but also in-between them at the same time, without being bound by either of them.<sup>135</sup> The “in-beyond” marginal person who according to Lee is the new marginal person, is one who is able to harmonize the experience of being “in-between” and “in-both.” S/he overcomes marginality without ceasing to be a marginal person. S/he is a reconciler and a wounded healer. S/he negotiates two or more worlds and tries to bridge or serve as a bridge to these worlds. S/he is “a symbol of a creative nexus that connects different, often antagonistic worlds together, and a catalyst who inspires the creation of a beautiful mosaic of colorful people...”<sup>136</sup> The immigrant marginal, who creatively combines the knowledge and insight of the insider with the critical attitude of the outsider, embodies this dimension of marginality.<sup>137</sup>

### *Jesus-Christ<sup>138</sup> as the Margin of Marginality*

A new marginal person is one who seeks a comprehensive and holistic understanding of marginality. Jesus, according to Lee, is the paradigm of new marginality, the embodiment of the new marginal person *par excellence*<sup>139</sup> and, consequently, the margin of marginality.

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<sup>134</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 49–53.

<sup>135</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 61–3.

<sup>136</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 62–3.

<sup>137</sup> Everett Stonequist, *The Marginal Man*, 154–5.

<sup>138</sup> Lee refers to Jesus in a hyphenated way, i.e., as Jesus-Christ, to destabilize the tendency to stress the Christ, understood (by Lee) as power and majesty, over Jesus, understood as weakness and lowliness, in discourses on the relationship between Jesus and the Christ or “Jesus as the Christ.” Lee reckons using Jesus-Christ will also emphasize his role as reconciler of the powerful or central people (as the Christ) and the weak or marginal (as Jesus).

<sup>139</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* Vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1991) especially 7–9 is illustrative of this.

For Lee, Jesus' incarnation, understood as divine marginalization<sup>140</sup> and divine emigration,<sup>141</sup> offers ways to comprehend Jesus' identity as the margin of marginality. Lee does this with the former (divine marginalization), by explaining it in the context of the divinity taking on human form and the fact that Jesus was: 1) conceived by an unwed woman; 2) born far from his town; 3) sheltered in a manger; 4) visited by Eastern wise men rather than the elite of his nation; and 5) forced to escape into Egypt. Lee does it for the latter (divine emigration) by speaking of the incarnation as God emigrating to or moving to a new and different place (in classical parlance "from heaven to earth"), or from a position of power to a state of power-less-ness.<sup>142</sup>

Jesus' life itself is, indeed, a life of marginalization. Jesus experienced homelessness, loneliness, and rejection. He was an "in-between" person. He was a stranger to his own people. He was treated like someone who was "outside the camp" (or the house of Israel) and even suffered outside the city gate (Hebrews 13:12–13). He was not accepted by the dominant groups of his day, e.g. Pharisees and Sadducees. His last days, particularly his passion and death, reflect all the more the classical definition of marginality as "in-between,"<sup>143</sup> as it was marked with suffering, alienation, and rejection. But he endured all of these for the sake of the poor and the oppressed. That is why, Lee thinks, the role and image of Jesus as the Suffering Servant is essential to Jesus' "in-betweenness." Consequently, he (Lee) believes servanthood is a condition or part of marginalization. He reckons this is the case because "becoming a servant often means to become nothing, to become a non-human being... Servants do not belong to the dominant group. They are outsiders, alienated from the world in which they live."<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 78–81.

<sup>141</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 83.

<sup>142</sup> Lee compares this to the downward mobility that happens in migration and illustrates it through the experience of a number of Asian migrants in America who are marginalized from the humiliation they go through by being "reduced" to working as janitors, cooks, and other marginal workers when they have professional-level positions and a relatively comfortable life in their home countries. But then again Lee points out the harsh reality that while "God's migration" is for the world's salvation, human emigration still somehow serves as an immigrant's redemption.

<sup>143</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 80, 84–5, 91.

<sup>144</sup> Lee, indeed, has a propensity to stress the servant image of Jesus as this (according to Lee) emphasizes Jesus' marginality while his lordship or image as Lord stresses centrality. Lee, *Marginality*, 82–3, 94–5.

As someone who is both human and divine, Jesus also lived the reality of the “in-both,” the contemporary definition of marginality. His ministry, Lee says, attests more strongly to this. He (Jesus) associated with marginal people but he never closed his door to central-group people.<sup>145</sup> He was a friend of and ate at table not only with the poor, but also with the sinners, and/or those who come from the central group like Nicodemus and Simon, who are both Pharisees. In other words, he did not associate exclusively with marginalized people. He was available to anyone willing to approach him, such as the Roman officer (Matt. 8: 5–13), a local synagogue official (Mark 5: 21–43), the rich young man (Luke 18:18–30), a lawyer (Luke 10:25–28), the Pharisees (John 3:1–21; Luke 7:36–50), and a council member (Matt. 27:57–61). He preached both in the haven of the powerful, e.g. the Temple, and the hovel of the power-less, from the streets to the marketplace, by the lake, and on the seas.

Despite the painful experiences of being “in-between,” and the intricacies as well as complexities of being “in-both,” Jesus, indeed, also lived as a reconciler. He broke down walls between Jews and Gentiles, between men and women, between the law and grace.<sup>146</sup> He sought to bring wholeness. He healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, gave hearing to the deaf and speech to the dumb, helped the paralyzed to walk, offered fellowship to women and Gentiles, fed the poor, etc. As healer and reconciler, he pioneered the new marginality, i.e., “in-beyond” marginality.

According to Lee, love, coupled with grace, plays a key role in Jesus’ “in-beyond” marginality. Love is what Jesus’ teachings and life is all about. What makes Jesus’ love significant, for Lee, is that it is inclusive.<sup>147</sup> It parts ways with central people’s notion of love as loving only those who love them and doing good only to those who do good to them. This is a way of life heavily dictated by justice and the law and may exclude people and force them to love in-between. On the other hand Jesus’ love which is coupled with grace invites people to live in-both. It transcends. Hence, Lee says love as Jesus has taught and shown is the way of marginality.

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<sup>145</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 86–96.

<sup>146</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 71–2.

<sup>147</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 90–1.

Jesus' resurrection, Lee claims, further attests to his (Jesus') "in-beyond" status as a marginal person. Lee declares:

With resurrection Christ transcended all marginality. He broke the bonds of every cultural, racial, religious, sexual, economic, social or regional bias that marginalized him and eventually led him to the cross. With resurrection Jesus-Christ is a new humanity, a new marginal person, who lives in-beyond by affirming both worlds.... The resurrection of Jesus Christ marks the beginning of a new age. It offers us a glimpse of the reign of God, where all people live in harmony and peace as children of God.<sup>148</sup>

For Lee, Jesus' resurrection created the creative core "where the Father, the Son and the Spirit are present... the place of neither-nor thinking, and the nexus of all margins... [it] is in-both, and the place of both-and thinking.... It is at this core where God seeks us all, and draws us to the new marginality. At this core God reigns with genuine pluralism."<sup>149</sup> This creative core or nexus is new, dynamic, creative, transforming. It does not dominate but harmonizes margins with coexistence. Most of all, it invites reconciliation.<sup>150</sup>

#### *The Church and Marginal Discipleship*

Under the theology of marginality, identity for marginal people is not just based on the individual self but more on a we-self conception of reality, where community figures prominently. The church, as the fellowship of marginal people, then becomes "the community of God's marginal people."<sup>151</sup>

As a community of the marginal people of God, the church draws inspiration not only from Jesus-Christ as the margin of marginality. The Trinity also plays an important role, as it is paradigmatic of plurality, difference, and community—three values that are very important in Lee's theological constructions on marginality. In fact, Lee says marginal people share the same call: to build and/or create marginal communities, where difference and plurality flourishes. For him, difference and plurality should be recognized, especially by multicul-

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<sup>148</sup> Lee insists on this cosmic dimension of the resurrection. He asserts that as a symbol of hope, joy, and life renewal, it represents the dawning of a new day—one that particularly heralds a genuinely pluralistic society. Lee, *Marginality*, 95–6.

<sup>149</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 98.

<sup>150</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 98.

<sup>151</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 121.

tural societies, as a social condition for it is the order of creation. He argues:

The denial of difference by those who seek the center excludes different people from their right to existence, their right to freedom, and their right to have their own space to make their own history and civilization. Moreover, the denial of difference repudiates equality. By embracing difference, we can learn to respect others and to endorse human equality. Moreover, affirming difference and equality is the foundation of a pluralistic society where all people, regardless of ethnic differences, can coexist as God's people. Such a pluralistic society is a microcosm of God's creative order and the vision of God's reign in the world.<sup>152</sup>

That is why Lee also points out the vital role of relationality in mutual-ity as part of marginal discipleship. One cannot work for a genuinely pluralistic society when one is not at home with difference and plurality. In the context of marginal discipleship this means understanding one's personhood as a community and/or in the context of a community. By being able to recognize "difference in plurality" in oneself, in others, and the world one becomes more at ease with and embrace the need to work for harmony.<sup>153</sup>

For Lee the recognition of difference and/or plurality is an important aspect of marginal discipleship such that indifference—understood as a denial of difference or God's creativity—is the primary sin of centrality, the opposite of marginality. Lee reckons people struggle over the imposition of sameness over difference and singularity over plurality by central people, e.g. assimilation, because such approaches are born out of and create unequal relations. The Church, then, has to keep on working towards the affirmation of difference and equality as the foundation of the community. Moreover, it has to stay in the margins and become the servant of the world rather than assume a central place. It must take its cue and learn from creative minority groups (or cell groups), who embody the genuine commitment of/to the Jesus-movement.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 108.

<sup>153</sup> Harmony, for Lee, is primarily the harmony of racial, sexual, class, and cultural differences. It is about balance, inclusivity, and reconciled diversity. It is about people being at home with differences and living side by side in peace. Lee, *Marginality*, 31; 63; 70; 157; 170.

<sup>154</sup> For Lee hope for the church comes from these small base community groups. He stresses, however, that these cells, especially marginal communities, must relate to other communities. For Lee, this is important for minority/migrant communities,

Indeed, the Church has to struggle to be a creative core. In view of plurality of faith expressions, for example, Lee suggests the Church should strive for dialogue and interdependence. With regard to liturgy in a multicultural society, he recommends changes to the “homogenized worship rituals” and the “inflexible worship format,” that offends the cultural sensibilities of ethnic groups.<sup>155</sup> He says these uniform and rigid worship formats do not ultimately attend to and express the reality of marginal people, e.g. (im)migrants, so liturgical reforms, e.g. in music, is necessary.

Lee most eloquently illustrates the meaning and challenge of marginal discipleship in the context of migration. For example, using the story of the Tower of Babel, (with the tower itself as the symbol of centralization), he claims the history of salvation begins with God scattering us abroad to decentralize us, and that the history of the people of Israel [also] began with the scattering of people—the removal of Abram, Sarah, and their family to a strange land (Gen. 12:1–9).<sup>156</sup> Moreover, he suggests that for Christians:

emigration or sojourning in a strange land is one of the initial steps to becoming a marginal person.... Immigration is the most vivid and profound symbol of marginality for us. Through immigration we are completely detached from a country that had protected and nurtured us. Immigration also estranges us from a centrality that previously protected us. We become displaced and must re-adjust our lives.<sup>157</sup>

Lee reckons migration is a test case of marginal discipleship, as one’s faith usually takes a prominent place when one migrates. He illustrates this in the case of Abram and Sarah, by pointing out how it is with faith, that they took the risk to leave everything that is familiar and secure to them, even if they do not know where they were going (Hebrews 11:8). He drives home the point by describing how the faith

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which tend to be parochial to resist alienation but actually only gain a false emotional security. He contends the church’s mission is to conscientize marginal individuals and groups of their marginality in a way that they discover a new perspective at the margin of their marginality. Lee, *Marginality*, 134, 140–7.

<sup>155</sup> Based on his experience with Korean migrants in America, for example, Lee argues for a more personalized worship setting, e.g. telling stories, using gospel songs, personal prayers, and a community meal, through culturally-oriented liturgies, and developing new alternative marginal liturgies and services. He also especially stresses the full meal after the service, referring to it as “their (the migrants’) communion.” Lee, *Marginality*, 125–6, 136–7.

<sup>156</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 110.

<sup>157</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 110–1.

of Israel deepened in the throes of migration, particularly during their sojourn in the wilderness:

The life of wandering in the wilderness for forty years was an experience of in-between. They were uprooted without belonging anywhere. . . . [It] clarified for them their need to shift their focus on. . . God. Marginality was, then, the potentiality of becoming God's people. The more marginalized they were, the closer they came to God, the margin of marginality.<sup>158</sup>

Lee also believes, that when marginal people, e.g. immigrants, experience God they become the *new* marginals—people who help effect liberation not only for themselves but also for others, including central people. Indeed, for Lee, new marginality does not mean totally leaving out the central people. He believes liberation is a mutual collective process and the goal of marginal people is harmonious coexistence of all people in a genuinely pluralistic society.<sup>159</sup> In the first place, he says, the liberation of the marginalized is not about overtaking the center or creating a new center for themselves.<sup>160</sup> Marginal discipleship is not about creating a new center at the margin. As Lee explains: Centrality is based on hierarchical value while marginality is based on egalitarian principle. Centrality is interested in dominance, while marginality is interested in service. Centrality vies for control, while marginality seeks cooperation. Because of such polarity, the margin cannot be the center. . . the margin does not have a center.<sup>161</sup>

### *Appreciation*

The theological scholarship of Lee, particularly in his theology of marginality, in itself is impressive and constitutes a cutting-edge contribution to the growing literature on theology and culture. Like most laudable critical hermeneutical framework, however, it is not free from reactions, including questions, from other theologians. It elicited, indeed, both positive and negative comments and/or responses,

<sup>158</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 110–6.

<sup>159</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 73.

<sup>160</sup> Citing the Exodus story which does not end with the liberation of the Hebrews but continues with their conquest of Canaan and their oppression of its native people Lee cautions about the possibility of the oppressed turning into the oppressor either by reproducing the same or creating new situations or patterns of oppression. Lee, *Marginality*, 150–1.

<sup>161</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 151.



particularly from his fellow American theologians. This section is devoted to these critical appreciations followed by my own over-all critical appreciation.

### *General Appreciation*

One of those who give a systematic critique on Lee's theology of marginality is Anselm Min. As far as Min is concerned, Jung Young Lee takes the credit as the first theologian for: 1) the thematic reflection on the margin as margin; 2) creatively exploring the many phenomenological dimensions of marginality; and 3) attempting towards a systematic application of the new paradigm (of marginality) to the doctrines of Christ, incarnation, sin, the church, etc.<sup>162</sup> As a Korean-American himself, Min especially appreciates Lee's utilization of Korean-American experience as a source of theology. He finds "insightful" and "telling," as well, Lee's parables of the dandelion and the pond, and considers these as the embodiment of "the best of story theology."

More specifically, Min regards Lee's bringing together of the classical (in-between) and the contemporary (in-both) definitions of marginality in a new comprehensive, holistic definition (in-beyond) highly creative. He affirms that transforming what is essentially a negative situation of alienation and rejection into a positive source of constructive transformation, hope, and solidarity is relevant to the pluralistic demand of a multicultural society. Moreover, he shares Lee's claim that creativity can emerge out of the simultaneous experience of being "in-between" and "in-both."<sup>163</sup>

Min, however, finds problems in some of Lee's claims. For example, when it comes to the experiences of negation and affirmation by marginal persons, Lee, according to Min, does not take a definitive position, whether these experiences are simply "differences" to be complemented and "harmonized" or concrete historical—not merely logical—contradictions to be "abolished" and eliminated. For Min, even Lee's position with regard to the "center" is ambivalent. While he (Lee) considers it as the source of injustice and marginalization, he does not advocate its abolition but only the balance between the center and margin, so Min asks what it means then to speak of "bal-

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<sup>162</sup> Anselm Min, "The Political Economy of Marginality: Comments on Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*," *Journal of Asian and Asian-American Theology* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1996): 83.

<sup>163</sup> Anselm Min, "The Political Economy of Marginality," 89.

ance,” “harmony,” “complementing,” and “reconciliation” between the oppressed margin and the oppressing center. How could the conflict between them “disappear,” when the center remains center and the margin, margin?<sup>164</sup>

Min raises other critical points. For one, he questions Lee’s lack of attention to the role of political economy in discussing race as a determinant of marginality. Min maintains marginality is not a natural but a historical category. People are marginal, he argues, only because they have lost the struggle for political-economic power.<sup>165</sup> Koreans, for instance, were not *born* marginal because they were Koreans, any more than white Europeans were *born* central because they were white Europeans.<sup>166</sup>

Min also thinks Lee’s discussion on how race determines marginality is insufficient, primarily because Lee restricts himself to an understanding of the economic dimension mostly in terms of the economic status of the individual (wealthy, poor, middle class), and as a given in the economic structure. Min is of the opinion Lee should look at the role of the historical and political dynamics of the structure itself, as “race relations are predominantly *about* political—economic power. The pluralism of race and culture, that Lee extols, is not possible without a genuine, decentralizing pluralism of political—economic power.”<sup>167</sup> To bolster this contention, Min points out how racism is most concretely expressed in the economic exploitation of cheap labor and political deprivation of basic rights, and how it (racism) becomes overt, especially in times of political economic hardship. He says:

Lee seems to equate marginality with the simple, even ontological, experience of difference in race and gender as such, without the further qualifications of political oppression, economic exploitation, or cultural deprivation. In short, every human being is a marginal person because he or she necessarily belongs to a particular race or gender regardless of whether that race or gender has been historically exploited and

<sup>164</sup> Anselm Min, “The Political Economy of Marginality,” 90.

<sup>165</sup> Anselm Min, “The Political Economy of Marginality,” 84.

<sup>166</sup> Drawing from Korean history, Min argues, Koreans *became* marginalized as a race because they, *as* a race, were politically and economically weak enough to resist U.S. imperialism. Consequently, succeeding generations of Koreans were marginalized, as a race, (regardless of individual political, economic, and educational status) and will continue to be so until and unless the collective political economic power of Koreans, as a race, improves and becomes competitive with that of other races, especially that of the center.

<sup>167</sup> Italics in original. Anselm Min, “The Political Economy of Marginality,” 85–6.

marginalized....By changing the meaning of margin to the positive experience of ethnic self-affirmation and equality on the one hand, and by reducing the historical category of the margin to the universal category of the experience of gender and racial difference as such, is Lee not in danger of covering up the painful reality of truly marginalized people...?<sup>168</sup>

Lastly, Min disputes Lee's marginalist praxis, i.e., ways of overcoming marginality, which include self-sacrifice and unconditional love. He claims these can be "historically and politically naive" or "empty moralistic exhortation."<sup>169</sup> According to Min, there has never been any change in relations of power, or a single transformation of centrality in history, ever brought about by moral suasion alone. The abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, and the end of two World Wars, etc. certainly did not come about as a voluntary concession of oppressive power, but through the dialectic of political power in its many forms.

Lee's utilization of the *yin-yang*, or the logic of "both-and" or harmony, that significantly informs the content and method of his theology of marginality, also drew a number of pointed observations. Timothy Tian-Min Lin wonders whether Lee has oversimplified the difference between the eastern and western ways of thinking. Lin reckons to make a radical difference between them seems to be a violation of the *yin-yang* principle itself.<sup>170</sup> Francis Clooney echoes this. Clooney thinks that Lee himself also exhibited dualistic thinking by dichotomizing Asia and the West, and by generalizing Western and Asian thought.<sup>171</sup> Jumsik Ahn, in the meantime, points out that while Lee praises the Asian logic of "both-and" he must, at the same time, admit that the logic of "both-and," or the logic of harmony, has been used to justify exploitation, oppression, and injustice in Asian history.<sup>172</sup>

### *Personal Appreciation*

In my view, Lee is partly guilty of spiritualization of reality, particularly because he largely failed to take into account one crucial factor in

<sup>168</sup> Anselm Min, "The Political Economy of Marginality," 88.

<sup>169</sup> Anselm Min, "The Political Economy of Marginality," 91-4.

<sup>170</sup> Timothy Tian-Min Lin, "Book Review of *The I: A Christian Concept of Man*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* Vol. 39, No. 4 (December 1971): 568.

<sup>171</sup> Francis X. Clooney, S.J. "Book Review: *The Trinity in Asian Perspective*," *Modern Theology* Vol. 13, No. 3 (1997): 408-9.

<sup>172</sup> Jumsik Ahn, *Korean Contextual Theology as Related to Ch'i: An Assessment on the Theology of Jung Young Lee*, 273.

describing it, i.e., its construction. While Min points out, for instance, Lee's failure to discuss the political-economic perspective of (racial) marginality, Lee also missed one important aspect, i.e., the gender perspective. He alluded to this when he described how Korean-American male immigrants seek recognition in church, and how women are the least recognized, even if they work harder than men in church. But his conclusion is a telling example of how he lacks a gender perspective. He says: "This seems to indicate that women are less inclined to seek to be at the center and more willing to accept the position of marginality."<sup>173</sup> He suggests it is alright for Korean-American male immigrants to hog power and authority in the Korean-American church, to compensate the treatment they get as second-class citizens in American society. But, for women, he makes it appear that it is either the women's fault that they do not get the recognition they deserve in church, or it is actually better for them not to seek recognition. Otherwise, they will be seeking marginality in its negative sense. Is this not double standard?

I am not surprised, however, at Lee's attitude towards women, particularly towards Korean women. In her book *Women Struggling for a New Life: The Role of Religion in the Cultural Passage from Korea to America*, Ai Ra Kim maintains Korean culture stereotypes women as docile, subservient, and passive. A Methodist pastor like Lee, she (Kim) did an analysis of the historical legacy of the traditional Confucian gender role ideology, and found out that Korean immigrants to America carry this patriarchal mentality or conservative ideology<sup>174</sup> even in the Korean immigrant church.

Subscription to this patriarchal mentality by Lee himself can be deduced with his selective presentation of the history of the *yin-yang*. Vivian-Lee Nyitray points to a chapter of *yin-yang*'s history, that Lee fails to mention:

During the Han (dynasty's) process of synthesis and systematization, (however), the superiority of *yang* [symbolized by the male] over *yin* [symbolized by the female] was advanced. As the correlation of everything from seasons, numbers, and military ranks to either *yin* or *yang*

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<sup>173</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 143.

<sup>174</sup> See Ai Ra Kim, *Women Struggling for a New Life: The Role of Religion in the Cultural Passage from Korea to America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

were established in Confucian orthodoxy, things and persons associated with *yin* were vulnerable to definition as inferior.<sup>175</sup>

Nyitray then maintains:

Central to contemporary feminist analyses of Confucianism is the undoing of the casual category collapse of woman into *yin*. In any context, *yin* associated with qualities of weakness, passivity, emotionality, inauspiciousness, the feminine, and/or what is female must be perceived as discrete, and *yin* must be identified in terms of a dynamic balance of constant change and reconfiguration.<sup>176</sup>

While he gives very concrete situations of marginalization, Lee's conceptions of how to respond to it tend to be too idealistic. He is short on realistic praxis. At the heart of this is Lee's understanding of the role of justice, as detached from and secondary to love. At one point he claims reconciliation, as the new mission of marginality, is not possible without justice. In another, he puts the emphasis on repentance instead, and says that love is more important than justice.<sup>177</sup> And there lies the rub, because his idea of love is a self-sacrificing and self-denying love. But, will this not encourage marginal people to bear, accept, or leave their sufferings unquestioned?

Take the case of women. Lee's interpretations of the above mentioned doctrines and/or symbols, i.e., love, suffering, servanthood, and the cross are the very same interpretations that have traditionally been co-opted to keep women second-class citizens. A reader with a woman's lens can also sense, that there is something amiss in Lee's contention that "the margin does not have a center." I say the margin does have a center and the margin has, what I call, the "margin of the margin." In the context of (im)migration, (im)migrant men are the center of this margin, and (im)migrant women are the "margin of the margin." Lee does not have to look far for an example. His description of Korean women in relation to the Korean-American church will drive home the point.

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<sup>175</sup> Vivian-Lee Nyitray, "Yin-Yang," in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, eds., Letty Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996): 325. Lee only refers to the Han dynasty by saying technical use of *yin-yang* started at this time. See Lee, "The Yin-Yang Way of Thinking," 34.

<sup>176</sup> Vivian-Lee Nyitray, "Yin-Yang," 325.

<sup>177</sup> Lee, *Marginality*, 73, 84, 140.

But Lee is also deserving of a number of accolades. I like, first and foremost, his creative and imaginative approach. I refer here specifically to his use of symbols like the pond, the dandelion, and mosaic to capture and introduce his ideas. But, of course, I like the symbol of the “margin” the most. It is a powerful metaphor. His utilization of it in the case of Jesus, for example, is very apt.

His sharing and reflections, as well, of the history and experience of migration in the U.S. by the Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese, most especially his own experiences as a migrant, are highly instructive. They make a good enough case that race is, indeed, a hermeneutical category for marginality, and that it is at its strongest in the context of migration. In fact, I think Lee has chosen a good context to situate and buttress his arguments for a “multicultural theology”<sup>178</sup> by looking at migration or the experience of migrants. As I have pointed out in the preceding chapter, migration is one of the major factors in the creation of many multicultural societies today, and it can be a powerful place for theology.

I also find incisive, Lee’s attempt to overcome the tendency in theology to present experience in a fragmented way, by interpreting marginality not just as either positive (in-between) or negative (in-both), but as a confluence of both (in-beyond). By taking the discourse beyond a sharp division between “in-between” and “in-both” to a more nuanced and fluid interaction between the two (in-beyond), Lee is able to capture the tensions and contradictions, that are important to surface for a “mosaic” theology, or a theology that imagines the whole.

Lee’s idea of creativity in marginality is also innovative. It is a pity though that he was short of concrete examples to buttress this. Different ways of coping by migrants, for instance, could have shed more light on this. He could have discussed and interpreted this more, for instance, through the ways in which Korean migrants deal with their marginality, e.g. turning to the church. Nevertheless, I agree with Lee, that creativity is transforming and that its transforming power is very much linked with people’s attitude towards plurality and, consequently, in terms of how people view difference. Hence, I also believe Lee’s conception of sin as “indifference” makes a lot of sense.

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<sup>178</sup> I will comment on Lee’s use of “multi” instead of “inter” in the next chapter.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter explored Delores Williams' survival quality of life and Jung Young Lee's theology of marginality. In survival quality of life, Williams names social-role surrogacy as Black women's oppression, and theorizes the struggle of Black women against it as survival struggle or struggle for survival quality of life. Williams points this out by drawing attention to the various survival strategies, particularly resistance strategies, Black women have created and skillfully developed over the years, and the centrality of religion and/or their faith in all these. To illustrate this contention, Williams gives critical attention to the crucial role of the Black church and, to a certain extent, the African-American denominational churches and, most especially, to the wilderness and/or wilderness experience of Black women, as reflected in the story of Hagar and Black women themselves.

In his theology on marginality as the key to multicultural theology, Jung Young Lee negotiates the psychological and socio-cultural implications of racial/ethnic marginalization as a condition, particularly in the context of immigrants in multicultural societies. Drawing richly from his own and other Asian-Americans' (particularly the Korean-Americans') experience as an immigrant in the U.S., Lee posits that marginal people inhabit "in-between" and/or "in-both" spaces, but that they could go beyond this by transforming their marginality, and become "in-beyond" marginal people. Lee then presents Jesus-Christ as the model—the margin of marginality—by drawing considerable attention to Jesus' experience of suffering as a stranger and on the cross, his image as a servant, and his inclusive message and ministry. Having said this, Lee contends marginal discipleship is constituted in the capacity to embrace difference and plurality, and creatively work as a community for a mosaic society, that lives in harmony.

These key themes of Williams' theology of survival quality of life and Lee's theology of marginality, that have been explored here, lay down the markers for a theological conversation with the experience of the DHs in H.K., on which I intend to identify the features of a theology of migrant DHs. Williams' and Lee's respective hermeneutical framework presents a basic method or outline that I can follow: 1) naming the experience of oppression; 2) identifying how subjectivity is/can be played out; and 3) reflecting with/from cultural and biblical sources as well as those from the Judaeo-Christian tradition. As a theological

reflection on oppressed women of color by a colored woman, Williams' survival quality of life can elucidate on the race, class, and, especially, gender aspect. Lee, meanwhile, can shed light on the race and, especially, migration aspect, as the struggle against racial marginalization by (im)migrants in multicultural societies, is where he situates his theology of marginality. The shared critical themes they surface and tackle in their respective hermeneutical frameworks, particularly race, the role of religion and the church(es) and, most especially, the idea of struggle, that comes from boundary existence, can also help surface and clarify the cultural elements and the role, as well as, faces of faith in the struggle of the DHs. As to how these influences will be more concretely expressed, that is a major aim of this research that the next chapter will endeavor to answer. For, now that the mapping is done and the groundwork has been laid, I am going to move into the central theological work of this book, that is, the constructive part.





### III. THE ROAD AHEAD



## CHAPTER FIVE

### A DIFFERENT CARTOGRAPHY: MAPPING THE GOD-TALK OF A FEMINIST THEOLOGY OF STRUGGLE OF FILIPINO WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION

The present is the locus of our normative criteria, that we are responsible for the content and character of our criteria, and that finally we must evaluate the adequacy of our claims, not by whether they cohere with an authoritative past, but by how they contribute to or constrain the creation of more viable cultures, societies, and communities.

—Sheila Greeve Davaney—<sup>1</sup>

#### INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4 we explored Delores Williams' theology of survival quality of life and Jung Young Lee's theology of marginality. More specifically, we delved into the key themes of the said hermeneutical frameworks, and provisionally concluded these can serve as markers towards the articulation of the features of a theology of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration.

The present chapter provides more solid and concrete grounds for the said conclusion, first, by engaging Williams' theology of survival quality of life and Lee's theology of marginality in a conversation with the experience of the DHs.<sup>2</sup> With the help of the said conversation, the present chapter will, then, describe the features of the God-talk of a theology of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration.

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<sup>1</sup> Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Introduction," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition and Norms*, eds., Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997): 15.

<sup>2</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, "DHs" will be used in the first part of this chapter to refer to Filipino women domestic workers in H.K. in particular. In the second part, i.e., "*Pakikibaka* as God-Talk," "DHs" will be used to refer to Filipino women migrant domestic workers in general.

The chapter begins with a triadic conversation, that is, a conversation between Williams, Lee, and the DHs' experience, whereby themes that are recurrent and common to Williams and Lee, with which the DHs' experience connect, serve as talking points. In the course of the conversation points of divergence (not just convergence) will also be identified.

But since the multi-textual character of a triadic conversation constrains us from fully mining the possibilities that Williams and Lee can offer, this chapter then proceeds to a level of conversation, whereby Williams and Lee are separately engaged with the experience of the DHs. To do this the key theme that is unique to Williams and Lee, in which the DHs' experience most strongly connect, is identified then explored for its resonance and, whenever possible, dissonance in relation to the DHs' experience. On the part of Williams the key theme that will be scrutinized is Surrogacy as Oppression; for Lee, the key theme of Migration as Marginalization will be tackled.

At the outset I would like to point out that my intention is not to draw out a one-to-one correspondence. The multiplicity, differences, and/or nuances of the contexts at hand and the inter-textual character of the endeavor preclude such a neat linkage and create, instead, points of convergence and divergence that take on varying contours and angles. In any case this serves well the present chapter's aim, which is to map the God-talk of a theology of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration.

LIFE ON THE EDGE AS GOD-TALK: A CONVERSATION BETWEEN  
WILLIAMS' SURVIVAL QUALITY OF LIFE, LEE'S MARGINALITY, AND  
THE STRUGGLE OF THE FILIPINA DHs IN HONG KONG

Life on the edge as God-talk, I believe, is the main theme which constitutes the central point of convergence between William's theology of survival quality of life, Lee's theology of marginality, and the DHs' experience of struggle. Williams' theology of survival quality of life is a God-talk on living on the edge, first and foremost, because to speak of survival is to talk about "limit" (situations or about living on the) "boundary," "verge," and "brink" — words which are synonymous to "edge." More concretely her theological context is Black women's *boundary existence*, how they are able to forge a survival quality of life in the midst of their surrogacy, and how their experience

challenges existing discourse in Black liberation theology and feminist theology and constitutes womanist God-talk.

In the meantime, Lee's central concept, i.e., "margin," is synonymous to "edge" and his key descriptions of the marginal person, i.e., "in-between," "in-both," and "in-beyond," are words that traverse and transgress the "edge." Moreover, his theological context is *marginal existence*, particularly by racial/ethnic/immigrant minorities, like him, in the U.S., how they are able to or could transform this life on the edge, and how their experience could serve as the key towards the articulation of a multicultural theology.

This basic motif in Williams' survival quality of life and Lee's marginality on life on the edge as God-talk which is discernible along certain themes and worked out on different levels, in varying degrees, and with nuances and divergences also appears in the experience of struggle by the DHs, who live a *border/bordered existence* as far back as they can remember. From being the subordinated gender in the Philippines to being Hong Kong's alien underclass the context from which they try to work out or live their faith is also a limit situation. Such conditions provide a fertile ground for the two theologians to converse, together and separately, with the experience of struggle by the DHs, in order to help identify the features of a theology of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration.

### *Triadic Conversation*

The section that follows engages Lee and Williams in a simultaneous conversation with the DHs' experience on major recurring themes that are common to the two and the DHs' experience relate to. These themes include: 1) race as heuristic lens; 2) wilderness and marginality as space; 3) role and meaning of suffering; 4) dealing with oppression; and; 5) church and community.

#### *Race as Heuristic Lens*

Race, as a heuristic lens, is a theme that forms part of Williams' survival quality of life and Lee's marginality that connects with the experience of the DHs. Lee uses race and/or race relations, particularly between Caucasian Americans and racial/ethnic/immigrant minorities, to understand and explain the process of marginalization and its transformation. Williams also engages race and/or race relations between white Americans and African-Americans (particularly with

African-American women) to describe and explain the surrogacy and survival strategies of Black women. In the same way race and/or race relations between the DHs and the Chinese (and, to a certain extent, the many other races that live) in H.K. serves as an important means to describe and understand the DHs' oppression and the ways in which they struggle against it.

More concretely, race as heuristic lens, as deployed by Williams and Lee in relation to the construction of surrogacy and (in-between) marginality, respectively, provides a means for understanding the DHs' experience of oppression, as migrant Filipinos. Together, Williams' political-economic-cultural and Lee's social-cultural-psychological approach to race address the multifaceted domestication of the DHs' racial and ethnic difference.

Williams, for example, makes it abundantly clear that Black women become surrogates not just because they are women, but also because they are Black (women). The whites' construction of Blacks as an inferior race and, consequently, suited to be "slaves" significantly accounts for Black women's surrogacy in the antebellum period. Similarly, the DHs end up as DHs in H.K. not just because they are women, but also because they are "Filipino" (women), whom the H.K. Chinese construct as "poor," Third World," and "only DHs." Moreover, demarchy and/or the persistent construction of America as "white" and "white-privilege," as Williams contends, makes being "Black" disadvantageous for Black women, in the same way that being "Filipino" becomes problematic for the DHs, when they live in the "Chinese" or "Chinese-privilege" territory that is H.K.<sup>3</sup> In this case Williams, then, speaks to and echoes the challenge of borders and strangers, that arises from the experience of the DHs.

As for Lee, his discussion and stories on how U.S. immigrants, like him, suffer from discrimination on account of their race/color and/or minority status link up with the DHs' experience of racial discrimination, as migrant Filipinos. Albeit there are class undertones (for the DHs) the DHs' experience of restricted socio-political, economic, and cultural rights and controlled access to public facilities, for example,

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Williams discussion on how the co-optation of the English language, American his/herstory, and everyday American life denigrates and disenfranchises Black people provides a clearer means for understanding the construction of the DHs' name in H.K. as *banmui* and the co-optation of the master narratives, i.e., *amah* and *muijai* myths, to degrade and keep the DHs in their oppressed place.

can be read in the same vein, as Lee's experience of being denied ordination by the Ohio Conference of the Methodist Church because of his racial/ethnic/immigrant/minority identity. This experience of Lee, and his position that racial marginalization is tantamount to oppression and should be transformed by working for a "mosaic" or a genuinely pluralistic society, then speaks to the challenge of borders and strangers and the call to hospitality, that arise out of the DHs' experience. Lee's concept of becoming "in-beyond" out of being "in-between," in particular, ties up well with the notion of transforming "border existence" into "spaces of presence," that surfaces in the DHs' struggle against their domestication.

Lee and Williams also respond to the challenge of borders and strangers, as well as the challenge of multiple identities, that arise from the DHs' experience, by presenting racial identity as a means in resisting surrogacy and (in-between) marginality. More concretely, the critical role of the Korean (immigrant) church and the Black church in combating surrogacy and (in-between) marginality parallels the highly-recognized role of the "Filipina (DHs') church" in the DHs' mitigation of their oppression.

#### *Wilderness and Marginality as Space*

Space, as expressed in Williams' idea of wilderness and Lee's concept of marginality, is also a talking point between Williams, Lee, and the experience of the DHs. It aligns, to a certain extent, with the challenge of nuancing the discourse on power, that is, power as both domination and resistance as Williams and Lee explain wilderness and marginality in terms of the construction of places, spheres, and domains as spaces of oppression and spaces of resistance.<sup>4</sup>

Williams, on the one hand, talks of negative wilderness as the wide, wide world that Black women are forced to go out into, just to eke out a living for their families. Similarly, many DHs are forced to migrate to H.K. and work as a DH, for the sake of their families. Moreover, they also experience H.K. as hostile place. Hence, Williams' discussion on the negative meaning of wilderness, i.e., as a place where difficulties are experienced, provides a lens with which to view the DHs' experience

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<sup>4</sup> I subscribe here to Christine Pohl's deployment of place and space as intimately linked. While Pohl refers to place in relation to the physical environment she also sees "place" as (positive or negative) "space" insofar as it is constructed by human relationships and commitments. Christine Pohl, *Making Room*, 13, 19, 150-3.



of H.K. as a place of oppression, where power is exercised as domination. Conversely, Williams' reference to wilderness as a friendly place (positive wilderness) for slaves provides a way for understanding the positive side of the DHs' experience in H.K. or, at least, those who speak of their sojourn in H.K. more positively. Furthermore, Williams' description of wilderness, as an experience of "making a way out of no way" with God's help (wilderness experience), sheds light on the DHs' experience of struggle in H.K., where power is (re)configured as resistance.

Lee, on the other hand, speaks of the oppression of living "in-between" two cultural worlds. This finds its echo in the DHs' experience of H.K. and the Philippines for, as migrants, the DHs live "in-between" the Philippines (as they continue and yearn to speak, eat, read, the things they have been used to in the Philippines) and H.K. (as they are domesticated to get used to and learn the way of life in H.K.). By eloquently describing and reflecting on what it means to live on the interstice, Lee's "in-between" concept sheds light on the challenge of borders and strangers, that arises from the DHs' experience.

Then, Williams and Lee respectively talk of the African-American denominational churches and the Korean immigrant church as places of oppression and resistance. For Black women, their churches are both negative and positive wilderness. For Korean-Americans, their churches also serve as both places of "in-between" and "in-beyond" marginality, albeit across gender lines. Nevertheless, the three conjoin as the DHs share the same experience, that is, the church is both and simultaneously a space of oppression and a space of resistance. As such Williams' and Lee's description and reflections, on the role of the church in the lives of the oppressed, which will be dealt with in depth in the latter part of this section, can be instructive in describing and interpreting the DHs' experience of power as power of the power-less. Lee connects a little bit more than Williams in theorizing on power, however, because of his explicitly-articulated reflections on "in-beyond" marginality as the "interpenetration of both positive and negative experience of marginality." In articulating the experience of marginality as such, Lee theorizes more deeply the much more complex and fluid character of the DHs' struggle against their domestication.

The DHs' experience of the home, however, talks back to Williams' and Lee's reflections on marginality and wilderness as space. Williams does not offer a more substantial and critical reflection of the home as negative wilderness, despite the fact that Black women experience the

home as a gendered space. She fails to fully mine the daily manifestations and implications of the ordinary but equally-vicious systematic oppression inside the “Big House” for the house slaves and, most especially, inside Black homes. The DHs’ experience of the home, from their immediate and/or extended family’s home in the Philippines to their employer’s home, tells Williams that the home, including our very own, can never be under-estimated as a site of oppression (including surrogacy) for women, especially when it is also the workplace, as is the case with the DHs and Black women, who worked and continue to work in other people’s homes.

With Lee, the DHs’ highly significant and pervasive experience of the home, e.g. employer’s home and H.K. (“temporary home”), as both a place of marginalization, and as a place, where they experience bits and pieces of “in-beyond” marginality and/or try to transform their marginality simultaneously, challenges Lee to scrutinize home as a critical concept in understanding and explaining marginality among immigrants or racial/ethnic minorities. Moreover, the DHs’ experience of the home as kinship, as “imagined community,” “transnational” family, and “virtual” community, i.e., as *netizens* of cyberspace, talks back to Lee, that home is an important heuristic device in clarifying a theology in the context of migration and/or multicultural society. The DHs construct and inhabit not just two but multiple worlds in these re-configurations of the home, thereby challenging Lee’s conceptualization of “in-both” and “in-beyond,” as only two cultural worlds. Their borderless political-economic strategies to struggle against their domestication also challenges Lee to go beyond talking of “in-both” and “in-beyond” in terms of cultural worlds, but political-economic worlds as well.

The DHs’ experience of the home also challenges Lee and, to a certain extent, Williams, to configure public and private places, as sites of survival quality of life and marginality, more ambiguously. Traditionally, the home belongs to the realm of the private and the outside world, where people work, is conceived as public. But the DHs’ experience destabilizes this classic categorization. Their home (private) space is also their work (public) place. For the live-in DHs, in particular, what is supposed to be their refuge (private) from the wide wide world is where they also work (public) and/or get exploited or abused.

One must not forget, as well, how the DHs resist by muddling the boundaries between the private and public with their “private” activities in the public space, that is, the Central District every Sunday. This

shows it is not enough to speak of women's experience of space in terms of the public and private in a sharply-divided way, as is often done in analysis on women-space, purportedly due to the notion of masculinization of the public and feminization of the private by patriarchal consciousness. The DHs' experience shows that the boundaries between these categories are more contingent, permeable, and blurred than existing conceptions of the dichotomy construct them.<sup>5</sup> As feminist geographers who explore how gender is spatialised say "dichotomous ways of thinking about spatiality is misplaced, and that many women (and men) are themselves struggling to overcome such dichotomies."<sup>6</sup>

### *The Role and Meaning of Suffering*

Suffering, as depicted and reflected upon by Williams and Lee, also reverberates in the experience of the DHs, and relates with the theological challenge of re-thinking suffering, that arises from the DHs' experience. The convergence, however, takes on varying contours and angles, in a way that Williams, more than Lee, rises up to the said challenge.

Theoretically the DHs connect more with Lee.<sup>7</sup> One can see this in terms of how the DHs, like Lee, regard suffering as a part of faith. The DHs consider suffering "natural" as Christ himself also suffered. Similarly, Lee propounds that suffering comes with marginality just as Jesus-Christ, the margin of marginality, suffered. And just as Lee exalts Jesus' image as the Suffering Servant, to present Jesus as the margin of marginality, the DHs also use Jesus' servanthood to construct an ethic

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<sup>5</sup> The work of Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) cited in Ruth Smith, "Moral Transcendence and Moral Space in the Historical Experiences of Women," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (Fall 1988): 21-37 gives an example on how the public sphere is not independent of the private sphere or that the existence of a public space inhabited by autonomous, self-sufficient individuals is actually made possible by private space.

<sup>6</sup> Nina Laurie et. al., "In and out of bounds and resisting boundaries: feminist geographies of space and place," in Women and Geography Study Group, *Feminist Geographies: Explorations in Diversity and Difference* (Essex: Longman, 1997): 114.

<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy to mention here that Lee's ideas on dealing with suffering which include "humor or laughter, finding meaning and support through community fellowship, and believing in divine presence" (see Lee, *Marginality*, 162) have equivalents or translations in the actual survival strategies of accommodation (laughter), political resistance (informal networks) and religious resistance (image of God as a friend) of the DHs.

of service, and justify “DH-hood” as a noble occupation. Indeed, the conferment of an “inevitable” status and “positive” value to suffering, because of the perceived redemptive value of Jesus’ suffering as a servant, constitutes a deep connection between Lee and the DHs. It must be noted here, however, that while Lee presents a bleak, pitiful picture of a servant as becoming “nothing,” “non-human being,” and “outsiders” the DHs speak of servanthood in a rosy and heroic way.

Moreover, the DHs share Lee’s view that suffering is a component and a litmus test for loving. Like Lee they equate loving with suffering and self-sacrifice even to the point of death. One can see this in the DHs’ “martyrdom mentality”—anchored on a sense of identification with and imitation of Jesus’ expression of love by suffering on the cross—which loudly resounds with Lee’s justification and exaltation of Jesus’ suffering on the cross in the context of love. Indeed, the solid point of coherence between Lee and the DHs is the shared view, that suffering is integral to Christian life and witness, because Jesus-Christ also went through it for love’s sake.

On the level of concrete experience and/or praxis, however, the DHs relate more with Williams. This is true in the sense that much of the DHs’ actual experiences of suffering exhibit strong likeness with the very forms of suffering, that Williams talks about in relation to Black women. Most of all, Williams’ contentions on suffering speak more to the challenge of re-thinking suffering, that arises from the DHs’ experience, in the sense that she does re-think suffering.

Williams maintains Black women suffer from multiple forms of surrogacy, expressed particularly in the assaults on their sexuality, labor, and nurturing functions. Similarly, the DHs suffer from various forms of domestication, manifested particularly in the attacks on their identity as migrant Filipinos, as migrant Filipino women, and as migrant domestic workers. Moreover, the concrete manifestations of the different forms of Black women’s oppression, that Williams describes, share similarities with the DHs’ concrete ordeals. Like Black women, for example, the DHs’ bodies and labor are exploited and abused by employer/slave-owner and capitalism/slavocracy. Both share, as well, unjust working conditions.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The parallelisms between Black women’s experience of oppression and that of the DHs will be elaborated in the dyadic conversation between Williams’ reflections on surrogacy and the DHs’ experience.

The role of the “enslaving Christianity,” fashioned and preached by churches and religious leaders both in the Philippines and H.K., also echoes Williams’ description of the role of African-American churches and its leaders, in the sacralization of the suffering of Black women. In fact, there is a strong correspondence of the doctrines which, Williams says, are co-opted by the African-American churches and its leaders, with those used for the DHs to make them bear with, accept, and internalize their suffering. These are the inter-related doctrines on Jesus’ suffering, the cross, love, and sacrifice.

Williams and the DHs part ways, however, when it comes to interpreting the said doctrines. Nevertheless, it is at this point that Williams rises up to the challenge of re-thinking suffering. For example, while the DHs believe Jesus’ suffering and, consequently, their suffering is redemptive, Williams maintains Jesus’ suffering is not redemptive or salvific, and that making use of it to explain (Black) women’s suffering can be counter-productive. Unlike the DHs, who think doing so does not really bring them harm but help them cope with suffering, Williams cogitates interfacing (Black) women’s suffering with Jesus’ suffering sacralizes the suffering, and buries (Black) women deeper into their surrogacy.

At the heart of this conceptual divergence on suffering is the bifurcation between Williams’ and the DHs’ points of view on the cross. The DHs see the cross as a symbol of Jesus’ identification with their suffering and vice-versa—a way of thinking that tends to make them acquiesce and be passive with their suffering—while Williams views the cross as a symbol of sin, particularly the sin of defilement. By surfacing, however, the suffering-reinforcing role and meaning of the cross, exposing and discussing the theories of atonement within their respective contexts, and highlighting the struggle for the good Williams powerfully speaks to the challenge on re-thinking suffering and the DHs’ own struggle.

The dissonance between the DHs’ and Williams’ line of thinking gets sharper when it comes to apprehending the meaning and role of love and sacrifice, again, in the context of Jesus’ suffering on the cross. From one end, Williams strongly advocates the womanist tenet exhorting Black women to “love themselves regardless.” On the other end, the DHs’ tenet is to love others, particularly their family, even to the point of forgetting their own well-being. Williams sees love, particularly sacrifice in the context of love, as a culprit. Except unmarried ones, who more palpably question and/or change this way of think-

ing after realizing how it has jeopardized their self-development, DHs tend not to see anything wrong with forgetting about their own well-being and loving and sacrificing for others.

Williams and the DHs also largely differ in their choice and interpretation of biblical models/stories to make sense of their suffering. For example, while Williams holds up Hagar, whom African-American women can truly identify with on many levels, and appropriates Hagar in a way that challenges Black women to struggle against their suffering and towards quality of life, the DHs choose biblical personalities, whom they share very little similarities with, e.g. Job. Moreover, their appropriation of the stories of their biblical models, e.g. Mary's Annunciation story, is done in a manner that does not help them (DHs) challenge or struggle against their suffering.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Williams' Hagar, who struggled against and looked for concrete means to change the problematic situation, the DHs' biblical models (as these are appropriated by the DHs) just acquiesced to the "God-given" situation. Hence, Williams' effective use of and reflections on Hagar challenges the DHs to find a biblical figure, who speaks to them not just as a suffering person but, most especially, as a suffering migrant woman of color, who struggle for quality of life.<sup>10</sup>

Obviously, Lee's, Williams' and the DHs' Christology is enshrined in their understanding of the role and meaning of suffering. Like Lee, the DHs subscribe theoretically to a "high" and hierarchical Christology, where the emphasis is on Jesus' divinity. This can be evinced

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<sup>9</sup> It serves well to recall here, that the notion of obedience and submission to God's will, which encourages passivity, takes prominence in the DHs' interpretation of the Annunciation story.

<sup>10</sup> Williams' interpretation of Hagar also strongly speaks to the DHs' experience insofar as Hagar struggled against her oppression as a slave woman of color. But since the DHs' identity as migrants strongly figures in their struggle I reckon Ruth as interpreted in Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 104–13; Dianne Bergant, "Ruth: The Migrant Who Saved the People," in *Migration, Religious Experience, and Globalization*, 49–61; and Mary Yuen, "The Ruths Living Among Us: A Cry from New Immigrant Women," *In God's Image* Vol. 16, No. 2 (1997): 22–3 could serve as a mirror of the DHs' struggle. Angela Wong Wai Ching, "Building Communities: Asians in Search of New Pedagogies of Encounter," *CTC Bulletin* Vol. XX, No. 1 (April 2004): 11 also writes along this line saying: "Ruth is in fact challenging the idea of living in fixed boundaries, relating to people of one's own kindred, and praying to a God of one's own origin... To see Ruth as choosing for herself a position of stranger reminds us once again how one can move from the security of home and venture into new relationship with people in a foreign land. Perhaps meeting with strangers as strangers is required of us in building communities in this vast, dynamic pluralistic world."

in how Jesus' suffering and his image as the Suffering Servant take up central positions in both the DHs' and Lee's view of Jesus. One can discern in the DHs' actual experience or practices, however, what amounts to an unarticulated "low" or egalitarian Christology, which puts the stress on Jesus' humanity like that of Williams. This mirroring of Williams' understanding of Jesus in terms of his "ministry of healing and righting relationships" can be seen in the way the DHs re-image Jesus as a friend and fellow stranger and, most especially, in their own faith-inspired and Church-supported struggle towards full humanity. Though not well-articulated in words, one can say that, side by side, or deep within their understanding of Jesus as a co-sufferer, is an image of Jesus as a co-resistor, or one who not only identifies but also struggles with them.

#### *Dealing with Oppression*

Dealing with oppression is another point where the DHs' experience, particularly the challenge concerning hospitality and catholicity and, most especially, the challenges that have to do with power, identity, and intercultural theology, find points of connection with Williams and Lee. With Williams, the DHs' internalization of domestication, particularly when it comes to loving others, is illumined by the womanist admonition to Black women to "love yourselves regardless." Like Black women most DHs submit to and accommodate their domestication, as women, by giving in to the male/family or community's expectations on the exercise of their nurturing functions. Williams' emphasis on the more liberating womanist tenet then serves as a challenge for the DHs' submission and accommodation and as an affirmation for their resistance against their domestication.

It is Williams' description and reflections on the subtle, silent, and dramatic political and religious resistance activities and the art of cunning, encounter, care, and connecting in which Black women survive their surrogacy, however, that resonate more strongly with the DHs, when it comes to dealing with oppression. The DHs' experience of struggling against their oppression not only replicates the above mentioned categorizations but also have similar manifestations. Like Black women, they dramatically resist by going to courts, suing their employer, staging protests, and creating subversive songs. Like Black women, as well, they subtly and silently resist through sisterhood, and through their own churches and communities.

Unlike Williams' smooth depiction of Black women's subjectivity, however, the DHs' subjectivity is much more fluid and complex, as can be seen in their equally strong tendency to submit to and accommodate their domestication. One striking example here is this: While Black women would even resort to killing their children to spare them from slavery, DHs would bring their daughters to H.K to work as DHs, and the DHs' daughters themselves willingly go or actively pursue working as a DH. This shows a deeper, inter-generational, and cross-border character of the internalization of one's oppression, on the part of the DHs, that does not palpably appear among Black women, as Williams depicted them. Another significant difference is the prominence of laughter, as a means of struggle, among the DHs. While this can probably be seen as part of the "love of life, music, dance, and the spirit," which Williams quotes from Alice Walker's description of the womanist, and to her (Williams') reference to the love for "feast and celebration," laughter, as a means of struggle by the DHs, somehow stands out by virtue of its pervasiveness.<sup>11</sup>

Last but, definitely, not the least the DHs link with Williams on the role of faith and God's help in dealing with oppression. In fact, in their ways of struggling DHs crystallize Williams' point on surviving as "making a way out of no way" with God's help. However, the DHs diverge a little as the DHs' faith is strongly marked by a sense of what I call independent dependence. They depend on God for guidance, help, and strength, and believe that God will not fail them, that God will accompany them. This, I believe, is somewhat different from Williams' idea of vision in the context of survival, particularly her articulations about God providing resources for survival to Hagar. Unlike Hagar, the DHs are more inclined towards seeking strength, and not so much looking for answers or praying for ideas on what to do. Like most Filipinos, who are reputed to be ingenious and flexible, like the *kawayan* (bamboo), the DHs usually know what to do. God comes in and is sought as the provider of strength. God, then, becomes not so much a

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<sup>11</sup> Except for a reference to Black folks' cultural mask of humor in Delores Williams, "Gospel, Culture and Women in an African-American Context," 17 Williams does not specifically discuss laughter as a resistance strategy in her writings. This pales in comparison to the DHs' case where they have a book of jokes, kinds of jokes, e.g. green jokes, and even a caricature (for their jokes), i.e., "Maria the stupid DH." I rather suspect that what songs, e.g. wilderness songs, blues, and jazz, is to African-Americans is laughter, especially in the form of jokes, for the DHs.



God of survival but a God of strength for the struggle. Hence, Jesus is even imaged as a fellow stranger, whom they draw strength from.

Like Lee, Williams presents her subjects (Black women) not just as victims, but also as resisters. In doing so, that is, by depicting their subjects as not monolithically oppressed, they respond to the challenge of articulating power as both domination and resistance. More specifically, by presenting Black women and racial/ethnic/immigrant minorities as surviving surrogates and transformed marginals, they elucidate on the DHs' experience as not just passive victims but struggling victims. Moreover, the manner in which Williams and Lee situate the domination and resistance of Black women and racial/ethnic/immigrant minorities in the context of different and intersecting identities (race, class, and gender identity for Williams and race, ethnic, migrant and minority identity for Lee), is instructive of the centrality of the DHs' various identities in their domestication, and their struggle against it. In fact, the very identities with/from which DHs are oppressed and resist are the very same identities, that Williams and Lee tackle together (race, class, and religious identity) and separately (gender for Williams and migrant identity for Lee), in their respective hermeneutical frameworks. Thus, Williams and Lee shed light on the challenge of the multiple and dynamic character of identities, that arises from the experience of the DHs.

With Lee, in particular, the DHs' strategies of submission conjoin, especially along gender lines, with his position on dealing with marginality, through loving that embraces suffering, as Jesus has done on the cross. Their strategies of accommodation, meanwhile, hook up with the ways in which Lee reflects on how racial/ethnic/immigrant minorities deal with their marginality by living "in-between" and, particularly, "in-both." The DHs' strategies of resistance and, to a certain extent, their strategies of accommodation, e.g. use of jokes, are also the epitome of the creativity that, Lee thinks, is important in transforming marginality.

Lee's unequivocal argument for recognizing difference and plurality, and working for harmony as ways of transforming marginality, also speak to the DHs' experience, given the same multicultural context and minority position that Lee speaks and reflects from. Accordingly, the DHs' experience of the domestication of their difference as migrant Filipinos deeply connects with Lee. Moreover, the DHs' strategies for resistance run alongside Lee's ideas on difference, plurality, and harmony as ways of transforming marginality. Their annual mul-

ticultural festivals, multinational organizations, e.g. AMCB, outreach activities to the local community, and acts of solidarity on social issues with local groups, e.g. LDWs and labor unions, can serve as examples of Lee's ideas on difference, plurality, and harmony, which are actually key ideas or values towards the articulation of an intercultural theology.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, these values are integral to the challenge of hospitality.<sup>13</sup> Still, as can be evinced from the DHs' continuing struggle, they are still far from transforming their marginality, as Lee has envisioned it to be. For them, their reality is not so much the transformation of marginality, but the struggle to transform it.

As Chapter 2 shows, "struggle" characterizes the way the DHs deal with their domestication. Insofar as Lee (by contending that marginality should be transformed) and Williams (by showing how Black women survive their surrogacy) make it clear, that oppression must be dealt with, in general, and resisted, in particular, both shed light on the feasibility of "struggle," as the epistemological category for the DHs' experience. To the extent that Williams herself speaks of "survival struggle" and the transformation of marginality (in-beyond), that Lee articulates, involves struggling with marginality itself (in-between and in-both), both point to and elucidate on struggle as the God-talk of the DHs.

### *Church and Community*

Williams and Lee also converse with the DHs' experience on the matter of church and community. At this juncture, the conversation responds to the implications of migrant religion, the challenge that has to do with hospitality, and the challenge to shift the discourse from *multicultural* to *intercultural* theology. With Williams, the DHs can very much identify with the way she presents and discusses the church as a basic institution in the lives of Black women. The way she depicts the Black church as a symbol and means of Black people's struggle concurs with the way the Filipina (DHs) church functions, not just as a religious center but as a socio-cultural and political-economic hub as well. Most importantly, her description of the Black church, and the distinctions she makes on it vis-à-vis African-American denominational churches,

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Michael Amaladoss, "From Syncretism to Harmony," *Chakana: Intercultural Forum of Theology and Philosophy* Vol. 2, No. 4 (2004): 43–60.

<sup>13</sup> Christine Pohl, *Making Room*, 61–84, 104–24 makes a link between hospitality and marginality in relation to the power of recognition.

link tightly with the DHs' experience of church, particularly with other DHs. From their Sunday service in parks and gyms, fellowships and/or *salo-salo* (shared meal) in public and private places, street protests and weekly gatherings at the Central District, to the meetings in car parks and garbage areas, DHs very much resonate with Williams' position, that church can happen outside the building and the institution.

Williams' illustration of the double-edged role of African-American denominational churches echoes, as well, the DHs' experience of Christian churches as an agent of domestication and, at the same time, a means for struggle. Noteworthy to recall here, is the legacy of the "enslaving brand of Christianity" the Spanish colonizers inculcated in the Filipino, especially in Filipino women, and the charismatic groups, that allegedly "do not promote liberating concepts of the divine," vis-à-vis the spiritual accompaniment, counseling, and the political, economic, and legal assistance, that church leaders and/or church-based NGOs, e.g. MFMW and DPCF, are doing.

The connection with Williams is crystallized in terms of how the church serves as a psycho-social space. Like Black women who, according to Williams, come to church where they are made to feel "somebody," DHs also seek the church, where they are not made to feel like "strangers." Like Black women, DHs also experience the church as a refuge from the horrors, atrocities, and difficulties born out of oppression. Moreover, like Williams' overriding notion and presentation of the church and community as "Black" and "African-American," the DHs' church and community is primarily centered on the Filipino (migrant) church and community. Hence, Williams and the DHs connect in terms of an understanding and engagement of the church and community as, first and foremost, an "intra," "within," "local," and "racial" one.<sup>14</sup> But, insofar as the DHs more strongly turn to the Filipina DH church, and not just the Filipino church in H.K. to combat their alienation, the DHs' experience of the church branches out from Williams, in that it (DHs' experience of church) is highly localized. Class, not just race, determines the DHs' church and community.

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<sup>14</sup> In the context of H.K.'s cultural pluralism, and the practice of religion by the DHs as "ethnoreligion," this could be much more specified for the DHs, so as to mean "ethnic."

Religious differences are another point of divergence between Williams and the DHs' experience. Black women mainly had to contend with religious difference on an "intra" level as they share the dominant religion of their slave-owners and the American society, i.e., Christianity. The DHs, on the other hand, have to contend not just with the "intra"—challenges posed by other Christian believers and/or groups—but also with the "inter," or the challenges posed by adherents of other religious traditions, and the travails of being a minority religious group (in H.K.) from being a majority religious group (in the Philippines). This interreligious differences and minority status cannot be ignored as these create considerable changes, e.g. religious conversion, and impinge on the religious identity of the DHs, e.g. limitation for DHs to go to Sunday service. This experience of the DHs, then, challenges Williams to articulate religious differences beyond "intra" to "inter," and to explore the dynamics of majority-minority status in the context of religious identities.

Lee enters and enriches the conversation at this point. Like Williams, he makes it abundantly clear, that personhood must be understood in the context of a community. Like Williams, as well, Lee believes and illustrates how the church is a highly-sought refuge for the oppressed, particularly for racial/ethnic/immigrant minorities. With Lee, in particular, the DHs can nod in agreement with his claims on the significance of "cell groups" or BECs in experiencing and building an authentic church. This is so since it is in the DHs' small groups, that they experience God's sustaining work in their lives—the same groups that encourage and help them struggle against their domestication, with faith as a weapon.

But while Lee is concerned with the local church and community, particularly those by the racial minorities and "cell groups," he argues that one's notion and engagement of the church and community should transcend the local level. As a matter of fact, his preoccupation with regard to the church is on the "inter"—the church "without"—or the church without borders. This is palpable in how he associates the discipleship of the marginal community with that which values plurality, difference, and harmony, and in how he contends that "the liberation of the marginal people is inseparable from the liberation of the central people."

As the alien underclass and a religious minority of a pluralistic society the DHs definitely connect with this conception by Lee of the church and community. From the negative side, the difficulties

towards building what the H.K. diocese dreams of as a church that is both Filipino and Chinese attest to this. On the positive side, the DHs annual multicultural celebrations, outreach activities, and acts of solidarity with the local community demonstrate this link with Lee's inclusive vision of the church and community. These also express Lee's arguments on dialogue and interdependence as ways of discipleship and harmony, and as the ultimate goal of a marginal church. Lastly, these can also be construed as the crystallization of Lee's position that a church and community, no matter how marginalized it is, should not close itself from the other churches and communities, including that of the oppressor. Hence, Lee's concept of the church and community is responsive to the challenge of hospitality, which arises from the DHs' experience.

Lastly, Lee connects with the DHs' experience on the matter of church and community with his conviction on liturgies or worship rituals, which take into account the cultural sensibilities of ethnic groups. The DHs' experiential concurrence with this can be evinced from their gravitation to religious services in Filipino or English, and their increasing attendance in charismatic celebrations, which are dynamic and tap into or speak to their pain or context. This is also in accord with Lee's argument, that worship must not just be de-homogenized but also creatively personalized to speak to people, especially to those who are oppressed. With this, Lee especially addresses the challenge of migrant religion in relation to the DHs' experience, in that he tackles not only the significance of a universal church and/or a "mosaic" community in the context of a multicultural society. He also speaks of/for the migrant church and community and its unique religious needs, e.g. liturgy.

But, as is the case with Williams' reflections on church and community, the DHs' experience of class-based religious discrimination brings in an angle that Lee does not tackle. For the DHs, their race, ethnicity, migrant, and minority identity are not their only problems as religious practitioners. They are also burdened by their social status as evidenced by the dissociation of the local as well as the non-DHs Filipino Christian community in H.K. Hence, the DHs' experience could also serve as an indication of the difference in experience of church and community between immigrants, who have citizenship status, and migrant workers, who are temporary and expendable "resident aliens." But, still, insofar as Williams and Lee dwell on the oppressed

and resisting church and community identified along racial and ethnic lines in the context of migration they, especially Lee, illuminate the challenge of migrant religion. Together they make it clear that in the context of dis-location the practice of religion, especially by the oppressed, could be heavily determined by racial and ethnic identity, and may be a source of oppression as well as a means for struggle.

### *Dyadic Conversation*

The section that follows brings the conversation to the dyadic level, i.e., Williams and Lee in separate conversation with the DHs, to surface and mine, as much as possible, the uniqueness that Williams' theology of survival quality of life and Lee's theology of marginality can offer, towards articulating the features of a theology of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration. The first part engages Williams' descriptions of and reflections on Surrogacy as Oppression and the second explores Lee's descriptions of and reflections on Migration as Marginalization.

#### *With Williams: Surrogacy as Oppression*

Williams' depiction, analysis, and reflections on Black women's experience of social-role surrogacy is where she stands unique from Lee, and connects the deepest to the DHs. Williams' discourse on surrogacy links, in particular, with the challenge of em-body-ing theology and gendering the quest for economic justice, that arise from the DHs' experience.

Williams particularly responds to the challenge of em-body-ing theology, with her description of Black women's surrogacy, which confirms and elucidates on the DHs' various forms of domestication, particularly as Filipino women and as migrant domestic workers. For example, like Black women slaves the DHs' sexuality and nurturing functions are appropriated, tamed, controlled, and exploited. They (DHs), too, are made to substitute for their female employers by being turned into surrogate houseworkers, mothers, and, sometimes, wives. The similarities in the experience of Black women slaves and the DHs becomes more stark in Williams' portrayal of the Black mammies whose job, Williams says, was taken on by domestic workers in the postbellum period. First Williams' description of the tasks of mammies is really not much different from what the DHs do. Like Black mammies DHs do not just take care of the housework. As "Doctors of

Humanity” (as the DHs jokingly call themselves) they are very much a part in raising Chinese children. Secondly, Black women slaves’ working conditions resemble that of the DHs. Williams’ examples of Black women slaves being taxed to the utmost, with multiple tasks and long hours of work, corroborate the slave-like nature of the DHs’ grueling work schedule. The appalling accommodation of Black women slaves, who were made to sleep in the kitchen and along the passageway, is also no different from the plight of the DHs.

Closer to the present the racialization of the DHs’ sexuality in H.K. finds some sense in Williams’ contention on the racialization of Black women’s sexuality, as a form of control by the dominant group. Like Black women the DHs’ sexuality is cloaked in stereotypes in H.K. In fact both have two stereotypes that are exactly alike, namely “loose” and “prostitute.” Thus, the DHs can relate when Williams says these stereotypes devalue (Black) womanhood and, consequently, control (Black) women’s sexuality. As was/is the case with Black women, these racialized stereotypes, indeed, devalue the DHs’ womanhood, as these put them on the receiving end of unsavory and discriminatory treatment. One aspect in the DHs’ response to this form of control, that probably needs more clarification on the part of Williams, is how their resistance to it simultaneously becomes submission and/or accommodation, as they end up achieving what the dominant group want, i.e., control their sexuality.

Williams speaks the strongest to the challenge of em-body-ing theology with her assertion, that the social-role surrogacy of Black women is a sin, particularly the sin of defilement. Her elaboration on why it is the sin of defilement touches the heart of what is offensive in the DHs’ experience of domestication. Like Black women’s bodies, DHs bodies are controlled, tamed, ravished, and violated, their womanhood and sexuality “devalued,” their self-esteem “depleted,” and their spirit “ruptured” and “obliterated.” In the case of the DHs, this destruction is evident in the religious, socio-cultural, and political-economic structures that discriminate and train them as DHs from girlhood, the various physical tests conducted during recruitment, and the physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and political-economic abuse during employment.

In fact, the assertions Williams makes on Black women’s surrogacy in relation to defilement, is where she speaks most eloquently to the DHs’ experience of oppression as domestication since, like the DHs,

Black women are also domesticated.<sup>15</sup> Their surrogacy is, in fact, premised on their domestication, in the same way that the DHs become surrogate mothers, wives, and parents because of their domestication. Hence, Williams' declarations can provide critical ideas to describe what happens in the process of domestication, i.e., taming and controlling, its mechanisms, e.g. gendered socialization and gendered and racialized violence, and its devastating effects, i.e., rupturing and obliterating the human or woman-spirit, where one's humanity, healthy sense of self, and well-being is damaged.

Williams also responds to the challenge of gendering the quest for economic justice, through her analysis of Black women's surrogacy in relation to the politics and dynamics of economics. For example, Williams argues that capitalism and the American way of life of comfort and leisure is achieved at the expense of poor Blacks, especially Black women. This argument segues perfectly with the reality that the vibrancy of the H.K. economy and the leisure and comfort of Chinese families is made possible by the "labor" of the DHs. This argument also relates well with how kyriarchal capitalism, with its gendered global job market, survives and thrives on poor shared resources, a.k.a. migrant workers, like the DHs, who do the dirty work and, thus, become "modern-day slaves." Williams also maintains poverty and the nature of work available force(d) Black women to engage in some of the surrogate roles in post-slavery America, e.g. the perpetuation of the mammy role by domestic workers. This corresponds to the fact that economic reasons and the lack of viable job opportunities for women in the Philippines heavily account for the DHs' migration as DHs.

The role of religion in the domestication of the DHs also finds some clarification in Williams' investigation into the religious undertones of Black people's slavery, in general, and Black women's surrogacy, in particular. Her contention at how slave-owners used Christianity to justify and reinforce Black people's slavery and Black women's surrogacy provides a way of identifying and interpreting the role of the legacy of the "enslaving brand of Christianity," that the Spanish colonizers brought and nurtured in the Philippines for more than 300

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<sup>15</sup> Williams' reflections on defilement as symbolized by the cross, i.e., as a manifestation of collective human sin and a reminder of how humans have tried throughout history to destroy visions of righting relationships, also form part of the reasons for this argument.



years, in the domestication of the DHs. In particular, Williams' argument that the Victorian model of womanhood was employed by the slave-owners to convert the "heathen Black women" affords a way for making sense out of the utilization of the *doncella* (Iberian peninsula's version of the Victorian woman) by the Spanish colonizers to tame the Filipina.<sup>16</sup>

The DHs' experience diverges, however, in one or two aspects, particularly in relation to surrogacy as substituting for male energy. First, the DHs do not work in farms. Neither do they engage in traditional male tasks. In fact, they balk if they are made to do supposedly "masculine" tasks like painting the house. Second, DHs do not substitute for the absence of male energy in the household as it is they, hence, the female energy, that is conspicuously absent in Philippine households. While the opposite (male energy substituting for female energy) is sometimes true in their case, another female (*tagasalo* or surrogate) usually substitutes for the absent female (energy). This and their strong compliance to (feminine) gender roles and its "rules" even in their absence, as can be evinced from the unbroken feminine chain in care work, is where the DHs' experience of oppression as domestication becomes more evident in contrast to Black women's. Quoting bell hooks, Williams speaks of the "masculinization of the Black female." In the DHs' case it is what I regard as the strong taming and controlling of the Filipino female to be feminine. The systematic nature and enduring character of this process of taming and controlling amount to domestication.

#### *With Lee: Migration as Marginalization*

Lee's reflections on migration as marginalization constitute his unique and deepest connection with the experience of the DHs, and relate with the challenges of migration as a locus for theological reflection and the challenge of intercultural theology. Like Lee and his racial/ethnic/immigrant minorities, the DHs experience migration as estrangement and as life on the fringes. Lee's descriptions on how the language, people, customs, and practices (even the weather) in the U.S. isolated and put immigrants, like him, "in-between" and "in-both" cultures, e.g. Korean and American, echo the DHs' experience of loneliness

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<sup>16</sup> I argue, however, that the strong colonial roots of the DHs' domestication also call for a postcolonial perspective to more fully apprehend their oppression.

and isolation due to the domestication of their difference. Lee and the other U.S. immigrants' problems with English, for instance, resemble the DHs' problems arising from their lack of facility with Cantonese. Like Lee and the other Asian immigrants in the U.S., the regulation of the DHs' difference (through policies against them) and the everyday forms of racism directed against them cut them off. They, too, are like Lee's dandelion—the “useless and dispensable weed”—that perfectly describes the DHs as unwanted and disposable migrant workers.

The DHs relate, as well, with Lee's experience and reflection on image-makers among migrants. While Lee is not part of the image-makers of Korean immigrants, i.e., Korean wives of American servicemen, that he mentioned, and the DHs themselves are the image-makers of Filipino migrants in H.K., both Lee and the DHs share the reality that the over-riding identity of racial/ethnic/immigrant minorities is always “as (im)migrants.” Moreover, Lee's and the DHs' experience converge in pointing out that there is a monolithic “face” (often based on the most numerous or most notorious members) attached to groups of migrants, by virtue of their racial/ethnic affinities. This, then, makes any member of the group the subject of discrimination by the dominant group whether or not s/he belongs to the migrant group's “image-maker.” But, being the image-makers themselves, migration is doubly difficult for the DHs, as they suffer from discrimination not just from the dominant group, but even from their own group, particularly from those who work in H.K. as professionals. At this point, the DHs' experience talks back to Lee to further nuance his idea of marginality to include class marginalization among migrants themselves.

In any case, the DHs' deeper marginalization as the Filipino migrant community's image-makers and their experience of loneliness, isolation, and exploitation actualize Lee's very description on how migration “is the most vivid and profound symbol of marginality,” in the way it detaches a person “from a country that had protected and nurtured” him/her. The religio-cultural differences the DHs had to deal with also crystallize the reality of “displacement” and “re-adjustment” Lee talks about in the context of migration. With these, Lee illumines the challenge of borders and strangers.

The challenge of borders and strangers is also illumined by Lee with his interpretation of the Incarnation as God's downward migration. Lee's interpretation meshes particularly with the DHs' experience of downward social mobility. His concrete example, i.e., professional Asian migrants being “reduced” to working as janitors, cooks, etc.,

matches the de-skilling and social demotion of the majority of the DHs “from ‘Ma’am to nobody.” Additionally, Lee’s contention that “while God’s migration or Incarnation is for the world’s salvation, human emigration is still the immigrant’s redemption” partially touches upon the DHs’ experience. It affirms many DHs’ view, that migration is their ticket out of problematic economic conditions, and the experience of the few, who use migration as a solution from gender-related problems. Hence, Lee also confirms a truth that emerges out of the DHs’ experience, i.e., that inasmuch as migration spawns oppression it also offers paths towards liberation. In doing so, i.e., by situating migration within the discourse of Christian redemption, Lee provides some kind of basis for the challenge of borders and strangers and the call to hospitality, that arise from the DHs’ experience.

Lee also provides a framework for elaborating on the challenge of hospitality as well as to the need for an *intercultural* theology, through his depiction of the (im)migrant marginals as people who “live in-between worlds and affirm both the dominant culture of their residence and the ancestral culture of their roots.” As Filipino Christians the DHs bring their renowned religiosity. But they cannot always practice it as they used to in the Philippines. Six days a week their way of life has to be less Filipino. They speak or deal with a different language, eat different food, and observe peculiar beliefs, customs, and traditions or, at least, suppress their own. Then, once-a-week, on a Sunday (or their off-day), they are more Filipino as they re-create home and eat and do anything and everything, that reminds them of the Philippines. But then, of course, “try” is the operative word, as they still have to follow H.K. rules and regulations and bear with its citizens’ various ways of reminding them, that they and their ethnic practices are not from and do not belong in Hong Kong. Lee’s conception of marginality as “living in-between worlds and affirming both the dominant culture of their residence and the ancestral culture of their roots” augurs well, then, for hospitable and catholic relations, and for the articulation of an intercultural theology, as it challenges not just the host society but also the DHs to engage one another towards a more open and harmonious relations.

Lee further makes sense of the challenge towards an *intercultural* theology with his presentation of the (im)migrant marginal as one who “can creatively combine the knowledge and insight of the insider with the critical attitude of the outsider.” As insiders, the DHs have been exposed to Islam and Muslims in H.K. in a way they have not been in

the Philippines. This, combined with their experience of being away from their family and the conservative Filipino society and Christianity, leads them to convert to Islam. The same is true with *tomboy* (lesbian) DHs, those who engage in affairs with *tomboys*, and those who transgress the *Maria Clara* image. Being outside of the Philippines, away from the prying conservative eyes of Filipino church and society, and being inside more liberal, faraway H.K. give these DHs greater courage and opportunities to be more open and adventurous about their sexuality. So although Lee regards the theology that arises out of the interaction of cultures and religions in a pluralistic society “*multicultural theology*,” his contention on the critical and creative combination of the insider-outsider position<sup>17</sup> by migrants, to me, reveals and explicates what could be considered tenets of an *intercultural theology*.<sup>18</sup>

Lee’s notion of sin as indifference against marginal people, like migrants, further seals his connection with the DHs’ experience in relation to the challenge of articulating an intercultural theology. The DHs’ problems of loneliness, isolation, and discrimination are rooted in the lack of recognition of the DHs’ difference. By upholding and insisting on the significance of plurality, recognition of difference,<sup>19</sup> and the importance of working for harmony in a pluralistic society,

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Phan “The Experience of Migration in the United States as a Source of Intercultural Theology,” in *Migration, Religious Experience, and Globalization*, 150 specifically writes on the critical and creative position of immigrants as insider and outsider in relation to intercultural theology. Phan asserts “because they [immigrants] dwell in the interstices between the two cultures, they are in a position to see more clearly and to appreciate more objectively, both as insiders and outsiders (‘emically’ and ‘etically’), the strengths as well as the weaknesses of both cultures, and as a result, are better equipped to contribute to the emergence of a new, enriched culture.” For the feminist perspective on the insider-outsider position see Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorinza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992). See also, Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Lee’s use of “multi” rather than “inter” may be rooted in the tendency among American theologians on cultures and/or cultural interactions to conflate “cross,” “multi,” and “inter,” particularly in Lee’s time. Peter Phan “The Experience of Migration in the United States as a Source of Intercultural Theology,” 152, 157, 160, for instance, still carries the term “inter-multi-cultural theology” despite the fact that Phan’s title already uses “intercultural” theology.

<sup>19</sup> Ruth L. Smith, “Relationality and the Ordering of Differences in Feminist Ethics,” 199–214 provides a critical feminist perspective by bringing in the power dynamics involved in the lack of recognition (through ordering) of differences. She argues we must perpetually and critically ask how the power relations of our moral claims order differences if we are to understand moral life relationally. On the level of intercultural

Lee provides a fertile ground for the discussion of what constitutes an intercultural theology.<sup>20</sup>

The role of faith when one migrates<sup>21</sup> is another talking point between Lee and the DHs' experience, especially since it addresses the challenge on the implications of migrant religion. Like Lee's model migrants, that is, Abram and Sarah, the DHs "took the risk with faith." Faith as a "weapon" in the struggle of the DHs, both in the Philippines and, especially, in H.K., is undeniable. In fact, Lee deeply relates with the DHs' experience with his contention that marginality in the context of migration compels people to turn to God. This recourse to faith among the DHs is all over the place, from the findings of the Tracer study (notably *bahala na*), the results of Shu-Ju-Ada Cheng's comparative study (notably church attendance), and the conclusions from the fieldwork done by Nicole Constable as well as Kimberly Chang and Julian Mc Allister Groves (notably the use of Jesus' servanthood to construct an ethic of service to justify and romanticize their servanthood).

The assertion by Lee, that (im)migrants turn to God as the margin of marginality, connects, as well, with the experience of the DHs, who seek God because they see God as a host and as a fellow stranger. This assertion, together with the illustration on how the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness deepened their faith, also segues perfectly with the forging of a deeper and more mature faith by the DHs. This connection can be evinced from the DHs' attendance in the DPCF theology classes, the re-imagining of God as a host and stranger, and participation in and organization of cause-oriented activities on their off-days.

The DHs' practice of religion as "ethnoreligion" also crystallizes Lee's contention that (im)migrant religion is closely linked with racial/ethnic

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discourse this means unpacking myths and rationalizations for cultural/religious superiority and/or the majority-minority conditions.

<sup>20</sup> For example, the theology of harmony that is characteristic of Asian theologians in Asia like Felix Wilfred, "Towards a Theology of Harmony: Some Fundamental Reflections," in *Yearbook of Contextual Theologies* (Aachen: MWI, 1993): 146–58, and those in diaspora (like Lee and) Jonathan Tan, "Theology of Harmony," in *Dialogue?: Resource Manual for Catholics in Asia*, ed., Edmund Chia (Bangkok, FABC-OEIA, 2001): 118–9, has emerged as a basic feature of Asian theology precisely because of the challenge of cultural diversity in Asia.

<sup>21</sup> See Pieter de Jong, *Migration and the Christian Faith* (The Hague: Research Group for European Migration Problems, 1964) for a more thorough assessment on this.

identity. The DHs' going to great lengths to attend Filipina-dominated services, that are held in *Tagalog* and complete with a Filipino priest and familiar songs, enunciates Lee's position that (im)migrants need a personalized religious/church service. What the DHs' experience would probably find lacking in Lee is a critique of religion (in relation to culture) in the home country, insofar as elements of Filipino Christianity account for the domestication of the DHs. Had Lee, for example, unpacked the role of Korean Confucianism in the marginalization of Korean women in Korean immigrant churches he would have spoken more powerfully to the DHs' experience.

*PAKIKIBAKA (STRUGGLE) AS GOD-TALK: FEATURES OF  
A THEOLOGY OF FILIPINO WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN THE  
CONTEXT OF MIGRATION*

The preceding conversation established that struggle is the H.K. DHs' version of life on the edge as God-talk. It also made clear that though it (struggle as God-talk) has points of divergence it has, in many ways, shared meanings, manifestations, implications, and vision with survival quality of life and marginality as Williams' and Lee's God-talk on life on the edge. Accordingly, the following section, then, explores the key features/themes of such a God-talk by Filipina migrant DHs, pointing out in the process Williams' and Lee's contributions to it, based on the foregoing conversation.

*Domestication as Oppression*

As shown in the experience of the DHs in H.K. domestication, forged through a systematic socialization and control of their gender, class, racial and cultural identities, is the name of the oppression of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration. This domestication turns migrant DHs into (1) dutiful daughters/sisters, devoted wives/mothers and (2) "shared resources" and "modern-day slaves."

*Dutiful Daughters and Sisters, Devoted Wives and Mothers*

In the preceding conversation, Williams connected most deeply with the H.K. DHs' experience with her contention, that Black women are made surrogates in a systematic process, where their sexuality and nurturing functions are tamed and controlled. Similarly, migrant DHs are domesticated through a structural gendered socialization that controls

their sexuality,<sup>22</sup> particularly their nurturing functions by inscribing an inferior position to it.

It all starts in the family. In Filipino families the work of caring is one that a daughter is expected to fulfill *for life*. This becomes a “double burden” when the girl-child becomes a woman, gets married, has children and is expected to manage a career and, still, the household. When deeply internalized, the socialization to care work results in the *tagasalo* syndrome, where daughters compulsively and single-handedly take responsibility for their families’ troubles, at very heavy physical and emotional costs to themselves.<sup>23</sup> Such is the expectation and utilization of the daughter’s capacity to care and nurture that by ages 7 to 15 daughters act as mother substitutes or surrogate mothers.<sup>24</sup> Even after marriage, they are the ones sought as an ever-dependable source of support, as they are expected to be more unconditionally nurturant and caring.

The gendered, hence controlled, responsibility training of daughters is meant to prepare them to assume the feminine role of “housewife,” thereby safeguarding the status quo and perpetuating society’s patriarchal standards. They are indoctrinated that their “primary vocation and responsibility” is to be good (read: devoted) Filipino Catholic/Christian wives and mothers. They are expected to work harder to keep their marriage. Extra-marital affairs, on their part, are less tolerated. When it is their husband who cheats they are more inclined to keep the status quo to avoid shame (*hiya*) and keep their *amor propio* (pride) and, most of all, to accede to religious and cultural expectation for them to preserve their marriage and family at all cost.

Since migration does not also free or exonerate them from their duty as mothers, DH mothers are compelled to also resort to transna-

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<sup>22</sup> Sexuality is understood and used here as “our self understanding and way of being in the world as male and female. It includes our appropriations of attitudes and characteristics which have been culturally defined as masculine and feminine. It involves our affectional orientation toward those of the opposite sex and/or the same sex. It includes attitudes about our own bodies and those of others.” James Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 17–8 quoted in Alison Webster, “Sexuality,” in *An A-Z of Feminist Theology*, 214.

<sup>23</sup> M.L.A. Carandang, *Filipino children under stress: Family dynamics and therapy* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1987) provides an excellent discussion on Filipino daughters as *tagasalo*.

<sup>24</sup> Ma. Emma Concepcion D. Liwag et al., “How We Raise Our Daughters and Sons,” 154–5.

tional motherhood. The ruptures and ambiguities of being a *migrant domestic worker* mother, then, take its toll on the mental and emotional condition of migrant DH mothers.<sup>25</sup> Their family, especially their children, is “their life.” Too often, however, DHs become the wanted but “unappreciated,” “underpaid,” and “betrayed” wives and mothers.<sup>26</sup> They end up as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers, whose future is held captive by their duty to care for their families. Truly, Williams’ ideas on the taming and control of sexuality and nurturing functions, as a form of surrogacy for Black women, couldn’t have found an eloquent parallel as in the case of migrant DHs.

As I see it, esteemed Filipino theologian Jose de Mesa’s exposition on the attributes of the *áte* (the first-born girl, the “big sister” or, in her absence, the girl born after her) in *Why Theology Is Never Far From Home* sheds light on the taming and controlling of Filipina migrant DHs’ sexuality and nurturing functions, particularly through the dutiful sister/*áte*:<sup>27</sup>

Sisters, particularly the *áte*, play a very important role in Philippine families. Being one... automatically implies... [being] the mother’s or parents’ “right hand”, a baby-sitter, a protector and care-giver, a disciplinarian, tutor, and one who is prepared to make sacrifices for the younger siblings.... she strives to lighten their [parents’] “burden” by being more responsible in the house.... Her sense of responsibility covers two big areas: help in rearing and educating younger siblings (and

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<sup>25</sup> A study of DHs in H.K. and Rome, for example, reveals the greatest source of anxiety and guilt feelings among them is their separation from their children. “Introduction,” in *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> This is, allegedly, the unwritten script in the life of Flor Contemplacion—the Singapore DH who was executed for murders, many believe, she did not commit—who has become the icon of the struggle of OFWs, especially migrant DHs. Many were puzzled why Contemplacion never staunchly objected nor defended herself. She remained impassive, composed, and emotionless at the threat of death, and even went to her death as if it was a release from all the torment, that she had suffered in the past years, a far cry from the bright, joyful mother of four, who had arrived in Singapore. From different sources woven together, it turns out that Contemplacion has been coping with “an inexpressibly deep sadness,” that stems from a husband who took a mistress home a few years before and the children whom she has “lost” to another woman (her husband’s mistress). F.J. Pidgeon, “Mother in Mourning,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 2, No. 4 (May–June 1996): 2–3.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Balabagan’s case illustrates the dutiful daughter and sister. She went to United Arab Emirates to support her parents and her brother’s education. Only 15 years old, she was jailed, subjected to 100 lashes, and was made to pay PhP 1 million as blood money after killing her rapist employer, in self-defense. Grace Chang, “The Global Trade in Filipina Workers,” in *Dragon Ladies: Asian-American Feminists Breathe Fire*, ed., Sonia Shah (Boston: South End Press, 1997): 143.



this may extend to her nephews and nieces as well) and care for the parents in their old age. Being *áte* is associated with caring and nurturing. . . . they [parents] expect her to love to a great degree and to take care of the children the way they do. So the *áte* is reared and trained towards this purpose. In manifesting such love and care, she proves herself to be a model who inspires and challenges the younger siblings. . . . She is also trained to be a good housekeeper, and to learn to sacrifice for the sake of the family (emphasis mine).<sup>28</sup>

Domestication, however, is forged not just in the family. The education to femininity, especially by the numerous religious educational institutions in the country, is also to blame on this.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, religion, particularly during the more than 400-year Spanish-American colonial rule, plays a central role, as its influence is woven in the socialization both at home and in education. The Catholic Church at the time of the Spanish colonization actively fostered the domestication of women through pulpit preachings and by limiting women's education to rudimentary reading and arithmetic, home crafts, and Christian doctrine.<sup>30</sup> In the hands of the Spaniards, the Filipina became her father's meek daughter, her husband's faithful subject, the Church's obedient servant, and before her marriage, a chaste virgin who would yield only to her husband (and occasionally to the friar).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Jose de Mesa, *Why Theology Is Never Far From Home* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 2003): 32–3. de Mesa also maintains being an *áte* never ceases. An *áte* is an *áte* with all its responsibilities even if she is abroad or when the younger siblings have all grown up.

<sup>29</sup> Mary John Mananzan, "Education to Femininity or Education to Feminism?" *Concilium* 1991/6: 30–1 says the religious teachings taught in school and church that are detrimental to women include: 1) insistence on woman's subordination as a wife; 2) the identification of her value with virginity if she is unmarried and the shift of valuation to her reproductive function once she is married; 3) a moral theology based on the dichotomy of body and soul that identifies woman with sex and sin; 4) the presentation of the passive and submissive plaster saint Blessed Virgin as a model instead of the valiant Mary of the *Magnificat* and the Mary at the foot of the cross; and 5) teachings on marriage which emphasize woman's secondary and passive role in the family, giving her very little decision regarding her reproductive functions but, on the other hand, burdening her with almost total responsibility for the good working or the breakdown of the family.

<sup>30</sup> Mary John Mananzan, "Education to Femininity or Education to Feminism?" 30–1 says the socialization effected by education and religion is a result of a thousand and one "little" things which when taken individually may sound petty, but the cumulative effect of which is the successful perpetuation of a patriarchal society. In fact, she concludes the domestication of the Filipino woman is complete by the time she graduates from college—the very same time when DHs start to migrate as DHs.

<sup>31</sup> Mary John Mananzan, "The Filipino Woman: A Historical Perspective," 64 makes clear the roots of domestication in Spanish colonization: "The young girl in

Mary John Mananzan points out the significant negative consequences on Filipino women by the Spaniards' imposition of a strongly patriarchal system:

Confined in her area of action, the woman poured all her innate sensibility and energy into developing a religious fervor which bordered on fanaticism. She was constantly reminded of her innate danger to men as the seductive Eve and was restlessly exhorted to follow an impossible model—the Virgin Mother. She could venerate her but her efforts to emulate her brought her into scrupulous frustrated efforts which ended up in giving her an abiding guilt complex which added to her timidity and at times reducing her to frigidity.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, “on the pretext of putting woman on a pedestal as an object of veneration, patriarchal society succeeded in *alienating her from public life, decisions and significance*” making her “a delicate ornament of the home or the victim soul of the convent”<sup>33</sup> (emphasis mine). “The images of the long-suffering woman, the woman who would sacrifice her virtue and even her life, the woman who would submit to her ‘fate,’ became part of the consciousness that molded the Filipina.”<sup>34</sup> What worsens this propensity to sacrifice, until today, is the utilization of the image of Jesus as sacrificed lamb to foster a victim attitude and encourage them to follow the path of “innocent victimhood.”<sup>35</sup>

This “innocent victimhood” mentality has roots, of course, in the commonly-acknowledged Spanish colonial Catholicism legacy that gives a great emphasis on the suffering rather than the glory of Christ.<sup>36</sup> This is the same mentality the DHs in H.K. exhibit and share

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the pre-Spanish society enjoyed equal opportunities and freedom of movement as the young boy; the young girl under the Spanish influence became a sheltered, over-protected, a timid maiden who received an education confined to church, kitchen, and children. She... was reduced to a helpless creature like *Maria Clara* who could never leave the house without the ever present *Tia* [Aunt] Isabel.”

<sup>32</sup> Mary John Mananzan, “The Filipino Woman: A Historical Perspective,” 64.

<sup>33</sup> Mary John Mananzan, “The Filipino Woman: A Historical Perspective,” 64.

<sup>34</sup> Her main function was child bearing and, if she had the added misfortune of being born to a poor class, she could be traded off to the usurious landlord as payment for her family's debts. Patria Agustin, “Women and Politics in the Philippines,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* Vol. 3, No. 2 (Fall 1987): 116.

<sup>35</sup> Mary John Mananzan, “Feminist Theology in Asia: A Ten Years' Overview,” *Feminist Theology* No. 10 (September 1995): 31.

<sup>36</sup> Mary John Mananzan, “Paschal Mystery from a Philippine Perspective,” *Concilium* 1993/2: 87–8. Benigno Beltran, *The Christology of the Inarticulate* (Manila: 1987), 123 quoted in Mary John Mananzan, “Paschal Mystery from a Philippine Perspective,” 87–8 says for many it “provides consolation and an outlet for pent-up emotions of sympathy and tragedy for the ignorant and the heavy-laden” and “increases the

with Lee, and the very same mentality and approach to Jesus' suffering, Williams says, is destructive to (Black) women's psycho-spiritual health, as it sacralizes and reinforces surrogacy. When this combines with, what Freddie Obligacion observes during regular attendance in church services for more than two decades as, "the emphasis of homilies on female domesticity through reminders that women should strive to become "excellent daughters, housewives, mothers, and servants of God,"<sup>37</sup> the DHs' domestication gains greater impetus and justification, just as Black women's surrogacy gains more acceptability through African-American churches' preachings on the cross. Williams' discourse on Jesus' suffering, the cross, and the role of traditional churches, then, provides a framework and illustration of this imbrication of religion in the DHs' domestication.

*"Shared Resources," "Modern-Day Slaves"*

Williams also strongly resonated with the H.K. DHs' experience with her assertion that the taming and control of Black women's sexuality and nurturing functions happens, as well, in the area of labor. She eloquently spoke to the H.K. DHs with her depiction and reflections on the violation and destruction of Black women's bodies, sense of self, woman-spirit, and consequently, their humanity, in their work as mammies, field laborers, breeders, domestic workers (postbellum period) and, in the midst of these, as mistresses. These make sense of migrant DHs' domestication as "shared resources" and "modern-day slaves."

When internalized and/or acted out by migrant DHs and acted upon by the Philippine government, their families, recruiters, and employers the taming and control of migrant DHs' sexuality, particularly their nurturing functions, expands into the area of labor. Because the Philippine economy survives on OFW remittances, the Philippine government goes to great lengths to keep OFWs, like the migrant DHs overseas, particularly by carefully crafting a false sense of nationalism and a false culture of migration among OFWs.<sup>38</sup> One title that for-

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resolve to survive" for some. Stanley Payne, *Spanish Catholicism: An Historical Overview* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 49–50 depicts how this is the trend in 16th century Spain.

<sup>37</sup> Freddie Obligacion, "The Empowering Impact of Faith Among Filipino Women," 23.

<sup>38</sup> This is created for domestic workers, for instance, through government-supported magazines like *Kabayan* and *Diwaliwan* and by giving all kinds of supposedly edifying titles to OFWs in general such as "economic heroes" or "modern-day

mer Philippine president Fidel Ramos particularly gave (which former Labor Secretary Nieves Confesor echoed) that commodifies, hence violates the DHs' bodies, is that of "internationally-shared resources."

As "internationally-shared resources," a.k.a. migrant workers, the DHs' labor is part of cheap (read: needed but not wanted) labor. They

may be filling a temporary labour vacuum in the host countries and are being paid wages which are comparably better than in their home countries. But [they] are not being 'integrated'...not considered a true, much less a 'permanent' factor of production. They are tradable and movable human resources that may not enjoy tenure of work and real labour rights... [and] can identify...only at the risk of admitting that they are less human than others; that some races or nations are to be superior and dominant; that some races and nations are meant to be inferior and slave-like servants.<sup>39</sup>

Hence the DHs' jobs as migrants are within the derogatory category of 3D and SALEP jobs and the Philippine government has less or no bargaining power nor political clout to fight for them. Consequently, many "internationally-shared resources" return home physically ill, emotionally-damaged, and mentally-deranged (if not dead) or with abused, mutilated, and dead or murdered bodies. In 1997, for example, all of the 251 Filipino migrant workers who came home physically ill were women. 607, in the meantime, died abroad in 1999, out of which 16 were murdered and 14 committed suicide.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, as "internationally-shared resources" engaged in service or care work DHs are more vulnerable to inhumane living conditions. They not only have to contend with the traditional sexual division of labor but also with the new international division of labor, whereby Third World women service the reproductive labour needs of the rich

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heroes." *Kabayan*, which is distributed in H.K., claims to "inform educate, and influence [OFWs] to continue practicing a set of values, so that the international community will have confidence in the Filipino" (emphasis mine). *Tinig Filipino*, though published in Hong Kong and is, therefore, not subject to government influence has similar content. See Grace Ebron, "Not Just the Maid: Negotiating Filipina Identity in Italy," <http://www.sshe.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue8/ebtron.html> accessed February 9, 2004.

<sup>39</sup> May-an Villalba, "Migrant Workers Challenge Globalisation," *In God's Image* Vol. 19, No. 1 (2000): 30-1.

<sup>40</sup> In September 2005, for example, there were 24 OFWs who are on death row. Veronica Uy, "DFA: 24 OFWs on death row for various crimes," [http://www.inq7.net/globalnation/sec\\_new/sep12-01.htm](http://www.inq7.net/globalnation/sec_new/sep12-01.htm) accessed Sept. 13, 2005.

countries.<sup>41</sup> Because they are actually substituting for other (middle class) women by relieving the latter of their domestic responsibilities so they (middle class women) can engage in more meaningful and better-paying work, the DHs' situation is also not just a class (domestic work is *poor* women's work), race (domestic work is *Filipino* women's work) nor the traditional case of gender (domestic work is *women's* work) oppression. Theirs is a further genderized oppression as their fellow women serve as accomplices in their oppression. Williams' concept on the "oppressed of the oppressed" and theory on "women's relational history," which argues for the interrogation of women's complicity in their fellow women's oppression, provides a framework for articulating and interrogating this, as it did in the case of the Hong Kong DHs.

Lee, on the other hand, provides insights for understanding the direct and indirect control and taming of the DHs cultural identity through his reflections on sin as indifference, and the need to recognize difference and plurality in plural societies. Because they are culturally (and religiously) different the DHs' rights and social benefits are limited. They are confined to the margins, or to the spaces "in-between," resulting to loneliness, isolation, and discrimination. As the heavier burden to adjust is placed on them some are forced to culturally assimilate to a certain extent, e.g. learning Cantonese. The same is true with their sexuality, which is controlled through different forms of social restraint, e.g. racialization, because they are *foreign* women. Williams' discourse on racialized stereotypes on Black women complements Lee here. She not only helps put in perspective the notion that these forms of control are not just meant to keep oppressed and different people, e.g. DHs, in their place but also to keep inferior women in their place.

As was in the case in the conversation with the H.K. DHs, it is in their work as DHs, however, that migrant DHs' domestication finds a lot of meaning in Williams' theological reflections. It is in their work that, what Williams contends as, the devaluation, taming, control, and violation of (Black) women's bodies as well as the erosion of their self-

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<sup>41</sup> Denise Nadeau, "Suffering Bodies: Asian Migrant Women in Canada," *In God's Image* Vol. 19, No. 3 (September 2000): 10-1 clarifies that this refers not only to birthing and child raising but to all forms of social reproduction, waged and unwaged, that are done to maintain workers under capitalism, e.g. food production, cleaning, educating, and transmitting cultural values, healing etc.

worth, depletion of their self-esteem and, consequently, the rupturing and obliteration of their spirit most subtly and dramatically happens. As “internationally-shared resources” in the area of domestic work, DHs are the “servants of globalization”—the “modern day slaves.”<sup>42</sup> As today’s black mammies, as Williams herself puts it, their work itself is devalued. It is the lowest paid and the first victim in times of economic downturn. Most of all, it turns them into the Philippine government’s “hot commodities,” their families’ milking cow, host government’s disposable workers, and the employer’s properties. The political, economic, physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse the H.K. DHs experience is a testament to how migrant DHs’ work as DHs is really about inequities and their human consequences—inequities in inter and intra-gender relations, family structures, class positions, formal and informal sectors, and the uneven development processes.

That is why domestication, as a complex, fluid, and enduring process of oppression, captures the depth and breadth of migrant DHs’ oppression. It is the structural moral process that has crippled Filipino women’s minds, produced guilt complexes, and infringed on their freedom.<sup>43</sup> It is the icon of the “patriarchal culture, religion and society,” that the Association of Women Theologians in the Philippines says, “have numbed girls and women into silence and immobility for centuries.”<sup>44</sup>

The mental conditioning of women with regard to their sexuality already constitutes violence against them.<sup>45</sup> The construction and inscription of identities such as dutiful daughters/sisters and devoted wives/mothers is tantamount to the sin of alienation as it alienates the DHs from themselves. Because they are indoctrinated to be submissive,

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<sup>42</sup> See Raynah Braganza Passanha et al., *Domestic Workers: A Modern Day Manifestation of Slavery* (Mumbai: Domestic Workers Movement, n.d.). See also Jacqueline William, “Towards a Womanist Theology of Liberation in South Africa: Black Domestic Workers as a Case Study,” *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* Vol. 4, No. 2 (November 1990): 24–35. Three factors metaphorically and structurally link housework and slavery. According to Phyllis Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States, 1920–1945* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 73 these include not treating domestics as people independent of their employers, designing housework to give domestics the physically hardest tasks, and demanding almost unlimited working hours.

<sup>43</sup> Mary John Mananzan, “Feminist Theology in Asia,” 31.

<sup>44</sup> Association of Women in Theology, Philippines, “Of Secrets and Violence... Breaking the Silence,” *In God’s Image* Vol. 17, No. 2 (1998): 35.

<sup>45</sup> Mary John Mananzan, “Feminist Theology in Asia,” 31.

docile, patient, longsuffering and self-sacrificing they imbibe a victim consciousness.<sup>46</sup> Their energies and needs become overly focused on the needs of their families, while their own self-development and their lives gets sidelined, forgotten, and sacrificed in the process.

Furthermore, as “internationally-shared resources” and “modern-day slaves,” DHs get alienated from their bodies and, consequently, from their selves. They become commodities that are exported, traded, used, abused, and discarded without consideration for their dignity as persons. Lastly, as “internationally-shared resources” identified with the work of “slaves,” they are also alienated from others, particularly from their host society, their fellow Filipino migrants, and even their religious community.

*Pakikibaka (Struggle) as Bahala na (Hopeful Risk-Taking)*

As shown in the experience of the DHs in H.K., and as clarified in the preceding conversation, *pakikibaka* (struggle) is where divine Wisdom is embedded in the lives of migrant DHs. This is mainly because their *pakikibaka* is imbricated in/with their *pananampalataya* (faith). Their struggle against their domestication—constituted in their political, economic, religious, and cultural submission, resistance, and accommodation—finds eloquent expression in the Filipino idiom *bahala na* (hopeful risk-taking).

*Bahala na* has positive and negative as well as religious, cultural, and political implications. Based on this, and insofar as it is linked with the Filipino religious conviction that the divine is heavily involved in the everyday life of people, and insofar as it is indicative of the Filipino belief and expectation of an encounter with the divine in every experience in the daily grind of life, *bahala na* serves as the heuristic lens for interrogating and reflecting on the *pakikibaka* of migrant DHs.<sup>47</sup>

As is the case with the H.K. DHs, *bahala na*, particularly when it is used in the context of fatalism and resignation or as a means to escape from involvement and responsibility,<sup>48</sup> leads migrant DHs to submit and accommodate their domestication through their silence, tears,

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<sup>46</sup> Mary John Mananzan, “Theological Reflections on Violence Against Women,” *Voices from the Third World* Vol. XVII, No. 1 (June 1994): 63.

<sup>47</sup> Leonila V. Bermisa, “Word, Sacrament and Liturgy: Philippine Experience,” *In God’s Image* Vol. 23, No. 1 (March 2004): 54.

<sup>48</sup> Catechism for Filipino Catholics, no. 1158 quoted in Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 85. This negative face of *bahala na* is linked to its utilization by the

songs, jokes, and identity negotiation. Jose de Mesa affirms *bahala na* does carry a defeatist worldview, when “providence tends to be understood in terms of *kapalaran* (destiny or fate) and *swerte* (predestined luck),” which “only strengthen[s] the indigenous assumption that passive resignation to the unbending and overwhelming will of God is the best attitude.”<sup>49</sup> This influences migrant DHs to submit and accommodate their domestication by acceding to their gendered socialization and gendered migration, as well as viewing their suffering as part of their faith in God as Lee does.

The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, however, refutes this negative fatalistic interpretation and stresses the connection between *bahala na* as trust in God and the social responsibility involved.<sup>50</sup> de Mesa also insists on these positive religio-political implications of *bahala na* and its great value in articulating a theology, that is rooted in and relevant to the Filipino reality.<sup>51</sup> He asserts: “*Bahala na* is not indifference to the consequences of an action nor is it foolhardiness. Rather, it is Filipino resiliency in the face of daunting situations. With an uttered *bahala na!* the Filipino overcomes paralysis and helplessness.”<sup>52</sup> From these come the positive meaning of *bahala na* as hopeful risk-taking, that is drawn from and strengthened by one’s faith.

Lee himself resonated with the H.K. DHs’ experience that faith plays an important role for resisting and transforming marginality among migrants. In fact, he related strongly with the H.K. DHs with his claim that religious practice flourishes in the context of migration. These avowals by Lee provide a way for framing *bahala na*’s rootedness in migrant DHs’ faith in God. These declarations, in particular, make sense of the observation that the legendary resilience of Filipina OFWs, like the DHs, has a lot to do with their faith in God that gives them strength to carry on.<sup>53</sup> It is there in their prayers and various church activities from the reception of the sacraments to Holy Week

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colonizers to paint a colonial image of the Filipino as passive and fatalistic, which was subsequently picked up by historians and sociologists.

<sup>49</sup> Jose de Mesa, *Why Theology Is Never Far Away From Home*, 162.

<sup>50</sup> Catechism for Filipino Catholics, no. 1158 quoted in Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 85.

<sup>51</sup> Clemens Sedmak also writes on the strong implications of *bahala na* for Filipino theology by doing an analysis of it to illustrate how faith and culture mutually influence each other within the Filipino context. See Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 83–6.

<sup>52</sup> Jose de Mesa, *Why Theology Is Never Far Away From Home*, 162.

<sup>53</sup> See “Fear of Male Violence II,” *TNT Hong Kong* Vol. 3, No. 1 (April 1997): 22.



activities and catechism classes. It is there in the way they try to read the Bible, join church groups, and engage in various religious activities from prayer sessions, singing at religious celebrations, doing volunteer work in/for the parish, and joining outreach activities. It is there, most of all, in their Eucharist, Sunday service and/or fellowships.

In relation to marginal discipleship Lee connected deeply with the H.K. DHs with his position on creativity and relevance (through resonance) of worship for (im)migrants. Moreover, he took account of the significance of the H.K. DHs' religious groups with his contention, that the institutional church should take note of small groups and/or movements, for it can learn a lot from these "marginal disciples," particularly in terms of creativity. These reflections of Lee effectively put migrant DHs' creative religious (re)negotiation and transformation of cultural practices as part of their struggle.

*Bahala na*, as a movement from paralysis and helplessness into action, entails *lakas ng loob* (courage). Here, Williams' ideas on Black women's dramatic resistance strategies shed light on the ways in which migrant DHs resist through *bahala na*, with its spirit of *lakas ng loob*. Courage is a life-blood of Black women's resistance. Similarly, it is the spirit of *lakas ng loob*, that serves as a life-force for the DHs to say *bahala na!* with faith in God then leave their families, their country, and everything that constitutes their sense of security.<sup>54</sup> It helps them make light of, even laugh at, their miserable situation. It gives them the impetus to use and engage every means possible to find solutions to their problems even across countries. It sustains them as they devise simple and complicated political, economic, and religio-cultural strategies, including those that put them and their job at risk. Lastly, it energizes them to question, circumvent, and defy their obligations to be dutiful daughters/sisters and devoted wives/mothers, even to the point of going home (to uncertain conditions) to teach their siblings/family a lesson.

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<sup>54</sup> Migrating itself is a risky decision and act. Many risk all they have and own, even their life and limb, just to get a job overseas or, sometimes, just to get overseas and then find a job when one gets there. It takes every ounce of their *lakas ng loob*. For instance, among those who led the migration across the dangerous borders of Italy many came as tourists to nearby countries then hid in cargo ships without ventilation, storage areas of tour buses, or the dust-filled ceiling of trains, or walked across the mountainous terrain of Europe to reach Italy. Some even died along the way due to hunger and cold. Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, *Servants of Globalization*, 44–7.

*Bahala na* is also there in the DHs' persistent and enduring hope that refuses to be stifled by crisis after crisis. It is there in their indefatigable, rarely shaken trust in God and God's providence, as they risk engagement in liberating praxis and risk ambiguity and adversity.<sup>55</sup> To say *bahala na!* is to have hope that things will work out; that they will achieve their goal; that they will make it through their sojourn. To say *bahala na!* is to have courageous hope which, in itself, is resistance,<sup>56</sup> in faith. de Mesa captures this confluence of hope and courage, in the context of faith, in what he considers as *bahala na*'s three positive elements namely, the daring to take risks, the hope that the Filipino has, and the freedom that is inherent in risking and hoping. de Mesa explains:

In actual usage *bahala na* expresses refusal to be defeated by discouraging situations.... [it] is what makes people move, take risks, and plan for the future. As an attitude of trust in God's providence, in the sense of leaving everything into God's hands when nothing more can be done, *bahala na* is expressed as *bahala na ang Diyos*, i.e., "let God take care of the matter". Trust in God's continuing care provides strength in such situations. It also gives the motivational push where the limits of the humanly possible have yet to be explored..... *Bahala na* gives people the capacity to laugh at themselves and the situations they are in (emphasis mine).<sup>57</sup>

Lastly, to say *bahala na!*, according to de Mesa, is to express *malasakit* (genuine caring effort) or to risk to communicate God's care and concern as Jesus did. Jesus, out of *malasakit* for others, was ready to risk, to say, "*Bahala na!*"<sup>58</sup> This segues perfectly with Williams' critical point that Jesus' ministerial vision of healing and righting relationships is what constitutes his message of redemption. This is one real good

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<sup>55</sup> Lee's position that "migration is still the immigrant's redemption" is faintly instructive here. While migration is not totally salvific there is a grain of truth to what Lee claims for some DHs, especially for those who are escaping from gender-related problems and those who gain a certain degree of social mobility. This also makes sense to those who experience some kind of personal advancement, e.g. they learn to be independent, and personal development, e.g. they learn how to relate interculturally and interreligiously.

<sup>56</sup> Denise Ackermann, "A Spirituality of Risk' for Christian Witness in South Africa," *International Review of Mission* Vol. LXXXIII, No. 328: 126. This hope, among DHs is embodied in *por gud* (shortened Tagalized version of "going home for good") and in how every day that passes is marked with an "X" as they count the days before their vacation or contract expiration.

<sup>57</sup> Jose de Mesa, *Why Theology Is Never Far Away From Home*, 162-3.

<sup>58</sup> Jose de Mesa, *Why Theology Is Never Far Away From Home*, 163-4.

news the DHs cannot do without, if they are to be able to say *bahala na!* with *malasakit*, as they do for their families as well as through their sisterhood and their civic-oriented projects for their host society and their communities in the Philippines. Williams' examples and reflections on the relational and community dimension of Black women's survival strategies also lend credence to these community-based and community-oriented ways, in which migrant DHs riskily express their concern and commitment for the well-being of others.

*In The Name of the Body*

Having said all of the above the body, then, is a key hermeneutical category for a theology of migrant DHs. The DHs' domestication is not only carved in and through their bodies. Their struggle against it is also worked out and staged through their bodies. This experience of the body as a site of oppression and struggle, in a simultaneous manner, drives home the point that bodies must be seen, understood, and engaged in the context of *personhood*. In ways similar to the defilement of Black women's bodies, the DHs bodies are violated. Their bodies are categorized and confined to feminine roles and treated as shared resources that can be exploited. But when bodies are viewed and treated as "selves" they are transformed from being objects to subjects and/or agents that have the power to struggle, heal, and empower.

The H.K. DHs' experience, in conversation with Williams' concept of defilement, also drills in the point that bodies as "selves" must be seen, understood, and engaged in the context of *equal and mutual personhood*. Migrant DHs are unfairly domesticated into dutiful daughters/sisters and devoted wives/mothers because their bodies, as women, are deemed fit for such roles—roles that are experienced by the DHs as detrimental for their self-development and well-being. Moreover, the conversation between Williams and the H.K. DHs' experience ensconces the point that bodies must be seen, understood, and engaged in the context of equally and mutually *actualizing personhood*. Migrant DHs are not just victims but also resisters or "strugglers." Moreover, they struggle not just to be respected as persons but also to reach for and actualize their potentials even in the midst of difficult situations. They show not just the bleeding and broken body but also "the body rising" individually and socially. A theology of migrant DHs, then, is a body theology that configures the body in relation to individual and social/collective persons/personhood and captures not just the body's passion and death but also its resurrection.

The body in a theology of Filipina migrant DHs must not only be interpreted in relation to a/the individual/collective self but also in the context of daily reality. This means that the body that eats, sleeps, works, laughs, rests, as well as the body that is abused, battered, exhausted, and wasted on a daily basis, is a necessary lens in giving justice to migrant DHs' experience. This is the only way for "daily reality" or *lo cotidiano*, as Latina and Hispanic feminist theologians say,<sup>59</sup> to be integrated.

Indeed, attending to the body necessarily means interrogating the daily grind of life. This is imperative as migrant DHs live daily all the mundane and monotonous activities associated with everyday life, e.g. cooking and bathing, that are largely unreflected in theology, but should actually merit prime space in theological discourses, as these provide the most basic lens on the human condition. Besides, migrant DHs' domestication and their struggle against it are woven into these daily activities. Engaging them (daily activities) as heuristic lens will then mean tackling everyday forms of resistance, including the DHs' aesthetic praxis like *salo-salo* and laughter. In any case, the encounter with God does not take place in a neutral so-called "religious" space, protected from, and above the realm of daily events and of his/herstory. This encounter takes place in real life, more specifically, through concrete events and in concrete situations. Hence, a theology of migrant DHs must not only have any-body as the place to do theology, but it must have a woman's body—one that is unmasked of all its colonized, domesticated, and racialized layers—set in the context of daily reality.<sup>60</sup>

The body as a key hermeneutical category of a theology of migrant DHs would also take into account folk religion—the dominant faith articulation among migrant DHs—that is characterized by corporeal expressions. Migrant DHs experience God and express their faith, not so much in their minds or in exercises in theory or doctrine, but

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<sup>59</sup> Maria Pilar Aquino and Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz provides critical contributions on this. See, for example, Maria Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America* (New York: Orbis, 1993) and Maria Pilar Aquino, "Theological Method in US Latino/a Theology: Toward an Intercultural Theology for the Third Millenium," in *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, eds., Orlando Espin and Miguel Diaz (New York: Orbis Books, 1999): 38–9. For Isasi-Diaz, see her ground-breaking work *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 66–73.

<sup>60</sup> Carol Robb, "A Framework for Feminist Ethics," in *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, 13–32.

in their hearts and in their bodies, whenever they heartily clap, sing, shout, and cry during their charismatic services; sing and dance during their socio-religious (prayer) meeting cum fellowships with *salo-salo* (shared meal) in public and private places and; whenever they walk on their knees, light candles, and wipe statues with handkerchiefs to pray in churches. Jose de Mesa insists the Filipino cultural identity and faith life is nourished by folk Catholicism, and that this largely unreflected religiosity needs to be considered and integrated in Filipino theology.<sup>61</sup> The lived theologies of the DHs cannot be dismissed as the empty activities of the ignorant. So is the body, which is the only means, in which these theologies are lived.

### *God of the Struggle*

Undeniably migrant DHs' struggle towards fullness of life and humanity is marked and sustained by faith. Through it all, God and/or their faith in God is part and parcel of this struggle. In the same way that God is a God of survival and God of marginality for Williams and Lee respectively, God, as a God of the struggle, then, constitutes the key God-image of a theology of migrant DHs.

As a God of the struggle, God is not so much the one who liberates but the one who journeys with the migrant DHs (in their struggle). Consequently, God is, first and foremost, the host or the God of hospitality. As a host, God provides, first, the bread for the struggle. Williams argues the struggle for survival quality of life is, first and foremost, a struggle for physical survival. Similarly, material needs are central to the DHs' struggle for fullness of life and humanity.

God's hospitality can be glimpsed in Jesus' teachings on God's kingdom, whose dominant images are those linked with the production of food and drink or home-like refuge for God's creatures.<sup>62</sup> Jesus' table

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<sup>61</sup> Jose de Mesa, *Why Theology Is Never Far From Home*, 82–3. Chapter 6 of Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 2003) gives an eloquent argument on the importance of taking popular religiosity into account when developing local theologies.

<sup>62</sup> Thus, John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 27–8 says the kingdom is said to be like seed being sown (Matt. 13:3–9, 24–30), as well as seed growing (Matt. 13:8; Mark 4:26–30) and yielding food (Matt. 13:8; Mark 4: 28–30) or shelter (Matt. 13:32); it is like grain being harvested (Matt. 13:30) or fish being caught (Matt. 13:47–48); it resembles a wedding feast (Matt. 22:1–14; 25:1–13), which Luke calls “great banquet” in 14:16–24) or, by humble contrast, the leaven which causes bread to rise (Matt. 13:33). Together with these sayings, Koenig notes, the feeding of the five thou-

communities also persuasively illustrate this gospel of Divine Providence or gospel of God's abundance and generosity, particularly with the needy. Within Jesus' table communities<sup>63</sup> or *salò-salò*, especially with the least, the last, and the lost of Jewish society, we also glimpse a religious character of God as a God of hospitality, i.e., as a provider of much-needed presence, acceptance, comfort, healing, and, in particular, strength. God then as a God of struggle provides not just bread but also the strength for the struggle.

For migrant DHs, this strength may come in the form of wisdom, support, and/or guidance. They know that it is they who, ultimately, should and can struggle with their situation. They know "*Nasa Diyos ang awa nasa tao ang gawa*" (God helps those who help themselves).<sup>64</sup> Here, Williams' description of the role of vision in the life of Hagar and Black women provides an elaboration through a bit of contrast. Unlike Williams' Black women, vision (in the sense of God telling them what to do as God did with Hagar) does not figure prominently in the DHs' image of and relationship with God. More often than not, DHs seem to know what to do, and God is a partner, not an observer nor the all-knowing dictator or master puppeteer in the struggle. But this (seeing God as provider of strength) does not diminish the role of God in their lives either. On the contrary this puts God at the center of the struggle, for, God as the provider of strength, hence, the source of *lakas ng loob*, helps the DHs say *bahala na!* and engage in *pakiki-baka*.

As he did for the Jesus-image of the H.K. DHs, Lee's image of Jesus as a stranger also provides a critical description of the God of struggle. As the stranger *par excellence* Jesus profoundly identifies, shares,

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sand and another group of sayings centered around food, drink, and welcoming where the kingdom, though not specifically mentioned, is certainly implied. See Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 15:3–10; Luke 15:11–32; Luke 10:30–37; Luke 16:1–9; Luke 16:19–31; Luke 12:16–21 as cited in John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 28.

<sup>63</sup> John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 27 notes this festive atmosphere, that characterizes the gatherings of Jesus and his followers. These gatherings, together with Jesus' discourses on social status in terms of place settings at a meal (Luke 13:28–30; 14:7–11), also put in perspective the warm and *fiesta* spirit of migrant DHs' *salò-salò* and the radical challenge embodied in the re-imagining of God as a host.

<sup>64</sup> The findings of Freddie Obligation's study on the impact of the Roman Catholic faith and/or religiosity to Filipino women buttresses this. He says Filipinas' strong faith in Divine Providence generates sequelae of constructive cognition, namely, a perception of personal control of self-efficacy, high self-esteem, high success expectancies, and a pronounced drive for self-improvement. Freddie Obligation, "The Empowering Impact of Faith Among Filipino Women," 1, 18.

and struggles with migrant DHs' primary condition of alienation and discrimination. Jesus' family fled to a foreign land (Egypt) due to Herod's persecution. Like migrant DH mothers, necessity forced Jesus' parents to "migrate" (to Egypt) for their child's sake. Jesus traveled and "preached" in foreign territories (Samaria) and was crucified in a foreign land (Jerusalem) just as DHs work and suffer in foreign lands. While he went around preaching and teaching, Jesus sought the hospitality of friends and strangers just as DHs need not just the fellowship of their friends, but also the hospitality of their host societies' citizens. Jesus experienced not being welcomed (Luke 9: 52–53) just as the DHs experience hostility, even cruelty, from their employers and host societies. As the stranger who walked with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13–35), and as the master/teacher who practiced the "hospitality which causes scandal," by associating with and eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus is the "perfect (fellow) stranger" who suffers but struggles (with migrant DHs). Indeed, Jesus knew what it means to be an outcast and excluded (Matthew 8:20 and 13:54–57) and he struggled against it. In doing so, he forged the path for *pakikibaka* for the "estranged" of this world.

The image of the "Jesus that struggles" is actually not a complete stranger to migrant DHs as Filipino Christians. It is embodied in the first (the Jesus who relates with people in a humane way) and the third (the Jesus who struggles with the suffering people) of the main features of Christology, that have been and continue to be a part of Filipino Christian spirit.<sup>65</sup> Evidently, Williams' Jesus finds some kind of parallel in the third feature, that is, the Jesus who struggles against suffering. Indeed, within the Filipino psyche and his/her story is the interpretation that Jesus' suffering is not a passive suffering, but a struggling suffering that encourages others to do the same.<sup>66</sup> The much-acclaimed work of Reynaldo Ilet on the role of the *pasyon* in creating and nurturing the revolutionary struggle of Filipinos against the colonizers is an eloquent example of the existence of this "Little Tradition" vis-à-vis

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<sup>65</sup> Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, 101–3. The second feature has to do with the Jesus who suffers with the people which is ultimately problematic based on the experience of the H.K. DHs and the conversation with Williams and Lee.

<sup>66</sup> The image of the crucified Jesus has, in fact, served as a subversive icon through the different revolutions that the Filipino people have staged in the struggle for freedom and justice, e.g. 1986 People Power Revolution. Alan Delotavo, "A Reflection on the Images of Christ in the Filipino Culture," *Asian Journal of Theology* Vol. 3, No. 2 (1989) cited in Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, 103.

the “Great Tradition” of the colonizers.<sup>67</sup> His ground-breaking work drives home the point, that Filipino his/herstory is not only a story of exploitation and subservience to both local and foreign powers, but also a his/herstory of resistance and/or struggle, where the *pasyon* plays a significant role. Iletto elaborates:

The *pasyon*, then, was not simply sung, heard, or celebrated by the masses in the nineteenth century. It was lived, both individually and socially, during the Holy Week and oftentimes beyond it. Furthermore, its meaning went beyond the doctrine of Christ’s redemption of many by his passion, death and resurrection. For traditional *Tagalog* society, Holy Week was an annual occasion for its own renewal, a time of ridding the *loob* (inner self) of impurities...for dying to the old self and being reborn anew, and through its many social events, for renewing or restoring ties between members of the community....<sup>68</sup>

Williams’ interpretation of the cross as a symbol of defilement, then, offers a way of apprehending the Filipino transformation of it and its colonial meanings through the *pasyon*. They transformed it because it is a symbol of their oppression or, using Williams’ words, a symbol of the Spanish colonizers’ “defilement” of their land and of themselves as a people. Williams’ interpretation of the cross as a symbol of

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<sup>67</sup> Reynaldo Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910* (Quezon City, Phils.: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979) as discussed in Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, 101. *Pasyon* literally means and/or refers to the passion or suffering of Christ, which is commemorated in Filipino religious celebrations either through a play (*Senakulo*) or the *pabasa ng Pasyon*. “Little Tradition” (tradition of the illiterate and simple folks) and “Great Tradition” (tradition of the literate and philosophic few) are attributed to the anthropologist Robert Redfield. See Margaret Park Redfield, ed., *Human Nature and the Study of Society: The Papers of Robert Redfield* Vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962) especially 120; 302–3; 345.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Archie Ligo, “Liberation Themes in Philippine Popular Religiosity: A Case Study,” *Voices from the Third World* Vol. XVI, No. 2 (December 1993): 120. Ligo maintains out of their experience of oppression in the hands of the Spanish *conquistadores* Filipinos transformed what to them was a symbol of subjugation (cross) into an instrument that awakened the people to revolt. The narratives of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection provided powerful images and moving drama to the Filipino peasantry. The images of transition from one state to another, e.g. from darkness to light, misery to joy, despair to hope, oppression to liberation, and death to life, as well as the image of Jesus, who chose to be in solidarity with the poor and suffered and died at the hands of the wealthy and aristocratic class, served as inspiration for their struggle. Through the genius of the Filipino, Jesus’ passion and crucifixion narratives were transformed into a Filipino *pasyon* recited not just during the Holy Week but even during life’s significant rituals like courtship and wake for the dead. Archie Ligo, “Liberation Themes in Philippine Popular Religiosity,” 118.



defilement makes sense to Filipino women, in particular, as the cross is a poignant reminder of the *mujer indigena*'s domestication, which defiled Filipino women's self-worth and identity,<sup>69</sup> and whose legacy lives in the inscription of the *Maria Clara* image in the Filipina. The only difference is that what Williams casts off as a tool for surrogacy is the very same weapon the Filipinos use for resistance. This double-edged place of the cross in the Filipino religious psyche is a slight departure from Williams' interpretation, which a theology of migrant DHs cannot ignore. The cross for the Filipinos, especially as embodied and experienced in the *pasyon*, is not necessarily a symbol of acquiescence or passivity to suffering. Ultimately, it is about struggling against suffering. For the Jesus of the *pasyon* is one who seeks to build humane relationships based on the self-worth of the individual and calls his disciples *katoto* (a friend who shares one's truth), *kasalo* (a person one eats with), *kasiping* (someone whom one sleeps with), and *kasambahay* (someone who lives in the same house).<sup>70</sup>

But the Christological features of a theology of migrant DHs will not be complete without the risen Jesus. Filipino Christology sees Jesus as a way toward full humanity. And, although there is some kind of difficulty involved, because of the usual association of the resurrection with the divine origin of Jesus rather than with his humanity, Eleazar Fernandez says, Filipinos have also internalized the resurrection, as part of their striving to be human, particularly by those who have opted to struggle for a better future.<sup>71</sup> de Mesa's interpretation of the resurrection complements this. Relating it to the Exaltation-Vindication interpretation of the resurrection that exists in the Tradition, de Mesa says Jesus' resurrection may be culturally intelligible for Filipinos as *pagbabangong-dangal*, which literally means the lifting up or raising up of one's dignity and honor. He posits that Jesus' shameful and humiliating death is actually a symbol of rejection and failure, and that Jesus' resurrection by the Father is indicative of the restoration of

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<sup>69</sup> Aside from the inculcation of the values of obedience and passivity the sexual abuse of Filipinas, especially by the friars, and the at times violent subjugation of the *babaylanes* (women priests), who are central figures in early Philippine society and leaders of many revolts against the colonizers, are glaring examples of this. See Z.A. Salazar, *Ang Babaylan sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas* (Quezon City: Palimbagan ng Lahi, 1999) especially 18–20.

<sup>70</sup> *People's Participation for Total Human Liberation* (Pasay City: Philippines: Alay Kapwa, 1982): 32 cited in Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, 101.

<sup>71</sup> Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, 105.

Jesus' dignity and honor. "The resurrection means that Jesus' claim, his faith in God's closeness, the way he lived his life and met his death, were confirmed. With his proclamation and his whole behavior he was right.... So the shame and dishonor were taken away. Jesus—his person, message, behavior and commitment was vindicated by way of exaltation."<sup>72</sup>

Resurrection as *pagbabangong-dangal* drives home the point that it (resurrection) is experienced whenever a person's dignity and honor are restored, vindicated, uplifted in one way or another, whenever people are willing to stand up, like Jesus, for the common humanity that they share with others.<sup>73</sup> This corresponds with Williams' insistence that the resurrection is a testimony to God's saving power through Jesus' ministerial vision and, consequently, to our Christian mission to work for right relations. These contentions by Williams, which speak to the H.K. DHs' struggle, also make sense not just of the obvious individual and collective ways in which migrant DHs' struggle against the rampant desecration of their dignity and honor, but also the subtle ones like laughter,<sup>74</sup> which Lee himself identifies as a means of resisting marginality. The H.K. DHs' enthusiastic, mocking, desperate, and hearty laughter in response to their domestication is an example of this.<sup>75</sup> Either directed toward themselves or toward their oppressors laughter is a means of struggle for them.

Gerald Arbuckle sheds light on the significance of laughter in *Laughing With God: Humor, Culture, and Transformation*. Arbuckle maintains that although humor and laughter are non-confrontational styles of critiquing an oppressive situation they are effective as they are often able to portray fraud, hypocrisy, and injustice far more powerfully and emotively than the written word. Humor's subversive quality, for example, is its most important function according to Arbuckle as it "deflates pomposity and undermines the rigidity of the status quo.

<sup>72</sup> Jose de Mesa, *Why Theology Is Never Far Away From Home*, 166.

<sup>73</sup> Jose de Mesa, *Why Theology Is Never Far Away From Home*, 166.

<sup>74</sup> As a bodily-act laughter once again confirms the centrality of the body in a theology of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration. For laughter is "the body's grace, its resistance to totalitarian truths, its 'wild wisdom' resisting the 'will to truth' which seeks to establish immutable truths." Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology*, 143.

<sup>75</sup> See also Michael Tan, "Teng isa" [http://www.inq7.net/opi/2001/dec/18/text/opi\\_mitan-1p.htm](http://www.inq7.net/opi/2001/dec/18/text/opi_mitan-1p.htm) accessed December 18, 2001 who, based on his experience with women OFWs, says this "almost unique *Pinoy* laughter" or "jovial mood" is "more specific to Filipinas."

When humor pokes fun at the oppressive stringencies and conventions of society people have the chance to re-imagine alternative ways of behaving.<sup>76</sup> Jacqueline Bussie also points out the value of laughter in her study of what she calls “the laughter of the oppressed” as expressed in Elie Wiesel’s *God’s Mistake*, Shusaku Endo’s *Silence*, and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. Bussie argues that laughter increases our consciousness of faith since faith is born of the very stuff that also engenders laughter namely contradictions, incongruity, and paradox. Bussie also contends that laughter reflects and heightens our consciousness of hope as “life is a conflict between two narratives: the narrative of reason/reality and the narrative of faith, the narrative of facts and the narrative of longing. This collision can lead to despair or hope but when it leads to hope that hope is heroic but appears to many eyes as madness. We hope because it is absurd.”<sup>77</sup>

In the Old Testament laughter is actually attributed directly to God. The name of Isaac—the son of Abraham and Sarah—means ‘God laughs.’ Karl-Josef Kuschel, in the meantime, provides a clear link between laughter and the resurrection. He avers laughter forms part of Christians’ basic character as Easter people. According to Kuschel, the Jesus story did not end in His suffering and death that elicited derisive laughter among his oppressors. The Jesus event culminated in the resurrection, the expression of God’s power, specifically through laughter at death. In the story of Jesus, then, the final act is laughter and the final experience is joy.<sup>78</sup> Echoing Harvey Cox, Kuschel affirms laughter is “hope’s last weapon” and explains:

Christians who laugh are expressing their feeling that the facts of the world are not the end of the matter, though this world need not be despised. Christians who laugh are taking part in God’s laughter at his creation and his creatures, and this laughter is a laughter of mercy and

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<sup>76</sup> Gerald Arbuckle, *Laughing With God: Humor, Culture, and Transformation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), 13.

<sup>77</sup> Jacqueline Bussie, *The Laughter of the Oppressed: Ethical and Theological Resistance in Wiesel, Morrison, and Endo* (New York: T & T Clark: 2007), 187.

<sup>78</sup> Karl-Josef Kuschel, “The Destructive and Liberating Power of Laughter: Anthropological and Theological Aspects,” *Concilium* 4 (2000): 119. Kuschel also cites, as an example, the old German church ritual called *risus paschalis* or Easter laughter whereby preachers at the Easter Mass would induce the congregation to peals of laughter, even using obscene pantomimes and double entendres.

friendliness... Christians who laugh are insisting that the stories of the world's sufferings do not have the last word...<sup>79</sup>

This Easter spirituality is not strange to Filipino Christology and the character of the Filipino people. It is enshrined in the feature of Filipino Christology, that Fernandez refers to as the "Jesus who struggles with joy"—the Jesus who knows how to celebrate in the midst of the struggle—which is a feature that is rooted in the *fiesta* (feast) spirit of Filipinos. Like the Jesus of the gospels who attends and speaks of feasts, e.g. wedding banquets and enjoys and seeks table fellowships and communities Filipinos love to celebrate *fiestas* and every imaginable occasion.<sup>80</sup> They love to sing, dance, laugh, eat, and drink and want to, still, be able to celebrate despite and in the midst of adversity. Even the People Power I revolution, for instance, came to be known as not just the "peaceful revolution" but also the "smiling revolution." This is sometimes misunderstood particularly by foreigners. But, as Fernandez says, "when the struggle is long and protracted and many have fallen on the way without seeing the dawn, every inch of victory has to be celebrated with joy and thanksgiving."<sup>81</sup> Besides, fiestas and other occasions or simple/spontaneous hearty dining after a hard day's work, is part of nourishing and cementing relationships for Filipinos.

### *Church of the Stranger*

In a theology of migrant DHs, the church cannot but be a church of the stranger. This church is, first and foremost, a catholic church. This is because catholicity is most expressed in the welcome for and/or hospitality to the stranger. Hospitality to the stranger is inherent to the being and witness of the church, just as hospitality has been characteristic of the way God and Jesus have been described in the Bible.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God is inclusive. His

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<sup>79</sup> Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Laughter: A Theological Essay* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 133 quoted in Karl-Josef Kuschel, "The Destructive and Liberating Power of Laughter," 146.

<sup>80</sup> Roberto Goizueta regards *fiesta* as aesthetic praxis. He argues festive rituals and celebrations express and reflect a profound sense of the human in relationship to the sacred. See Roberto Goizueta, "Fiesta: Life in the Subjunctive," in *From the Heart of Our People*, 84-99.

<sup>81</sup> Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, 104.

<sup>82</sup> The Orthodox icon of the Trinity even identifies the divine communion between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit with the communion of three strangers who were received and fed by Abraham in the spirit of genuine hospitality (Gen. 18; Hebrews

fellowship at the table with those vilified and ostracized by Jewish religion symbolizes this inclusive hospitality of God.

In the church of the stranger, churches are challenged by the brokenness of communities and the social fabric of life, as experienced by uprooted people, like migrants, to become what they (churches) really are: sanctuaries for “refugees” (or for everyone with human need), and a table around which people of diverse and even opposing positions can converse and break bread together.<sup>83</sup> Just as he did with the H.K. DHs’ experience, Lee’s reflections on indifference as sin in the context of migration and/or plural societies provide a frame of reference for this challenge. For a church of the stranger is supposed to be a church without borders. It loses its *raison d’être*, particularly its catholicity, when it closes itself to the stranger or, in Lee’s words, when it becomes “indifferent” to the “different” and does not strive for an inclusive community, that is a sign and foretaste of God’s kingdom.

A church of the stranger does not level but thrives on difference, diversity, and plurality. It is like Lee’s vision of a mosaic society, which builds harmonious relationships with people regardless of their gender, class, race, ethnicity, and religion. Lee’s depiction of Jesus as stranger lends greater sense and clarity to this fundamental call to the church to be the church of the stranger. Jesus himself did not only take on the identity of a stranger but also struggled to build better and warmer relations with literal strangers and, most especially, with the e-stranger in Jewish society.

Williams’ reflections on the Black church and Lee’s notion of marginal discipleship also give key descriptions to the church of the stranger, in the same way that they illumined the challenge of borders and strangers that arose from the H.K. DHs’ experience. Like Williams’ Black church and African-American denominational churches, the church of the stranger could happen or be experienced on different levels. Like Williams’ Black church, it is not a building. Neither is it also an institution. Like Williams’ Black church, it is a movement that embodies (Black people’s) resistance or, of what Lee regards as, marginal discipleship. The church of the stranger is an example, of what

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13:2). WCC, *A Moment to Choose: Risking to Be With Uprooted People* (Geneva: WCC, 1996), 15.

<sup>83</sup> Jose Mario Francisco, “Leading a church without borders,” <http://www.partners.inq7.net/newsbreak> accessed April 27, 2005.

Lee calls, creative movements at the margins.<sup>84</sup> It is expressed in Lee's vision of a liturgy for (im)migrants that is sensitive to their culture and minister to their pain as a people.<sup>85</sup>

As a potent tool for their struggle the *salo-salo* (shared meal), also mentioned by Lee in the case of immigrants, serves as a heuristic lens for elaborating on the church of the stranger. Meals in the Christian tradition are not just about food, generosity, and graciousness but also about friendship rooted in a profound respect and care for one another. In fact, shared meals or fellowships usually served as the context of most hospitable encounters in the Christian tradition. Jesus connected with those most in need of human connection by sitting at table with them. He built and fortified his community of disciples up to the very end by eating together with them (Last Supper). Moreover, shared meals also count as one of the hallmarks of the household churches of the early Christian communities (Acts 2: 46).

*Salo-salos* (which Lee also points out in relation to migrants' creative religious ways of resisting marginality) are not actually peculiar in the Filipino setting. But the atmosphere in *salo-salos* in the context of migration takes on a different cast, such that one may say the *salo-salo* after the service or during the regular religious group or community gatherings may well be the real Eucharist or the Sunday service. Seeing one is like witnessing the Gospel at table. The spirit of joy, the atmosphere of warmth and affection, the sense of community, and the baring of humanity<sup>86</sup> are such that the experience itself becomes a

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<sup>84</sup> Migrant DHs' places of worship, e.g. parks, gyms, homes, and buildings, attest to the peripheral nature of this creative movement (at the margins). In this church the boundaries between the public and private are permeable, and family, home, and kinship is experienced not as agents of domestication but as means for the struggle.

<sup>85</sup> The DHs' church of the stranger has a "Filipino flavor" insofar as its worship and rituals are not just cognitive but, most especially, affective. Leonila Bermisa maintains Filipinos have an affinity and preference for more senses-oriented liturgy. According to Bermisa this is especially the case among Filipino women who show more sensitivity to the sacred and the mystery than (Filipino) men who have probably been desensitized by the introduction (into the male psyche) of the *machismo* trait imported from Spain and which took root in Philippine culture and society. For her an authentic Filipino worship or ritual is one that is sensual to make it more alive and really reach and touch the minds and hearts and flesh of the Filipino believer. Leonila V. Bermisa, "Word, Sacrament and Liturgy: Philippine Experience," 54.

<sup>86</sup> Aside from eating these *salo-salos* are usually marked by a lot of talking, smiling, touching, hugging, sometimes even crying as the sharing of food becomes woven with the sharing of lives. These are also often celebratory such that singing and dancing become part of the activity. Migrant DHs look forward to *salo-salos* for these are

God-experience. It is like seeing “the substance of religion and more... the strength that comes from valuing the intangibles, the meanings that are continually created and understood, when human beings come together to share their lives and their fears, their meals and their memories.”<sup>87</sup> It is the Eucharist in the flesh rooted in the resiliency, tenacity, and beauty of woman-spirit. It is a powerful reminder that Christian spirituality must not just be about fasting but also about celebrating, and that it must not just be about families but also about communities. Most of all, it serves as a reminder that Christian spirituality must never be confined to prayer or any other religious activity but to anything and everything that attends to and celebrates our body and, consequently, our humanity.

*Salo-salo*, as a means of struggle of the DHs, also makes their “church of the stranger” a privileged expression of community.<sup>88</sup> Filipino EATWOT theologians give voice to this profound expression of community in their commendation of the members of *El Shaddai* who

demonstrate a conviction and dedication that is enviable, especially for those who are seeking life affirming ways of faith: joyful gatherings, sharing of testimonies and personal stories, the fellowship in food, in laughter, in healing and in celebration. The sense of community is strong among *El Shaddai* followers, which is reflective of the Filipino value of *pakikipagkapwa*, seldom evident in other Catholic Church groups or gatherings.<sup>89</sup>

Migrant DHs’ church of the stranger is also a pilgrim church. “Migration is a symbol that reveals the underlying reality of the church as a pilgrim people... almost a sacrament, for it is like a mirror in which the People of God views its own reality not only as a problem but also as grace that... transforms the church when its members embrace their [migrants] poverty as wayfarers in a passing world.”<sup>90</sup> Indeed,

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the rare times when they can be themselves and feel genuine acceptance, care, and concern.

<sup>87</sup> Randy David, *Public Lives: Essays on Selfhood and Social Solidarity*, 52.

<sup>88</sup> Letty Russell, *Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology*, 83 cites table fellowship as a beautiful image of the kingdom, particularly as an expression of the kingdom of love and community.

<sup>89</sup> Virginia Fabella et al., “Dugo-Duga ng Buhay: A Philippine Experience in Spirituality,” 236–7 acknowledges and lauds this, particularly the sense of solidarity, even among the members overseas, which count thousands of DHs among them.

<sup>90</sup> Silvano Tomasi, “The Prophetic Mission of the Churches: Theological Perspectives,” in WCC, *The Prophetic Mission of the Churches in Response to Forced Displacement of Peoples*, A Global Ecumenical Consultation, Addis Ababa Ethiopia, 6–11

“migration is graced even in difficult circumstances... part of the ongoing mystery of redemption, contributing to solving the great problems of the human family. [Migrants] are, thus, also part of God’s plan for the growth of the human family in greater cultural unity and universal fraternity”(sic).<sup>91</sup>

Silvano Tomasi, in fact, maintains that we need to have a new mentality by looking at the challenge of welcoming strangers as a justice issue today both for the Church and for society, and not only an option of charity.<sup>92</sup> A growing number of theologians echo this stance by relating the challenges posed by the conditions of contemporary migration to the Social Teachings of the Church<sup>93</sup> as well as to human rights.<sup>94</sup> What they make clear is the reality that salvation history (understood as salvation in history) today is inevitably tied with the plight of the millions of migrants all over the world and the millions more who (will) continue to be forced to embrace migration in the name of survival.<sup>95</sup> P. Giacomo Danesi in “Towards a Theology of Migration” articulates the place of migration in a church working its way towards God and/or redemption:

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November 1995, 40. Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, n. 48 sheds light on this revelatory quality of migration vis-à-vis the pilgrim character of the church: “The pilgrim church... carries the mark of this world which will pass, and she herself takes her place among the creation which groan and travail yet and await redemption... (cf. Rom. 8:19–22). See footnote n. 14, cited in Silvano Tomasi, “The Prophetic Mission of the Churches, 43.

<sup>91</sup> Silvano Tomasi, “The Prophetic Mission of the Churches,” 41.

<sup>92</sup> Silvano Tomasi, “Migration and Catholicism in a Global Context,” in *Migration in a Global World*, Concilium 2008/5 ed., Solange Lefebvre and Luiz Carlos Susin (London: SCM Press): 25.

<sup>93</sup> See, for instance, Michael Blume, S.V.D., “Migration and the Social Doctrine of the Church,” in *Migration, Religious Experience and Globalization*, eds., Gioacchino Campese and Pietro Ciallella (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 2003): 62–75.

<sup>94</sup> I have discussed this elsewhere. See Gemma Tulud Cruz, “In the Embrace of Risk: Risk as Heuristic Lens for a Catholic Ethical Contribution to Immigration Reform.” Paper presented at the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians in the United States (ACHTUS) 2009 Convention, 31 May–3 June 2009 Chicago, Illinois. See also Graziano Battistella, “Migration and Human Dignity,” in *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*, eds., Daniel Groody and Gioacchino Campese (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008): 177–191; Graziano Battistella, “The Human Rights of Migrants: A Pastoral Challenge,” in *Migration, Religious Experience and Globalization*, 76–102 and; Michel Andraos, “Migration: A Human Right to Be Defended,” *New Theology Review* Vol. 20, Number 3 (August 2007): 78–81.

<sup>95</sup> Daniel D. Groody, “Jesus and the Undocumented Immigrant: A Spiritual Geography of a Crucified People,” *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 307–316.



Against the Gospel ideal of brotherhood, migrations, whatever form they may take, are always revealed as ways of gradually forming a new social fabric, a new body, which the Gospel message is called to animate; by virtue of the tragic aspect they often entail, they are transformed into appeals to brotherhood on a world scale; by virtue of the conflicts that accompany them, they are an aspect of the painful birth of the pilgrim Church; by virtue of the discords and disparities they disclose, they become an appeal for a juster universal order; and by virtue of the rapprochement they effect between the most diverse components of the human family, migrations are ways to—and the foundation of—a pentecostal, universalistic, catholic, and ecumenical experience of Christian brotherhood (sic).<sup>96</sup>

Migration, indeed, could be the birthplace of a new humanity.<sup>97</sup> As a pilgrim community migrants have a profound experience of God. As they move from one reality to another, so does their God, who is not established in a solid temple but shares in their provisional life. God walks alongside them (as DHs see God) and becomes a pilgrim on the roads of this uneven world nurturing and blessing them by the power of renewed relationships and community within the household of life. In fact, solidarity is more real in such situations than in stable communities. Because it is an improvised community, the pilgrim community is less attached to the institution. It enjoys more flexibility and freedom, and is more open to other cultures and to less clerical ways of being church.<sup>98</sup>

Hence, as Lee most convincingly links to the H.K. DHs' religious problems, that are rooted in their racial and ethnic difference, the church of the stranger is also an intercultural church. It respects and is open to all cultures and religions. It welcomes fellow believers, including converts, from/with other cultures regardless of class and tries to be the church of the stranger by "becoming strangers together." To this end, a theology of migrant DHs is an intercultural theology. It is a theology that does not simply focus on the multiplication or amalgamation of cultures but, most especially, on the interaction between and among cultures and religions, which give rise to changes or con-

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<sup>96</sup> P. Giacomo Danesi, "Towards a Theology of Migration," in *The Prophetic Mission of Churches in Response to Forced Displacement of People*, 35.

<sup>97</sup> Anthony Rogers, FSC, "Towards Globalising Solidarity Through Faith Encounters In Asia," in *The Migrant Family in Asia: Reaching Out and Touching Them*, ed., Anthony Rogers, FSC (Manila: Office for Human Development, 2007): 68–71.

<sup>98</sup> Rev. Marga Janete Ströher, "People Are Made To Shine—Not To Suffer," in *The Prophetic Mission of Churches in Response to Forced Displacement of People*, 50.

version in religio-cultural orientation in the context of migration. It is a theology that views other cultures and religions as gifts that enrich the catholicity and pilgrimage of the church of the stranger, individually and collectively.

Looking back at the features discussed above, one can see that the theology that arises from Filipino women migrant domestic workers' struggle is a *feminist* theology. First of all, it taps into feminist theory. It interrogates sexism, and "gender" is used as an epistemological category, particularly in the discussion on domestication, *bahala na* as *pakikibaka*, and the body. As done by feminist theorists, various and interlocking forms of oppression, that structure women's lives (in this case, the Filipina migrant domestic workers and how their experience of the different forms of domestication is linked with other forms of oppression like classism and racism), are investigated, and an alternative future toward the flourishing of women (Filipina migrant domestic workers) is imagined.

Moreover, the features of the theology I have developed here are central to feminist thought and practice. They "lift up many different aspects of (this) flourishing of women—respect for their bodily integrity and creativity as well as social conditions and relations of power marked by mutuality and reciprocity—" in a way that honors feminist theorists' recognition of the diversity of women's identity, and the complexity of women's subjectivity.<sup>99</sup> The features, particularly domestication as oppression and *bahala na* as *pakikibaka*, manifest the former, i.e., recognition of diversity in women's identity, by their contextuality and/or focus on the complex "givenness" and multiple circumstances of a particular group of women, namely Filipina migrant DHs.<sup>100</sup> They (features), particularly God of the struggle and church of the stranger, express the latter, i.e., recognition of the complexity of women's subjectivity, by exhibiting an interrogation of the diverse sites and modes of Filipino women migrant domestic workers' struggle in a more fluid manner, including the more personal dimensions of everyday living.

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<sup>99</sup> Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>100</sup> More concretely, the reality that the theology developed here is based on the experience of a particular group of women of color aligns with feminist theorists' recognition of the rich cultural and his/herstorical differences of women's experiences in various eras, geographical locations, communities and ethnicities.

The role of *salo-salo* and laughter, as a peculiarly strong and ambiguous facet of Filipina migrant women's struggle, illustrates this.

Lastly, the theology that arises from the struggle of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration is a feminist theology, in that "it takes special interest in the lives of women, their stories, their hopes, their flourishing and failures, and their multilayered experiences of oppression... brings these lives and experiences into the drama of the Christian message and explores how Christian faith grounds and shapes women's experiences of hope, justice, and grace as well as instigates and enforces women's experiences of oppression, sin, and evil. The term "feminist," then, locates the distinctive interests of this theology, [in that] it is a theology, that articulates the Christian message in language and actions, that seek to liberate women and all persons, a goal that Christian feminists believe cannot be disentangled from the central truth of the Christian faith as a whole."<sup>101</sup> Indeed, the theology developed here is feminist theology, in that it is a testament to what Rosemary Radford Ruether names as the critical principle of feminist theology, namely the promotion of the full humanity of women.<sup>102</sup> It challenges traditional views of women's role in religion and society. It examines the gendered and exclusive character of Christian thought, and practice and explores alternative meanings, symbols, and images, e.g. a Jesus who suffers but struggles and an intercultural church. It expresses, what Elizabeth Johnson points to in *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, as the three interrelated tasks of feminist theology. "It critically analyzes inherited oppressions, searches for an alternative wisdom and suppressed history, and risks new interpretations of the tradition in conversation with women's lives."<sup>103</sup> More succinctly, it reflects what Serene Jones delineates as feminist systematic theology: It identifies "fitting connections" between doctrine and concrete actions in the Christian community by asking whether the church practices what it confesses and by testing or interrogating doctrines, e.g. cross and suffering, in the concrete lives of women.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 14.

<sup>102</sup> See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 18–9 as quoted in Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 30.

<sup>103</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, 29.

<sup>104</sup> Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 18.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The chapter opened with a conversation, in triadic and dyadic terms, between Williams' theology of survival quality of life, Lee's theology of marginality, and the experience of the H.K. DHs. In the conversation it has been established that Williams chiefly spoke to the gender aspect and, consequently, to the gender-related challenges that arose from the H.K. DHs' experience. Lee, in the meantime, connected more with the migration aspect and, consequently, to the migration-related challenges. Both resonated with the H.K. DHs' experience, however, on a number of other themes, particularly those that concern race, space, suffering, dealing with oppression, and church. From this conversation, the features of a theology of migrant DHs are then articulated.

Domestication, *bahala na*, the body, God of the struggle, and church of the stranger are the key themes that have been identified and described as the features of a theology of migrant DHs. From the elaboration on these, we can see that no simple or clear-cut redemptive moment occur for the DHs. Theirs is a faith lived in the context of a process of working out or working towards full humanity and liberation. Struggle marks their lives. Struggle characterizes their lives. The revolutionary point is that their struggle cannot be viewed in isolation from a living and embodied faith, as it is lived daily in interstices. It is a struggle that is at once personal, political, his/herstorical and sacred. In the first place, the struggle for human dignity and liberation requires a great amount of faith. And insofar as this faith-based struggle has a woman-face and feminist theologies are rooted in communities of faith and struggle<sup>105</sup> we can conclude that the theology that arises from the experience of migrant DHs is a feminist theology of struggle.

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<sup>105</sup> Letty Russell, *Household of Freedom*, 88. See also Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 22–52; Maria Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 20; and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Struggle is a Name for Hope: A Critical Feminist Interpretation for Liberation," *Pacifica* 10 (June 1997): 238.



## CHAPTER SIX

# EXPANDING THE VIEW: THE CHALLENGES OF A FEMINIST THEOLOGY OF STRUGGLE OF FILIPINO WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION TO THE THEOLOGY OF STRUGGLE IN THE PHILIPPINES

Beginning to think in a different way requires us to take different positions on the subject of knowing; to open up spaces for new ways of thinking and to consider our own thinking in terms of how our goals affect our perceptions.

—Ivone Gebara—<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Every theological expression does not arise nor exist in isolation. It has a context of its own that is heavily dictated by the present; it arises from an-other context that forms part (but not entirely) of its past; and its future partly depends upon the critical, constructive, and creative weaving of these two. As a contextual theology on Filipino women FTOS<sup>2</sup> is obviously dialogical first with the contextual theology in the Philippines. Among the various contemporary theological efforts in the Philippines<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 21 quoted in Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 150.

<sup>2</sup> For purposes of brevity, and taking cue from the abbreviated reference to the Theology of Struggle in the Philippines as “ToS”, “FToS” will be used throughout this part of the research to refer to “feminist theology of struggle of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration.”

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Franklin Pilario, C.M., “The Craft of Contextual Theology: Towards a Methodological Conversation in the Philippine Context,” *Chakana* Vol.1, No. 1 (2003): 20–1, 38–40 citing Catalino Arevalo, S.J. “Filipino Theology” in *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives*, ed., K. Mueller (New York: Orbis, 1997): 161–7 speaks of three trajectories in the Filipino theological landscape. These include, first, mainstream theology, which uses the discourse of the magisterium as its main base for reflection; second, culture theology, which consists in correlating key Filipino terms and their cluster concepts with the Christian message; and third, liberationist theology known and called as Theology of Struggle which, Arevalo says, is comprised of three sub-groups. These consist of, first, the Filipino theologian members of the EATWOT

the Theology of Struggle or ToS stands out as the best possible partner for dialogue.<sup>4</sup>

Just as Williams herself engaged Black liberation theology in dialogue with womanist theology to see where the womanist material “fits” and where Black liberation theology can expand for womanist theology to “fit,” this chapter will undertake a similar endeavor. It will engage ToS in a dialogue with FToS to see where the FToS material fits and ascertain how ToS might go forward. Three areas will be the

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(Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians) and the CNL (Christians for National Liberation). This is where Edicio de la Torre, Carlos Abesamis, Mary John Mananzan, Louie Hechanova, and Virginia Fabella are said to belong. The second is that of the centrist group which “consciously and explicitly” relies on the official ecclesial magisterium in the discernment of an appropriate Christian praxis in our times and, last, but not the least, the “theological” reflection going on among grassroots communities (BECs) whose political position ranges from “far left” to “left of centre.” Daniel Franklin Pilario, C.M., “The Craft of Contextual Theology,” 38 reckons the option to start with concrete socio-historical reality; the use of the tools for social analysis (particularly Marxism); commitment to concrete action towards social transformation; and the view that it is the grassroots poor who are the “real theologians” unite these groups.

<sup>4</sup> See Antonio B. Lambino et al., *Towards “Doing Theology” in the Philippine Context* (Manila: Loyola School of Theology, 1982), 20–2 for a concise presentation of the development of ToS in the Philippines. For sources this research relies heavily on the first of the three sub-groups of liberationist theologians identified above, i.e. EATWOT and CNL group, primarily because their group is the one that has gained a wide international hearing and has greater and sustained publications from the time ToS emerged in the late 1960s. The more recent publications include that of Eleazar Fernandez, “Theology of Struggle,” in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, 201–2 and Mary John Mananzan, “Globalization and the Perennial Question of Justice,” *In God’s Image* Vol. 21, No. 2 (June 2002): 22–7. This dearth in publications does not necessarily mean that there have been a change in context but, rather, due to a number of practical limitations. Daniel Franklin Pilario, C.M., “The Craft of Contextual Theology,” 38 says it is because many reflections do not get a hearing as they exist only in mimeographed forms. In “Doing Theology (In a Situation) of Struggle,” *Voices from the Third World* Vol. XIV, No. 1 (June 1991): 32 Karl Gaspar is even more to the point when he declares: “If you want to know about the theology of struggle... do not look for a book. There isn’t one; and none may be written soon.” Though Eleazar Fernandez’s book on ToS, which came out in 1994, proved Gaspar wrong, he (Gaspar) who, I have been informed, have been asked to write an article on ToS in a forthcoming book on Asian theology by an Italian publishing company, is not entirely wrong. Eleazar Fernandez, *Towards a Theology of Struggle*, 22 lays down the reasons more succinctly for this paucity of written and published systematic theological reflections on ToS more recently: “Filipino theologians have been so active in the struggle that they have not enough time to put in writing their rich faith-life reflections. Filipino theologians are not traditional theologians who spend most of their time lecturing and publishing their lectures. Furthermore, these theologians do not have the usual sabbatical leaves that some, if not most, of their Western counterparts enjoy with financial benefits.”

focus of this dialogue namely contextualization, biblical hermeneutics, and religious and cultural critique.

### CONTEXTUALIZATION

When it was first introduced to the theological world in 1972, contextualization was used as a concept to designate ways of expressing theology in a non-Western context, utilizing native culture and thought expressions as the basis of theological formulation. Today, however, it has evolved and is now understood in different ways. Insofar as it is an important element of Asian feminist methodology,<sup>5</sup> and is defined as “taking a critical look at the local context (with its historical, socio-economic, political, cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious dimensions) as well as the impact of outside forces (such as the imposition of a global market and a homogenized culture) on the people,”<sup>6</sup> I believe FToS challenges ToS in the area of contextualization.

ToS begins with and reflects on the bellicose struggle by the (grass-roots) poor and oppressed in the Philippines against political, economic and, to a certain extent, cultural and religious oppression. FToS starts with and reflects on the daily struggle of Filipino women domestic workers outside of the Philippines against their local, national, and global domestication. Two areas, namely gender and migration, emerge here as points whereby FToS speaks to ToS in the area of contextualization.

#### *The Gender Issue*

Obviously, the starting point for theologizing of FToS is the situation or experience of Filipino women migrant domestic workers. ToS, on the other hand, starts with the experience of the “poor and oppressed,” as it is broadly conceived and understood in classical Latin American liberation theology. This is where the lacuna begins. As has already been argued in Chapter 3 classical Latin American liberation theology’s deployment of “poor and oppressed” falls short of accounting for the experience and perspective of women. This is because it is too

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<sup>5</sup> This means that the starting point for theologizing is the experience of Asian women and their struggle in a male-dominated world. Mary John Mananzan, “Feminist Theology in Asia,” 26.

<sup>6</sup> Virginia Fabella, “Contextualization,” in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, 58.



general and its focus, i.e., political-economic, leaves unexamined and unattended equally vital dimensions of oppression, particularly for women, e.g. religio-cultural oppression. ToS also carries this weakness, which FToS exposes as the lack of gender perspective.

Most ToS theologians, both from the Catholic and Protestant side are male; the majority of whom are religious or clergy members. The lament of Mary John Mananzan, in an EATWOT gathering on gender dialogue, reveals the downside of this predominance of male theologians in mainstream or malestream ToS in relation to the lack of gender perspective. Mananzan shares: "My own impression of the dialogue we had with our male colleagues in the Philippines, was that although they seemed to understand the women's perspective as we explained to them, they have not actually taken it into consideration in their own theologizing. They consider it as primarily the business of the Women's Commission."<sup>7</sup>

Mananzan's statement is very significant in the face of the fact that, as has been mentioned earlier, most of the eminent ToS theologians are EATWOT members. This failure, even by Filipino women theologians,<sup>8</sup> to go beyond the class analysis, which ToS has a bias to, is

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<sup>7</sup> Mary John Mananzan, "Gender Dialogue in EATWOT: An Asian Perspective," *Voices from the Third World* Vol. XIX, No. 1 (June 1996): 76.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Tapia, *The Contribution of Philippine Christian Women to Asian Women's Theology*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, Claremont California, 1989, 30-1 reveals that even though numerous women's organizations were founded in the early part of the 1980s, the distinctly feminist viewpoint had not been clarified. The official effort of Filipino women theologians to insist and work on addressing women's concerns within the theology of struggle, Tapia says, started only with a consultation in December 22-29, 1984 of Filipino women trained in theology, under the sponsorship of EATWOT's Commission on Women. Moreover, among these women theologians (most of whom are also women religious or religious leaders) Mananzan, a Benedictine nun, is arguably the only one who has considerably tackled the spiritual and herstorical experiences of Filipino women. See, for example, Mary John Mananzan, "Woman and Religion," in *Forum for Interdisciplinary Studies, Religion and Society: Towards a Theology of Struggle* Book 1 (Manila: Forum for Interdisciplinary Studies, 1988): 107-20. Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Routledge, 2001) cited in Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 151 provides a possible explanation to this by pointing to how "the emergence of feminist consciousness in the Third World took place in the wider political climate of national struggles, the fight against economic exploitation, and the quest for cultural self-definition." I have discussed, to a certain extent, how this played out in the Philippines in a response to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's essay on "Feminist Studies in Religion and Theology In-Between Nationalism and Globalization." See Gemma Tulud Cruz, "Response," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring 2005): 141-7.

glaringly visible in the absence of reflection on the spiritual and historical experiences of Filipino women and their efforts to transform the systems destroying their lives and human integrity. Even their class analysis, which is supposed to be interdisciplinary, reflects this lack of gender perspective. They use the social sciences as tools for reflection to “begin to understand the social order . . . the structures, the classes, the relationships, the contradictions . . . discover the oppressive dynamics that cause poverty and powerlessness, and the dynamics of liberating action for change.”<sup>9</sup> They turn, for example, to psychology, sociology, history, and political economy<sup>10</sup> but their analysis and/or critique does not go deep enough into these disciplines to take up issues of gender socialization. To be sure, it sorely lacks feminist theory. Most ToS theologians’ use of social sciences has yet to take them not just to general psychology and sociology but as far as the psychology and sociology of gender socialization, not just to history or his-story but also to her-story (of Filipino women), and not just to political economy in general but to the political economy of gender in particular.

In cases where Filipino women’s situation and struggle is given a space at all, particularly by male ToS theologians, it is relegated to the fringes, with a few pages.<sup>11</sup> Too often the situation and the struggle towards liberation of Filipino women have been considered a “distinct” concern and having dynamics of its own even when Filipinas, particularly those who have been involved in the people’s movements have not viewed their struggle for justice, freedom, and democracy as a “separate” concern<sup>12</sup> but as “integral” and “vital” to the national struggle.<sup>13</sup> Mananzan points to this sentiment as she insists Filipino feminist theological reflections on the struggles of Filipino women for

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<sup>9</sup> Karl Gaspar, “Doing Theology (In a Situation) of Struggle,” 38.

<sup>10</sup> Carlos Abesamis, S.J., “Faith and Life Reflections from the Grassroots in the Philippines,” in *Asia’s Struggle for Full Humanity*, ed., Virginia Fabella (New York: Orbis Books, 1980): 129–30 affirms and illustrates this.

<sup>11</sup> These rare ones include Karl Gaspar, CSsR, who discussed it in the two and a half pages of the last part of “Doing Theology (In a Situation) of Struggle,” 32–65 and Eleazar Fernandez, who tackled it in three pages of his 187-page book on the theology of struggle. See Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, 17; 169–70. Fernandez also allots two sentences on this in his writing on ToS in Eleazar Fernandez, “Theology of Struggle,” in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, 201–2.

<sup>12</sup> Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, 17.

fuller humanity should be “in the context of the overall struggle for societal transformation and total human liberation.”<sup>14</sup>

The very methodology of ToS, i.e., reflection on the praxis of struggle, requires the situation of women be a constitutive element, not just as an afterthought or a minor theme. If there is a group or sector in Philippine society who knows deeply what it means to be poor and oppressed it would be the women, whose domestication has marginalized them in all spheres of Philippine society from politics, religion, economics, and culture. Besides, Filipino society is not complete without the women. Hence, the situation, particularly the domestication, of women and their struggle for humanity should not be an addendum. It is an inseparable and equally vital component within ToS.<sup>15</sup> And this, as also argued by Latina feminist theologians in the case of liberation theology, is not just about a change in language but also a change in the epistemological horizon. It is not just about including women in the production and making of theology and the creation of a new liberating reality but also about modifying the theological expression and content in a way that they criticize patriarchal structures and androcentric vision in the whole social context of oppression.<sup>16</sup>

In the context of FToS and ToS this “modification” and “change in epistemological horizon” concretely comes into how FToS puts into question some of ToS’ anthropological presuppositions. This applies particularly with ToS’ key categories namely “poor and oppressed”<sup>17</sup> and “humanity” and/or “full humanity.” How can ToS speak of “humanity” much less “full humanity,” when the experience and con-

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<sup>14</sup> Mary John Mananzan, “Paschal Mystery from a Philippine Perspective,” 93.

<sup>15</sup> ToS also claims to be a “(Filipino) people’s theology.” But a people’s theology can only claim to be truly representative of the people if it is informed by the oppressive experiences, struggle, and vision of Filipino women.

<sup>16</sup> Maria Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 109.

<sup>17</sup> The inadequacy of this category in view of migrant DHs’ experience can already be seen in Chapter 5’s description of the DHs as the “oppressed of the oppressed”. Nevertheless, let me illustrate this vis-à-vis ToS’ discursive emphasis on “class.” Class-wise migrant DHs are not just the “poor and oppressed”, especially in H.K. where they are pushed even further to the bottom of the hierarchy of oppression. This is very much true when one factors in the imbrication of gender and race with their class-based oppression. Hence, a theology that starts with a general category as “poor and oppressed” and one that primarily concerns itself with the oppression and struggle of peasants and workers in the Philippines cannot really take into account the depth and breadth of migrant DHs’ experience. As Chapter 1, 2, and 5 show even some of the oppressive experiences and strategies for struggle as workers by migrant DHs come in peculiar forms and are a far cry from the situation of Filipino workers in the Philippines.

tribution of the half of (Filipino) “humanity”, i.e. (Filipino) women, is excluded and/or marginalized? An egalitarian anthropological perspective insists on the integrity of humanity without any exclusion of certain aspects or persons.<sup>18</sup> How is it possible then that ToS male theologians who are members of the EATWOT regard women’s oppression as “women’s business”? Isn’t this tantamount to denigration of the women situation and women’s concerns?

The subtle denigration and, consequently, marginalization of the humanity of the oppressed is characteristic of a relationship of oppression. To be sure ToS, particularly ToS male theologians, need an egalitarian anthropological perspective understood as equality between equals and equality as mutuality, both in theory and in praxis. How can ToS speak at all to migrant DHs’ experience when the basic theological task of integrating the experience of Filipino women in the Philippines, particularly through a serious analysis on their structural oppression and struggle as poor, as Filipinos, and as women, has yet to find enough recognition and space in ToS’ theological reflections?

Even ToS’ epistemological category, that is, “struggle” is challenged by “struggle” as understood and lived in FToS. “Struggle” for ToS is strongly marked by a belligerent and militaristic stance to the point of engaging or joining in some kind of an armed struggle or revolution,<sup>19</sup> as reflected in the common rallying cries “Dare to Fight! Dare to pay the price! Dare to struggle, dare to win!”<sup>20</sup> This confrontative

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<sup>18</sup> As Maria Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 94 posits: “When we speak of humanity we must integrate individual differences into our structure of knowledge. Humanity expresses itself in intrinsically different ways; men and women, though different, are two actual ways of being human. This difference does not in any way imply that one is greater or lesser. It simply indicates a single equal equality in two different modes. Although the modes are different, they possess one same original quality. A notion that makes the differences between women and men antagonistic creates competition and not mutual solidarity, because it tends to impose its own world of values as absolute and universal.”

<sup>19</sup> Ursula King, “Spirituality for Life,” in *Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality for Life*, eds., Mary John Mananzan et al. (New York: Orbis Books, 1996): 151, for example, finds the use of “struggle” and “resistance” problematic because of their association with military language and/or violence.

<sup>20</sup> This is often traced to the considerable Marxist influence, particularly among the more popular proponents of ToS, like former SVD priest Edicio de la Torre, who went underground and was imprisoned during the repression in the late 1970s to the early 1980s. For example, de la Torre, who heavily subscribes to Maoist thought, singles out three main elements in Maoist thinking for his theological method: 1) dialectical unity of theory and praxis; 2) nationalism; and 3) permanent revolution. In his article “The Filipino Christian: Guidelines for a Response to Maoism” that is cited in Sr. Theresa Dagdag, M.M., “Emerging Theology in the Philippines Today,” in Institute of Religion

conception of struggle is mirrored in the predilection to an understanding of power as the “principalities,” “evil forces,” or “forces of darkness” and of Christian life as “warfare” and “combat.” As Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes muses:

In my country life is lived out in the context of a confrontation.... a struggle, if you will.... it is unmistakably clear that life is a battleground where the forces of justice and truth confront the forces of evil. And it makes sense to us when the Bible calls us to live out lives in the context of *warfare* or *combat* (Ephesians 6:11).<sup>21</sup>

Dr. Feliciano Carino echoes this stance as he points out that the “warfare” or the struggle against “evil forces,” in which Christ’s resurrection is the “first fruit,” “continues until all the powers are brought under the reign of God” (1 Cor. 15:20 ff). Meanwhile, Christians are to put the armor of God to equip them in the battle against the forces of darkness.<sup>22</sup> He makes this more explicit by declaring: “The theology of struggle takes on this conception of the Christian life as having the primary component of ‘warfare’ and ‘combat.’<sup>23</sup> In this sense, it has a militant and activist stance.”<sup>24</sup>

“Struggle,” meanwhile, among Filipina migrant DHs, is on a *daily* grueling basis. In theory and in praxis migrant DHs’ struggle is not a special or seasonal struggle that only intensifies when a dictator like Ferdinand Marcos is in power or when the World Bank and International Monetary Fund’s structural adjustment programs (SAP) jeop-

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and Culture, *Currents in Philippine Theology* (Quezon City, Phils.: IRC, 1992): 79 de la Torre even calls on Filipino Christians to be “a servant of the revolution.” See also Edicio de la Torre, “A Theology of Struggle,” in *Currents in Philippine Theology*, 61–5. Karl Gaspar, a Redemptorist and another well-known articulator of ToS, who was also imprisoned, exhibit the same revolutionary concept of struggle. See, for instance, Karl Gaspar, *Pumipiglas: Teolohiya ng Bayan: A Preliminary Sketch on the Theology of Struggle from a Cultural-Liturgical Perspective* (Quezon City, Phils.: Socio-Pastoral Institute, 1986), 27. See also Bishop Benito M. Dominguez, “A Theology of Struggle: Towards a Struggle with a Human Face,” in *Currents of Philippine Theology*, 84.

<sup>21</sup> Italics in original. Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes, “Peopling Theology,” in *God’s Image* Vol. 19, No. 1 (2000): 16.

<sup>22</sup> Dr. Feliciano Carino, “What About the Theology of Struggle,” in *Religion and Society: Towards a Theology of Struggle*, xi.

<sup>23</sup> The explanation for the name taking of “struggle” in Lester Edwin Ruiz, “Towards a Theology of Politics,?” in *Religion and Society: Towards a Theology of Struggle*, viii quoted in Mary John Mananzan, “Paschal Mystery from a Philippine Perspective,” 90–1 in relation to the biblical tradition of Jacob wrestling (struggling with) God also echoes the combative undertones of ToS conception of struggle.

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Feliciano Carino, “What About the Theology of Struggle,” xi.

ardize the jobs and wages of workers, the livelihood of peasants, or the ancestral domain of indigenous communities. For Filipino women, particularly migrant DHs, struggle is a way of life. It is woven into their everyday living conditions on top of and in the midst of the cultural and, most especially, political and economic struggle that the ToS is chiefly concerned with.<sup>25</sup> The last paragraph of Jose Arguello's response, to the above mentioned EATWOT presentation of Mananzan on gender dialogue, eloquently spells this different conception and experience of "struggle" by women, and how liberationist theologies, like ToS, can learn from women's situation and experience of struggle. Arguello contemplates: "In Nicaragua, where we had now tragically lost a revolution, we sense this urgency to commit ourselves to a new spirituality of gender-partnership and global ecological and social justice *emerging from the depth of concrete daily life*" (italics in original).<sup>26</sup>

#### *Emerging Themes for a Gender-Sensitive ToS*

Arguello's acknowledgement quoted above forms part of three themes which, I believe, FToS presents for ToS to work on in order for it to be contextually gender-sensitive. The first has to do precisely with what Arguello realizes as a vital component of liberationist theologies, that is, a theology (or a ToS) that is anchored on *daily reality*. "The keystone for the new respect and awareness of the feminine must take place in daily life."<sup>27</sup> This holds true, especially since God's mystery, as experienced and expressed by women is not usually explicitly dealt with as a topic (by them) but in relation to their daily experience of faith. Migrant DHs, in particular, live in a context of daily struggle,

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<sup>25</sup> *Peasant Women Study for Critical Consciousness and Self-Organization* (Davao City, Phils.: Women Studies and Resource Center, n.d.), 23 cited in Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, 17, for example, reveals how women are expected to be mothers, "nursing the baby while stirring the pot" even as they participate in the (armed) struggle.

<sup>26</sup> Jose Arguello, "Response to Mary J. Mananzan," *Voices from the Third World* Vol. XIX, No. 1 (June 1996): 85. It is interesting to juxtapose this with the way how (especially in the 1980s) the Nicaraguan concept and experience of revolution is held in high esteem under ToS. Four out six international articles in a book on ToS, for instance, are on the Nicaraguan revolution. See Socio-Pastoral Institute, *With Raging Hope: A Compilation of Talks on the Church Involved in Social Transformation and Its Emerging Theology* Vol. 1 (Quezon City, Phils.: Socio-Pastoral Institute, 1983): 113–25, 126–32, 165–93, 194–8.

<sup>27</sup> Jose Arguello, "Response to Mary J. Mananzan," 85.

and the answers they seek must meet the challenge of this reality that happens everyday. The problem with ToS and other liberationist theologies, which espouse “a perspective that gives priority to large social changes” is that, too often, they “tend to undervalue the daily struggles undertaken by women... to obtain immediate vital needs” and regard these (women’s struggles) as “having little or no historical effect on social change.”<sup>28</sup> “Thus, it is necessary to reclaim for the liberation project *all* forms of struggle for life engaged in by women. They show up the capitalist system’s inability to respond to the vital needs of the poor and provide basic human rights for women. When we set these daily struggles within the broad context of the struggle for life as a whole, we recognize them as women’s struggles to claim their right to life and full humanity.”<sup>29</sup> Most importantly, when struggle is set in the context of daily life the domestication of women becomes visible. Moreover, it captures ways and means of seeking and experiencing God that would otherwise be ignored due to their perceived triviality because they occur daily.

Daily reality, particularly when lived in the context of the struggle for life in the midst of multiple forms of oppression, is sacramental. It both evokes and reveals God. While I do not seek to romanticize or valorize migrant DHs’ experience there is something about their situation and the faith, courage, hope, and resilience with which they struggle against their situation on a daily basis that reveal certain character, nature, and forms of the kind of local and, at the same time, global oppression that the Philippines and the Two-Thirds world, in general, face and struggle against today. Migrant DHs experience, for instance, exposes the home as a site of struggle.<sup>30</sup> If ToS is really serious about the grassroots poor as the primary source and “doers” of ToS it must realize that the grassroots poor’s struggle is not only in their farms or workplaces, in the streets, or in their “bamboo sanctuaries” (for socio-political and religious meetings) but also right at home.

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<sup>28</sup> As this theology is concerned with daily life it necessarily incorporate the relations between men and women. Maria Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Maria Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 20

<sup>30</sup> The experience also more strongly reveals laughter as a means for struggle. ToS does speak of the sense of celebration, the “*fiesta* mentality” of Filipinos as a significant part of ToS. It has yet to single out, however, laughter as a tool for accommodation and/or resistance of oppressed Filipinos and, on this aspect, ToS can learn a thing or two from women, particularly migrant DHs.

In fact, as the migrant DHs' experience shows, it starts right at home, making it a *daily* occurrence.

To be sure tackling daily reality as a theme for contextualization could surface the gender perspective for ToS, since many Filipino women in the Philippines spend their whole day everyday in their "world" called "home," where physical, economic, and sexual exploitation first happens and is strengthened. Moreover, tackling daily reality (as situated in the home) as a theme for a gender-sensitive contextualization could, first of all, enrich ToS' conception of (political-economic) struggle, as the home has a double-edged role in the experience of the DHs. As their workplace, the home is a site of oppression. Then, as kinship and/or an "imagined (global) community," the DHs' experience also brings in the home as a tool for struggle. Secondly, engaging daily reality, in the context of the home, could also neutralize and expand ToS' conception of struggle as political-economic. This is so since a critical analysis of the home as a site of struggle could reveal the physical, psychological, sexual, and spiritual face of Filipino, especially Filipino women's oppression.

Since they are oppressed because they are (Filipino) women, migrant DHs are actually a "class"—understood as a sub-group or sub-set—in themselves. But ToS will not be able to fully see this unique and far more serious experience of oppression of migrant DHs as Filipino *women*, unless it (ToS) recognizes sexism, particularly in the form of domestication, as part of the Filipino oppression it needs to take into account of. How could it talk about an "option for the poor," when it takes for granted a particular group that suffers greater structural impoverishment? Moreover, how could it speak of an "option for the oppressed" when it does not take into account the reality that a certain group, i.e., migrant domestic workers, reels from being the "oppressed of the oppressed"?<sup>31</sup> I reckon a theology that makes women's struggle, particularly migrant DHs' struggle, explicitly count, makes *option for the self* an important theme in articulating a theology of struggle. This, i.e., option for the self, is the second theme, which FToS offers ToS to make it contextually gender-sensitive.

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<sup>31</sup> One does not even have to go outside of the Philippines. A 1996 survey reveals that nearly 1.3 million Filipino girl-children are working, with the vast majority (79%) working away from home as domestic helpers for other families. IBON Facts and Figures 1996 cited in Emma Concepcion D. Liwag et al., "How We Raise Our Daughters and Sons," 155.



ToS puts a lot of emphasis on suffering and justifies martyrdom by conflating it with Filipino religious and cultural icons like the Suffering Messiah.<sup>32</sup> The fact that migrant DHs are already poorer and more oppressed, however, makes ToS' rhetoric on the acceptability and meaningfulness of suffering and martyrdom, by smuggling in an element of heroism, harmful rather than beneficial to the DHs' well-being. It justifies and intensifies their domestication.<sup>33</sup> As Williams posits, this rhetoric is noxious to (Black) women's psycho-spiritual health because it encourages them to bear with their suffering. Hence, continuing this rhetoric could only reinforce the DHs' domestication.

ToS' stress on suffering and endorsement of martyrdom is propped up by the notion or interpretation of "option for the poor" as a Filipino Christian duty to love and serve others, particularly the needy or the disadvantaged. When the needy or the disadvantaged is a family member this interpretation becomes a more potent tool for domestication since Filipinos are socialized to always put their families first. The option becomes an "obligation" that exacerbates migrant DHs' domestication. A ToS that will not bury Filipino women, particularly migrant DHs, deeper into their oppression would then serve well to re-imagine option for the poor by balancing existing theological reflections on love for others with the option for the self.

Williams captures this imperative very well in the womanist dictum: "Love yourselves regardless." Too often, love for the self in Christian theological reflections is either swallowed up or dwarfed by the love for others because of the over-emphasis on the latter. Love for the self has been so associated with sin as selfishness that it is often portrayed as negative. This is exacerbated by an understanding of Jesus' ultimate sacrifice on the cross as atonement for sinful humanity and greatest expression of God's love and identification with us which, Christian theologies, like ToS, then use to encourage self-sacrifice, selflessness, and self-abnegation. In the process, however, the love for the self, which Jesus himself enshrined in the second of the two greatest commandments, has been lost. Theological reflections literally follow

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<sup>32</sup> Edicio de la Torre, "A Theology of Struggle," 64.

<sup>33</sup> This rhetoric is particularly lethal among those who are victims of wife battery. See Gemma Tulud Cruz, "Liberating Theology: A Theological Exploration on the Challenge of Wife Battery to Christian Theology," in *Ecclesia of Women in Asia: Gathering the Voices of the Silenced*, eds., Evelyn Monteiro and Antoinette Gutzler (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005): 53-69.

the order in which the two appear in the articulation, i.e., “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” Because love for one’s self comes after love for the neighbor/other, it is treated as less of a virtue or not even a virtue. Jesus did not discourage or forbid us from loving ourselves. Jesus did not say “Love your neighbor *more than* you love yourself” but “*as* you love yourself” or “*the same as*” or “*like*” you love yourself. There is no hierarchy between the two. One is not better than the other. The self is married to the other and vice-versa without canceling out one another.<sup>34</sup>

This exaltation of loving others by marginalizing, diminishing, and even demonizing love for the self has produced more victims and offered more sacrifices than Jesus would have wanted. As experienced by migrant Filipina DHs, these victims are often women as they are socialized to be caring and nurturing for others.<sup>35</sup> A ToS that is sensitive to Filipino women, particularly migrant DHs, then needs to articulate “a faith that will provide women with resources for strength rather than resources for endurance”<sup>36</sup> by recovering the equal significance of the love for the self. Love for the self and others should not be presented antagonistically or in a mutually exclusive way but as interdependent. They “are two poles of the same loving movement and one cannot develop fully without the other...”<sup>37</sup>

Another possibility for a more balanced articulation on love for the self and others, is for ToS to turn to the notion of kinship, especially since the moral economy of kinship plays such a strong role in Filipino morality in general and the migrant community in particular. Kinship denotes a ‘self-in-relation.’ Hence, it does not leave out the “self” nor the “other.” Moreover, it is very much Filipino as it is rooted in the understanding of *kapwa* (shared personhood), and very much Asian as it is rooted in the relational concept of personhood, i.e., “I

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<sup>34</sup> Ivone Gebara, “Feminist Spirituality: Risk and Resistance,” in *In the Power of Wisdom: Feminist Spiritualities of Struggle*, 34–6.

<sup>35</sup> According to Elizabeth Amoah “Sacrifice/Self-Negation,” in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, 254 this is true even in contemporary political and socio-economic structures in developing countries, especially since most of these are male-biased. In such ordering of relations women usually bear the brunt of adjustment schemes.

<sup>36</sup> Joy Bussert, *Battered Women: From a Theology of Suffering to an Ethic of Empowerment* (New York: Lutheran Church in America, Division for Mission in North America, 1986), 65 quoted in Kristine Rankka, *Women and the Value of Suffering*, 106.

<sup>37</sup> Ivone Gebara, “Option for the Poor as an Option for the Poor Woman,” *Concilium* 194 (1987): 112–3 quoted in Maria Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 114.

am because we are.” Lastly, it is also very much Christian insofar as it is reflective of the idea of the kingdom of God itself.

I rather think Jesus’ command to love our neighbor is premised on or made possible by the love for oneself. We cannot give what we do not have. We cannot offer genuine love when we do not know or have not experienced it. We cannot give authentic love, if that very same love does not emanate from a genuine love for the self, or from a self that is genuinely loved by others. We will end up consuming ourselves if we keep on offering love without a wellspring of love from deep within. In real reality successful relationships and fruitful works or struggles for justice are those that give a “good feeling,” some kind of satisfaction, and sense of fulfillment or some sort of psycho-spiritual benefit for the person(s) involved. This personal growth and/or well-being, achieved side by side with acts that facilitate the growth and well-being of others, is a deep spiritual force that keeps truly loving persons going.<sup>38</sup>

In the first place, don’t we choose the relationships, the people, and the causes we offer our love and service for? And don’t we usually choose those that we like, make us happy, and make us grow as persons? Truly, the “Greatest Love of All,” as the song with the same title claims, is “learning to love yourself,” for it is in being able to love ourselves, that we are able to truly and more deeply love others. Even in sacrifices, Elizabeth Amoah insists, “there must be an element of benefit for the offerer as well as the receiver...one should not give away everything to one’s own doom. Sacrifice should be interpreted to mean a balanced giving of something valuable to another, in the expectation of advancing the spiritual, and the material welfare of both giver and receiver.”<sup>39</sup>

Having discussed the first two themes (daily reality and option for the self), let us now go to a third theme for a contextually gender-sensitive ToS, i.e., *ethic of risk*,<sup>40</sup> which arises from *bahala na* (hopeful risk-taking), as migrant DHs’ basic means of struggle. In the name of nationalism and social reform ToS theologians romanticize suffer-

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<sup>38</sup> A healthy sense of self-worth and self-respect which can only come from an appreciation and love for the self is a basic requirement not just for a sane and meaningful life but even in works for justice. Sharon Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 76.

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Amoah, “Sacrifice/Self-Negation,” in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, 254.

<sup>40</sup> One of the critical works on this is Sharon Welch’s *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*.

ing, encourages martyrdom, and sanctions violence (through armed struggle) as “means” of the struggle.<sup>41</sup> The challenge of FToS to ToS, that emanates from this, then, shares considerable resemblance with Williams’ challenge to Black liberation theology to revalue its adoption and sanctioning of “by whatever means necessary” as a value in the Black struggle for liberation. For FToS, to struggle is to risk. But this does not necessarily or automatically mean suffering, much less, violent or revolutionary struggle, as ToS tends to think. For FToS, the ultimate value is life, better life, fullness of life. This FToS’ vision for life, in the context of struggle, is achieved through an ethic of risk—inherent in *bahala na*—which ought to be noted, as this ethic presents an alternative (probably a more Filipino Christian way compared) to ToS’ conception of “means” or way of *pakikibaka*. FToS’ ethic of risk could serve as a middle ground for the praxis of struggle, as it adopts a more life-giving stance, by exhausting all peaceful and legal means for struggling.

For Filipino women, like the migrant DHs, “faith is taking risks” for the sake of fuller life.<sup>42</sup> Like Latin American women, who, against the unjust irreversible logic of the global capitalist system, which produces so many deaths, (women) adhere stubbornly to the logic of life,<sup>43</sup> migrant DHs’ ethic of risk does not resort to violence as a means of struggle.<sup>44</sup> No one really wins with violence. Violence begets more violence and death. A theology that valorizes suffering, encourages martyrdom, and sanctions violence, sacralizes self-destructive love. An ethic of risk rooted in passion for life, however, is guided by a

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<sup>41</sup> Louie G. Hechanova, C.Ss.R., “Towards a Moral Theology of Violence,” in *With Raging Hope*, 15–24 points to this sanctioning of violence by speaking of violence as “a morally or ethically permissible course of action.” This inclination to violence is also imaged in ToS’ popular symbols like the clenched fist and the barbed wire. See Rev. Luna L. Dingayan, “The Clenched Fist, The Barbed Wire, and the Burning Candle,” in *Currents in Philippine Theology*, 19–23.

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Tapia, *The Contribution of Philippine Christian Women to Asian Women’s Theology*, 154.

<sup>43</sup> Maria Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 102.

<sup>44</sup> This stance for life is powerfully worded by Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker: “Let us say that life shows us the face of God only in fleeting glimpses, by the light of night fires, in dancing shadows, in departing ghosts, and in recollections of steady love. Let us say this is enough, enough for us to run with perseverance the race that is set before us, *enough for us to stand against violence, enough for us to hold each other in benediction and blessing*” (emphasis mine). Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 252.

self-maturing love—a love that “hunger[s] to create, to honor life, to protect it, and to see it flourish.”<sup>45</sup>

In *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, Sharon Welch writes that life is the ultimate value of an ethic of risk. A person who risks, she says, cares for, as well as, loves life in all its forms. Welch argues this is made possible by grounding the struggle in a redefined responsible action. This means to say the struggle for justice should be, first and foremost, within the limits of bounded power. It should begin with the recognition that we cannot guarantee decisive changes and the achievement of desired ends in the near future or even in our lifetime; we can only possibly create a matrix or conditions, in which further actions are possible or the possibility for desired changes are possible. Drawing from African-American literature, Welch maintains, an ethic of risk as responsible action, can be seen when the resisters name, find, and create other resources that evoke persistent defiance in the face of repeated defeats. For Welch, this “sheer holy boldness” is about deciding to care and act, although there are no guarantees of success. It is not easy, she says, as such action requires immense deep daring. At the same time, however, it also enables deep joy.<sup>46</sup>

An ethic of risk, for Welch, also entails strategic risk-taking. It is not impulsive but makes intelligent choices. It chooses its battles. She insists “learning to tell the difference between what has to be fought and what can be tolerated is inescapable for anyone trying to maintain self-respect in the face of oppression, in the face of struggle against deep-seated problems.”<sup>47</sup> As Welch contends:

The aims of an ethic of risk may appear modest, yet it offers the potential of sustained resistance against overwhelming odds. The aim is simple—given that we cannot guarantee an end to racism nor the prevention of all war, we can prevent our own capitulation to structural evil. We can participate in a long heritage of resistance, standing with those who have worked for change in the past. We can also take risks, trying to create the

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<sup>45</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 252. Besides, “the human person was not made for suffering, or be kept down. People were made to stand on their own two feet and walk, to make their own way, participate in society, and initiate their own historical protagonism.” Ana Maria Tepedino, “Jesús e a recuperação do ser humano mulher,” *REB* 48/190 (1988): 275–6 quoted in Maria Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 91.

<sup>46</sup> Sharon Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, 68. The concept of “sheer holy boldness” is attributed by Welch to Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt-Eaters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 265.

<sup>47</sup> Sharon Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, 80.

conditions that will evoke and sustain further resistance. We can help create the conditions necessary for justice and peace, realizing that the choices of others can only be influenced and responded to, never controlled.... We cannot make their choices; we can only provide a heritage of persistence, imagination, and solidarity.<sup>48</sup>

### *The Challenge of Migration*

The need for expansion, in terms of the interrogation of what constitutes Filipino context today, is also a challenge FToS makes to ToS in its contextualization. ToS chiefly concerns itself with issues regarding national identity and national sovereignty, particularly those that stem from political and economic problems, which affect the Filipinos in the Philippines, e.g. colonization, domestic feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism.<sup>49</sup> Its preoccupation, in other words, is mainly on national concerns in and within the Philippines. Yes, there are reflections on neo-colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism.<sup>50</sup> Most of these, however, have not really taken into account the new stage of capitalist accumulation and commodification and the changes in identity

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<sup>48</sup> Sharon Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, 48. One element within FToS' understanding and praxis of risk that can also make a contribution to ToS is the element of hope. To risk for Filipina migrant DHs is not just to hope but to "hope against hope." This courageous hope is willing to take the long and hard way of struggle but not necessarily the short-cut, that is, violence. Neither is this hope a far-off ideal or a palliative. It is a deep spiritual force that comes from the knowledge that God—their ever-reliable source of strength—is with them. These are the very same reflections shared by the women in Elizabeth Tapia's research, most of whom are involved in the women's movements in the Philippines, especially in the turbulent 1970s and 1980s. They "continue to do their work in the midst of overwhelming obstacles and risks. They dare to hope in the midst of suffering and pain. It is a hope that is nurtured by their courage, resilience, and solidarity with women and men who share their cause, if not their experience... Their faith enables them to continue their struggle for full humanity... as they draw strength and guidance from God who is portrayed in the Bible as compassionate, full of mercy, and source of healing.... [They rest in the knowledge that] "God is with us. God created us. God does not forsake us." Elizabeth Tapia, *The Contribution of Philippine Christian Women to Asian Women's Theology*, 144, 155.

<sup>49</sup> For example, imperialism, domestic feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism, which are the slogans of the student movement in the 1970s, are the lens and the context of Edicio de la Torre's theological reflections. Cited in Daniel Franklin Pilario, C.M., "The Craft of Contextual Theology," 39.

<sup>50</sup> Mary John Mananzan, "Emerging Alternatives to Globalization and Transformative Action: Philippine-Asia-Pacific Experience," *Voices from the Third World* Vol. XXI, No. 2 (December 1998): 119–33 and Mary John Mananzan, "Globalization and the Perennial Question of Justice," 22–7 count among the few reflections on this theme.

and subjectivity, that accompany the new icon of oppression, that is, globalization. What happens now, for example, with ToS' concept of nationalism in the face of the reality that the new emerging empire does not depend on the traditional notion of state as bounded space, but on building a globalized and decentralized network of international financial institutions, mass media and communication systems, and multinational corporations with flexible labor and capital?

Among the burning Filipino social issues, that ToS needs to include in reflecting on the Filipino context, especially as part of the context of the poor and oppressed, is the issue of migration. Filipino migration has already been dubbed as a "social emergency."<sup>51</sup> Close to 10% of the Filipino population is in out-migration and 70% are affected by it. But it has yet to merit a place as a context for Filipino theological reflection.<sup>52</sup> The only literature on it, so far, is mostly in the field of social sciences, including those published by NGOs.<sup>53</sup> Much more so for women migration,<sup>54</sup> particularly women domestic worker migration, which has been the subject of a considerable number of studies in social sciences, even outside of the Philippines, but has yet to find a space in the Filipino theological imagination. This is an unfortunate lacuna, even in theological reflections by ToS Filipino women theologians, including reflections that have to do with globalization, which is imbricated with DHs' migration.

Clearly, the challenge has to do with making ToS more outward and not just inward looking. It must concern itself not just with the

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<sup>51</sup> Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "Migration: A Social Emergency," *National Migrants' Sunday Magazine* (25 February 1996).

<sup>52</sup> I have attempted to do this elsewhere. See Gemma Tulud Cruz, "Migration as a New Frontier for Mission: The Filipino Experience," *The Japan Mission Journal* Vol. 59, No. 1 (Spring 2005): 58–66 and Gemma Tulud Cruz, "Beyond the Borders, Beyond the Margins: Filipino Migration and its Challenges to Doing Mission," *World Mission* (March 2004): 21–6. Also posted at [www.sedos.org](http://www.sedos.org).

<sup>53</sup> Noteworthy to mention here is the publication sponsored by ECMI-CBCP and Scalabrini Center for People on the Move, *Character Formation Program on Migration* (Makati: Saint Paul's 2002).

<sup>54</sup> ECMI-CBCP, *Feminization of Migration* (Manila: ECMI-CBCP, 1997) sheds light on this increasing "woman face" to Filipino migration. But women migration deserves more critical attention not just for this reason. Interrogating their plight is also crucial in making sure there is a gender perspective in the investigation of migration as part of the Filipino context. FToS particularly urges ToS to critically interrogate the situation of migrant domestic workers in its contextualization as the DHs' experience (especially as the country's "image-makers" abroad) provides clues in the (re)configuration of the Filipino identity by Filipinos inside and outside the Philippines and the international community.

Filipinos in the Philippines, but also to the eight to ten million Filipinos in diaspora whose “present absence” and “absent presence” is not only keeping the Philippine economy afloat but is also redefining the Filipino human condition. To be sure, migration is bringing ample changes as it re-shapes families<sup>55</sup> and whole communities, and the nation as a whole. Even the political-economic future of the Philippines will be most likely (re)defined by this phenomenon, as the country gets slowly depleted of its human resources, with the exodus of its brains and brawns, and the economy survives on remittances. If ToS is to be a theology that has to do with the struggle of the poor and the oppressed, especially workers, it cannot but concern itself with OFWs, particularly women migrant domestic workers, because their struggle could enrich ToS itself.

Basic to this enrichment is FToS’ provision of a picture of the other side of the coin of the Filipino context. First, the grassroots poor in the Philippines live in a Third World country, while most migrant DHs live and work in First World countries. Second, while the grassroots poor in the Philippines have the privilege of being the majority (culturally and religiously) migrant DHs have to learn to live with the psychological, economic, social, political, and religious disadvantages of being the cultural, and (in some countries) religious minority. Third, while the grassroots poor in the Philippines enjoy all the usual and special rights by virtue of being citizens, migrant DHs are forced to accept all the discriminatory policies and practices, that come with being an alien, and one of the most unwanted at that. How much more complete can ToS’ contextualization get than having a view of the other side of the Filipino context?

FToS’ “unique” (at least compared to the Filipino context in the Philippines) or more nuanced image of God or of the God of the struggle is another enrichment that FToS offers to ToS. FToS’ God of the struggle, particularly its new image of God as a host and Jesus as stranger, for instance, expands ToS’ image of Jesus as Liberator.

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<sup>55</sup> See, for example, CBCP, *Seasonal Orphans and Solo Parents: The Impact of Overseas Migration* (Manila: CBCP Commission on Migration and Tourism, 1987); Stella P. Go, “International Labor Migration and the Filipino Family: Examining the Social Dimensions,” *Asian Migrant* Vol. 14, No. 4 (Oct.–Dec. 2001): 103–109 and; Alice Tadeo-Pingol, “Absentee Wives and Househusbands: Power, Identity, and Family Dynamics,” *Review of Women’s Studies* Vol. IX No. 1 and 2 (Jan.–Dec. 1999): 16–45.



*Emerging Themes for a Migration-Conscious Contextualization*

In relation to contextualization, migration concretely challenges ToS to expand its understanding and investigation of the local context in dialogue with global realities, particularly in the context of migration. Within this interrogation, FToS presents ToS the theme of *theology as intercultural discourse*. FToS, in other words, challenges ToS' theologians to articulate ToS as an intercultural theology. The Filipino diaspora has put one out of every five Filipinos into a multi-cultural and multi-religious milieu. ToS cannot ignore this reality of plural context because, first, it has radical effects on the millions of Filipinos in out-migration. On the one hand, migrants' exposure or immersion to multicultural and multireligious cities or countries, that are usually affluent, leads to their personal development. Because they learn about other ways of life, their outlook in life is broadened, their capacity for intercultural relations broadened.<sup>56</sup> Because they earn (more), there is (greater) possibility for economic advancement. There are also considerable changes to gender and sexuality (*tomboyism*), racial/cultural (*Maria Clara* image), and religious (conversion to Islam) identity, that are rooted in the more intense intercultural encounters.

Secondly, ToS cannot close its eyes on Filipino migrants' multicultural experience in rich cities or countries because their (migrants) response to this strongly affects their families and communities, who comprise the 70% of the Filipino population that is now affected by migration. For example, there are indications the certain degree of economic mobility migrants achieve, problematically impacts them and their families as materialism increases (among migrants and their families) and a false "culture of migration" is created in their communities.<sup>57</sup>

Thirdly, ToS which is basically mono-cultural and mono-religious in terms of approach and, consequently, in terms of content needs to be intercultural to be really true to the context of Filipinos even those in the Philippines. With its various cultural groups, which have their

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<sup>56</sup> Maruja Asis, "The Return Migration of Filipino Women Migrants: Home, But Not for Good," in *Female Labor Migration in South-East Asia: Change and Continuity*, eds., Christina Wille and Basia Passl (Bangkok: Asian Research Center for Migration, 2001), 46, 58–9, 67.

<sup>57</sup> ECMI-CBCP, *Character Formation Program on Migration*, 94. See also, Augustus T. Añonuevo and Joicel Sopena, "Paglaki Ko, Mag-aabroad Ako!: Aspirations of Children of Migrant Workers," in *Coming Home: Women, Migration and Reintegration*, 122–4.

own dialect and particular way of life, the Philippines itself is paradigmatic of a multicultural society. In terms of religion the Philippines is not mono-religious either. Christianity exists or has to co-exist with Islam, which came to the Philippines even earlier than Christianity. Then, there are also the *Chinoys* or Chinese Filipinos who have been in the Philippines for a long time, many of whom are Buddhist/Taoist/Confucianist. Hence, to be intercultural is a must for ToS if it is to truly speak of and to the Filipino context. Doing so will also enable ToS to equip and help future migrants in living in highly multicultural societies abroad.

Given the experience of migrant DHs and the historical and contemporary problematic relations between the Christian majority and the Muslim minority in the Philippines, I am convinced, that this intercultural challenge, particularly the interreligious aspect, is of utmost significance as a theological task for ToS, and even for FToS in the future. This becomes more important for ToS since in reality Muslims and Christians live together in communities, and not separate as media tends to make people think, by speaking as if Muslims are only in the southern part of the Philippines, or that they live far from Christians. Moreover, this is a crucial task for ToS today if it is to make up for a missed opportunity. By saying “missed opportunity” I refer here to the reality that ToS did not engage the Muslim-Christian conflict, even though the conflict intensified and raged in the 1970s, which is around the same time when ToS gathered momentum.<sup>58</sup>

Lastly, tackling and articulating ToS from an intercultural perspective also affords ToS the opportunity to re-visit the question on “Filipino identity,” and enrich not just Filipino theology in the Philippines, but make a contribution, as well, to the current debate and movement in theology as an intercultural discourse. Niels Mulder speaks of the “mixed-up” symbolic language of the Filipino whom he describes as “an English-speaking Malay, with a Spanish name, who loves to eat Chinese food.”<sup>59</sup> Others refer to the Filipino as the “brown American” with a contemporary culture that gives the impression of

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<sup>58</sup> Sebastian D’Ambra, “Islam in the Philippines,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* Vol. 29, No. 4 (1992): 381–2.

<sup>59</sup> Niels Mulder, *Inside Philippine Society: Interpretations of Everyday Life* (Quezon City, Phils.: New Day Publishers, 1997), 4.

a “bricolage.”<sup>60</sup> Doesn’t this reality of Filipino identity, on top of the experience of cultural and religious pluralism in the context of migration, make Filipino migrants, particularly migrant DHs, a rich source for clues on interrogating intercultural encounters from a faith perspective?

#### BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Another challenge, which FToS presents to ToS, is in the area of biblical hermeneutics. Asian feminist theologians insist, that when “confronted with the women’s situation, a new reading of the Bible has to emerge, seeing parallelisms with the situations of biblical women, reinterpreting the passages that confirm the subordination and discrimination of women, [and] seeing these in their cultural contexts.”<sup>61</sup> As can be seen in the experience of the DHs in H.K., interpretation of certain biblical passages and stories, particularly that of specific biblical personalities, contributed to their domestication. As has been shown, however, in Williams’ analysis on Hagar new and more liberating possibilities emerge, when the text is critically read not just within its own context, but also when it is engaged in dialogue with the contemporary context, particularly women’s context.

For FToS, biblical hermeneutics is a hermeneutic of life. It is ultimately a question of what is more life-giving, especially for women who are doubly victimized, not just by the patriarchal cast of the biblical world, but also by the androcentric and uncritical interpretation of certain texts. In this area, however, FToS encounters a problem with ToS. FToS particularly challenges ToS’ acknowledged exegete, that is, Jesuit priest Carlos Abesamis on this. One contentious point has to do with Abesamis’ use of the exodus as a paradigm in the struggle of Filipinos for justice and freedom.<sup>62</sup> Abesamis takes his starting point for

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<sup>60</sup> Raul Pertierra, “‘The Market’ in Asian Values,” in *Asian Values: Encounter with Diversity*, eds., Josiane Cauquelin et al. (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998): 119.

<sup>61</sup> Mary John Mananzan, “Feminist Theology in Asia,” 26.

<sup>62</sup> James R. Wheelchel, *The Path to Liberation: Theology of Struggle in the Philippines* (Quezon City, Phils.: New Day Publishers, 1995), 80 notes this for ToS in general. He also notes how “fundamental” the use of the “Exodus event” is as a model for salvation in Scripture in ToS. Sr. Theresa Dagdag, for example, starts her reflections in Sr. Theresa Dagdag, M.M., “Emerging Theology in the Philippines Today,” 67–8 with a “Filipinized” version of the story on the slavery of the Hebrews in the first chapter of the book of Exodus. She substituted *Indios*—a name given by the Spanish coloniz-

theological reflection from the “exodus of the chosen people of God.” For him, the exodus is a central event, in that it is a “justice event,” “the most primitive article of faith about justice and about a God of justice,” and the “central event in the Israelitic salvation history.”<sup>63</sup> But the experience of migrant DHs runs counter to these and other ToS theologians’ related interpretations (of the exodus) as “freedom from slavery” or “journey to the promised land”<sup>64</sup> by the “chosen people” or the “poor and oppressed.”

As for the exodus event as a journey towards freedom: For migrant DHs, their exodus or “departure” actually borders more on the opposite; it is a journey towards slavery. In fact as a reproduction and intensification of their domestication their migration as domestic workers is a journey from one slavery to another. There is no definitive freedom in sight. There is no “justice event,” but only a struggle for justice, a struggle for the eradication or, at the very least, mitigation of their (DHs) slave-like conditions. Though there were pockets of objections, the exodus was a journey the Israelites were only too happy to take. For migrant DHs, however, the journey is mostly not voluntarily undertaken, but imposed on them by lack of (better) alternatives in the Philippines, and a socialization that molds them to prioritize the well-being of others before their own. It is a journey that is usually not for personal gain, but for the benefit of their family. Neither is it a journey for national gain or national sovereignty, as the Israelites supposedly achieved from their exodus. While the DHs’ migration keeps the economy afloat, the long-term consequences of the significant absence of the country’s women, the “brain drain” it is creating, and the humiliation, that arises from being at the mercy

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ers to the Filipinos—for the Hebrews and the Spanish monarch and his soldiers and priests for the pharaoh and the Egyptian oppressors. She does this to point out that “the story of the *Indios*... is the story of the Filipino PEOPLE—a history of centuries of domination, not only economically, but also culturally... the history of a people who have repeatedly refused to be stopped in their ‘long march’ toward *freedom from slavery and toward national identity*” (emphasis mine).

<sup>63</sup> Carlos Abesamis, *Exploring Biblical Faith* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1991), 30, 32 quoted in Mary John Mananzan, “Paschal Mystery from a Philippine Perspective,” 92. See also Carlos Abesamis, *Exploring the Core of Biblical Faith: A Catechetical Primer* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1988), 26 quoted in Tomas M. Roxas, *A Biblical Evaluation of Soteriology in Filipino Liberation Theology*, Unpublished M.A. Thesis. Dallas Theological Seminary, May 1987, 27.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Bishop Benito M. Dominguez, “A Theology of Struggle: Towards a Struggle with a Human Face,” 84 and Dr. Feliciano Carino, “What About the Theology of Struggle?” xiii.

of host countries and governments (not to mention being branded as a “nation of domestic helpers”), erode the economic gain and chips away the already limited and fledgling national sovereignty the country has.

With regard to the exodus as a journey to the promised land: This is far from the truth in the experience of migrant DHs. If there is any thing, that can be gleaned from the very reasons that they leave their country and the harrowing conditions they struggle with in their host countries, it is the good news that no land on earth is a promised land.<sup>65</sup> To use the idea of promised land is simply an injustice in light of their experience, unless one considers countries that push people into car parks, garbage areas, train stations, bus stops, and deny equal access to basic services and facilities, a promised land.

As for the exodus as putatively the story of the “chosen people”:<sup>66</sup> Migrant domestic workers could not be the chosen people. The most likely possible land and home they probably could call their own, i.e., their home country, is mired in political-economic problems. It offers no or very little promise and has become a site of struggle like Williams’ wilderness in the postbellum period. That is why they are forced to leave it in the first place, to go to what they perceived as their “promised place” of H.K., Singapore, Canada, Middle East, Malaysia, etc. only to find themselves in another postbellum wilderness, where they are regarded and treated as “burdens,” even “plague.” There is no promised land for the DHs. Promises and covenants would not make much sense, precisely because they have become victims of too many broken promises and covenants, through the many violations of their contract.

Indeed, based on migrant DHs’ experience, the interpretation of the exodus by ToS theologians in general, and by Abesamis in particular, is problematic. As Williams eloquently pointed out in her critique of Black liberation theology’s normative use of the exodus it is not liberating for the “oppressed of the oppressed,” like women of color. Hence, there is, ultimately, no justice the DHs could identify with. In fact, interpretations of exodus as a master narrative, particularly

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<sup>65</sup> Graziano Battistela, *For a More Abundant Life: Migrant Workers in Asia*, Background Paper for the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly (Hong Kong: FABC, 1995), 9.

<sup>66</sup> “Chosen people” is referred to here in terms of its deployment to mean promise and possibilities, blessings and privilege, particularly in the form of a “land” (“flowing with milk and honey”) and/or a “home,” and “nation” of one’s own.

interpretations on “chosen people” and “promised land,” play a role in the oppression of migrant DHs, insofar as these interpretations were used by the colonizers to justify their conquests,<sup>67</sup> and insofar as these continue to be used today to construct religious and national identities, where one group is blessed and the other is cursed, one is chosen the other is rejected, and one is special/central, while the other is marginal.

Regina Schwartz, in *The Curse of Cain*, makes this explicit connection between, on the one hand, the function of religious and national identities, through the deployment of covenant, land, kinship, “nation,” and memory in the Hebrew Bible, and, on the other, the modern history of colonial expansion of the West. Picking up the line of thought of a student of hers, who asked “What about the Canaanites?” in relation to the exodus story Schwartz replies and expounds:

Yes, what about the Canaanites? and the Amorites, Moabites, Hittites? While the biblical narratives charted the creation, cohesion, and calamities befalling a people at the behest of their God, what about all the other peoples and their gods? Having long seen the Bible put to uses that I could not excuse—hatred of Blacks, Jews, gays, women, “pagan[s]”, and the poor—I now began to see some complicity, for over and over the Bible tells the story of a people who inherit at someone else’s expense.... Through the dissemination of the Bible in Western culture, its narratives have become the foundation of a prevailing understanding of ethnic, religious, and national identity as defined negatively, over against others.<sup>68</sup>

Another example of Abesamis’ problematic biblical hermeneutics is his interpretive categorization of women as outcasts but “non-poor”

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<sup>67</sup> “Promised land” and “chosen people” are dangerous ideologies in that they are potent tools for destructive conquest as the colonizers did. I wonder if the ideology of domesticity would have found its way (as it is today) on Philippine soil if the Spaniards did not think of themselves as “saviors” and “messiahs” of the “pagan *indios*” and did not view their *doncellas* as better than the *mujer indigena* at that time.

<sup>68</sup> Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), ix–x quoted in Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 114. Indeed, interpreting and presenting the exodus as a “justice event” is, to me, just scratching the surface. In fact, whatever sense of justice that is in it is half-baked. For when one really gets to brass tacks or when one views the exodus from the perspective of the Canaanites, Moabites, etc., the Israelites, took the land. It was conquest justified by “holy” discourses—the same discourses that underpin modern Zionism and the displacement of the Palestinians from their homeland. What was justice for the Israelites was injustice for the residents of Canaan and, today, the Palestinians.

in “Good News to the Poor.” Abesamis thinks, “it does not seem wise to apply the word ‘poor’” to women (and others that he listed as “non-poor outcasts”), “because biblical terminology reserves ‘poor’ (*anawim*; *ptochoi*) to the really poor and oppressed.”<sup>69</sup> Abesamis, therefore, prefers reserving “poor” to the really (materially) poor and (politically) oppressed. But, one does not have to go far from the gospels to see that women in the biblical world, including the time of Jesus, definitely fall into this category. They, together with children, are even the poorest of the poor and the oppressed of the oppressed. How does Abesamis, for example, make sense of the plight of widows, e.g. 1 Kings 17:8–16, particularly the account on the widow in Mark 12:41–44, who is explicitly referred to in the text as “poor”?<sup>70</sup> Even Ruth had to settle for the left-overs in Boaz’s field and resort to using her sexuality just to make Boaz marry her and, in effect, get herself and Naomi out of an economic poverty, that is intensified by their widowhood and, for Ruth, (her) foreign status. For Abesamis not to regard these women as poor and oppressed is, to me, a “gender-blind” and myopic reading of the text. In doing so, he does injustice not just to the majority of biblical women, but also to the millions of Filipino women in the Philippines, who are mired in economic poverty. He also does an injustice to the tens of thousands of Filipino women migrant workers, particularly domestic workers, whose migration, which is fueled by their socio-political and economic marginalization in the Philippines, puts them in even more dire conditions.

Abesamis’ biblical hermeneutics poses problems in relation to the experience of migrant DHs not just because of his patriarchal bias,<sup>71</sup> but also because of the marginalized role of experience in his understanding and doing of theology. He argues, for example, that for

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<sup>69</sup> Carlos Abesamis, S.J., “Good News to the Poor,” in *Religion and Society: Towards a Theology of Struggle*, 207–8.

<sup>70</sup> In her interpretation of the poor widow’s offering (Mark 12: 41–44) Mary Ann Tolbert, “Mark,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, eds., Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992): 357 notes how “the widow who comes to the treasury, then, is not only disadvantaged by poverty but also by her vulnerable status, which makes her almost invisible in the legal, religious, political and social eyes of her society.”

<sup>71</sup> I did not have access to the book by Abesamis (a collection of his theological reflections) entitled *Total Salvation: Historical and Biblical* but in Sr. Theresa Dagdag’s citation from it on the list of human evils, in which Abesamis sees God saving millions of oppressed people, sexism is even nowhere to be found. Sr. Theresa Dagdag, M.M., “Emerging Theology in the Philippines Today,” 71.

theological reflections to be relevant, they must be grounded in history, experience, and in the Scriptures or the Bible.<sup>72</sup> He maintains, however, that the life-experience of the people must be interpreted in the light of the Judaeo-Christian heritage with its *history*, spirit, and *world-view*<sup>73</sup> (emphasis mine). Moreover, he contends theological reflection is “above all else ‘describing’ the present moment in the light of the history of redemption.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, the Bible and the history of redemption can describe, speak to, and criticize contemporary experience but contemporary experience cannot do the same thing. Is this not like being caught in a time warp or in a time capsule, as if humanity’s understanding of reality has not evolved and the world has not change at all? As Rodrigo Tano, in his critique of Abesamis’ theological method and reflections, observes:

Abesamis’ contention that God is reenacting salvation history in and through the life-experiences of nations in the same way that he did in the life of Israel and the church is open to question. Although the experiences of God’s people may parallel those of other individuals and nations, the “biblical narrative alone is salvation history.” Thus, while the safe arrival and preservation of the Pilgrim Fathers, for instance, may be attributed to God’s providential care, their experiences cannot be identified with biblical or salvation history because they do not belong to the line of salvation in the usual sense in which this term is employed. . . . Thus, when Abesamis affirms that salvation history is being reenacted in Philippine history through liberation and development projects, he can do so only by extension or broad application of the meaning of salvation history. To be sure, God as sovereign Creator is at work in human history, but his providence and superintendence over men’s affairs are not identical with his redemptive acts in the past. It can surely be maintained that there is an obvious qualitative difference between the archetypal events in salvation history and the events on the Philippine scene.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Cited in Sr. Theresa Dagdag, M.M., “Emerging Theology in the Philippines Today,” 71.

<sup>73</sup> Carlos Abesamis, “Reflections on the Task of the Asian Theologian (Especially the Filipino Theologian),” *Philippine Priests’ Forum* 1 (1969): 46–7 cited in Rodrigo Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting: A Case Study in the Contextualization of Theology* (Quezon City, Phils.: New Day Publishers, 1981), 89. See also Carlos Abesamis S.J., “Doing Theological Reflection in a Philippine Context,” in *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes*, ed., Douglas Elwood (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980): 91–2.

<sup>74</sup> Carlos Abesamis, “Doing Theological Reflection (Philippines),” paper presented at the Conference of Third World Theologians, Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, 5–12 August 1976, p. 2 quoted in Rodrigo Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting*, 90.

<sup>75</sup> Rodrigo Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting*, 151.



How can a biblical hermeneutics, that is heavily caught up or trapped in the past, be relevant to a present situation, as the plight of Filipino women migrant domestic workers, especially when the present is immensely different from the past? Patriarchy is so much a part of the biblical world. If the biblical text and context are not subjected to criticism, and the biblical world-view uncritically remains the norm for “describing” or interpreting the present situation, where else can Filipino women turn to in order to get a more life-giving interpretation of the Bible and their experience? Besides, isn’t theology, particularly one that is oriented towards liberative praxis like ToS, ultimately, about transforming and not just “describing” the situation?

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in “Struggle is a Name for Hope: A Critical Feminist Interpretation for Liberation,” drives this point home when she insists that a critical interpretation of the Bible, with a view to struggle as a name for hope, especially for women

does not commence by beginning with the text and placing the bible at the center of its attention. Instead it begins with a critical systemic analysis of patri-kyriarchal structures of dehumanisation and focus on the struggle of wo/men at the bottom of the patri-kyriarchal pyramid of domination and exploitation...because their struggles reveal the fulcrum of oppression and dehumanisation threatening every wo/man... It insists on the hermeneutical priority of feminist struggles in order to be able not only to disentangle the ideological (religious-theological) functions of biblical texts for inculcating and legitimating the patri-kyriarchal order but also for explaining their potential for fostering justice and liberation.<sup>76</sup>

A more liberating biblical hermeneutics, Schüssler Fiorenza then argues, should not only be engaged in socio-historical reconstruction, as Abesamis does, but also for reclaiming subjugated knowledges as memory and heritage for feminist liberation struggles. For her, “the heart of such a critical feminist interpretation for liberation is not the generic ‘option for the oppressed’ either, as ToS theologians advocates, “but the recognition that the dehumanisation and the survival of wo/

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<sup>76</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Struggle is a Name for Hope: A Critical Feminist Interpretation for Liberation,” 238. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that for the act of biblical interpretation to be a moment in the global struggle for liberation it must be a four-fold task that involves: 1) Scripture as a site of struggle over theological authority; 2) the bible as a site of struggle over religious meaning; 3) wo/men’s struggles as a site of biblical interpretation; and 4) reclaiming a radical democratic feminist tradition, i.e., *ekklesia*.

men struggling against multiple oppressions ‘reveal’ the full destructive powers of kyriarchy as well as the possibility for liberation from them.”<sup>77</sup>

FToS then challenges ToS’ biblical interpretation to be done, not only by reading the Bible with the lenses and in the contexts of the oppressed struggling for changing patterns of oppression which are inscribed in religious, cultural, and societal texts and institutions. FToS also challenges ToS to employ a hermeneutic of appreciation, reconstruction, evaluation, and imagination (aside from its usual tool of hermeneutic of suspicion), that enable Filipino women as theological subjects, to critically wrestle with the oppressive as well as liberating functions of particular biblical texts, in their lives and struggles. “The understanding of ‘Scripture’ has shifted from the sacred Word of God and a historical document from the past, to a relational concept involving interaction with interpretive communities.”<sup>78</sup> As Kwok Pui-lan explains

The meaning of the Bible is no longer seen as located in the authorial voice of God, or in the intention of the author or the redactor, but increasingly in the interpretive community, whether it is the religious community or the academic guild. Collectively, these new paradigms have shifted emphasis from the world *behind the text* (historical criticism) to the world *in the text* (literary criticism informed by critical theories) and the world *in front of the text* (reader-response).<sup>79</sup>

The above mentioned points, raised by Schüssler Fiorenza and Kwok (and Williams’ interpretation of Hagar), expose what ToS’ biblical hermeneutics is in need of, i.e., going beyond traditional methods and embracing new and diverse paradigms for biblical interpretation. These include reader-response criticism, rhetorical criticism, feminist criticism, vernacular hermeneutics, cultural studies, and postcolonial criticism.<sup>80</sup> “A postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible,” for example, “will be able to investigate the deployment of gender in the narration of identity, the negotiation of power differentials between

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<sup>77</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Struggle is a Name for Hope: A Critical Feminist Interpretation for Liberation,” 242.

<sup>78</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) cited in Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 103.

<sup>79</sup> Italics in original. Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 103.

<sup>80</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 103.

the colonizers and the colonized, and the reinforcement of patriarchal control over spheres where these elites could exercise control.”<sup>81</sup>

#### RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CRITIQUE

Aside from contextualization and biblical hermeneutics, FToS also enriches ToS in the area of religious and cultural critique. In their reflective analysis on Christianity and Christian sources, like the Bible, for example, there is a palpable absence of a critique of women marginalization in the Christian religion among ToS theologians. In their critique of Filipino Christianity, in the meantime, they have yet to do a more systematic investigation of the feminization of Filipino colonization, whose oppressive legacies FToS exposes. ToS theologians do speak about the devastation of colonization, even during the Spanish period. But, they only do so generally, with references to the “domesticating religion and cross of the colonizers.”<sup>82</sup> Except for Mananzan, ToS theologians do not show or interrogate how the colonizers’ problematic cultural interpretations and representations<sup>83</sup> and, most especially, their domesticating religion and/or domesticating cross took a heavier toll on the *mujer indigena*. FToS exposes this as a failure, given the fact that the roots of migrant DHs’ domestication strongly extends as far back as colonial time, particularly the Spanish colonization period. This is a void in ToS’ religious and cultural critique that needs to be filled to be able to know how to theologically move forward, particularly in re-imagining Filipino women. A re-constructive critique of

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<sup>81</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 9. Kwok also cites two recent critical works in this field namely Gale Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) and Musa Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000).

<sup>82</sup> Karl Gaspar, “Doing Theology (In a Situation) of Struggle,” 44, 52.

<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Mary Holt, *Colonizing Filipinas: Nineteenth Century Representations of the Philippines in Western Historiography* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2002) writes on this. Delia Aguilar, “The Social Construction of the Filipino Woman,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* Vol. 13, Issue 4 (1989): 527–51, for example, unmasks images such as “queen of the home”, “power behind the throne”, and “pursekeeper.” Aguilar insists the (re)casting of these images with the appropriate rationale by colonial discourse deceptively presents Filipino women as superior to men (and Philippine society as a matriarchal society) and hinders an accurate depiction of (Filipino) women’s subordinate status. See also Delia Aguilar, *Toward A Nationalist Feminism* (Quezon City, Phils: Giraffe Books, 1998), 1–34.

the Filipino religious and cultural experience of colonization will also give justice to Filipino women in the past, whose contribution in the struggle for emancipation has been largely unreflected. Moreover, this re-constructive critique will also be very significant, as it is bound to reveal the relatively egalitarian society of pre-colonial Philippines—a facet of Filipino his/her story—that can provide clues in mapping out a theology of struggle with an egalitarian anthropological perspective.

So much has been said about how colonialism and postcolonialism, in their historic and synchronic conjunctions, have generated a long revolutionary tradition in the Philippines. So much has been said about the *pasyon*. ToS also needs to give a more serious and comprehensive analysis and/or critique of the oppressive effects of colonization, particularly to Filipino women. Truly, there is a need to unmask the depth and breadth of the oppressive effects of the experience of being “377 years in the convent, forty-three years in Hollywood, and five years in a concentration camp.”<sup>84</sup> On this, and the interrogation of how the marks of past colonization still rear their ugly heads today, hinges a more authentic and expansive reflection on the new colonization of Filipinas created by globalization.<sup>85</sup>

FToS’ bringing out into the open the need for a postcolonial theory and/or postcolonial perspective<sup>86</sup> in religious and cultural critique also enriches ToS’ deployment of religious and cultural critique. In doing so, FToS presents possibilities for (re)-reading and (re)-interpreting Filipino wo/men’s experience of colonization on various levels, by unpacking the myriad and intricate interplay between gender, reli-

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<sup>84</sup> Patria Agustin, “Women and Politics in the Philippines,” 115.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Delia Aguilar, “Servants to the Global Masters: The Half-Hidden World of Filipina Migrant Labor,” *Against the Current* 22 (March–April 1996): 21–3. See also Delia Aguilar, *Toward A Nationalist Feminism*, 135–42.

<sup>86</sup> I am well aware of the criticism that it might not be appropriate to use the prefix “post” in the temporal sense as there are questions whether we have really entered the postcolonial age. I argue, however, that the postcolonial perspective is rightly engaged by FToS and should also be done by ToS because the effects of four centuries of colonialism in the Philippines, notably its ill effects, continue to be seen. Besides, postcolonial is not just about the temporal but also the political. Rey Chow, “Between Colonizers: Hong Kong’s Postcolonial Self-Writing in the 1990s,” *Diaspora* 2 (1992): 152 quoted in Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 2 expresses the position this research takes, when he says that “post” in postcolonial indicates “a notion of time which is not linear but constant, marked by events that may be technically finished but that can only be fully understood with the consideration of the devastation they left behind.”

gion, and colonialism.<sup>87</sup> Secondly, it surfaces more tools and resources for an inter-disciplinary religious and cultural critique. This is made possible by virtue of the fact that postcolonial theory taps into more disciplines, that emerged in the academy in the modern period, as well as literature, travelogue, and other popular writings and genres that are often considered above the fray of political contention. In particular, the various strategies for reading literary texts, that are introduced by postcolonial theories, such as narrative theory, feminist criticism, intertextuality, and analyses of realist fiction, the arts, and popular media, can augment ToS' religio-cultural analysis.<sup>88</sup>

With the above mentioned additional tools for interpretation, ToS could expand its critique of Filipino values or religio-cultural worldview beyond its usual targets or subjects, such as *pakikisama* (being congenial), fatalism and resignation<sup>89</sup> to other significant concepts, particularly those that make women doubly oppressed. With the said tools it (ToS) would be more able to take to task and unmask, for example, the culture of *machismo*, which sanctions the *querida* (mistress) system and lionizes philandering men.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, FToS challenges ToS to go beyond its usual strategy of hermeneutics of suspicion and learn, as FToS does, from the hermeneutics of appreciation that theologians of culture employ. Based on the critical contribution to FToS of Jose de Mesa's (re)-interpretation of *bahala na* and the resurrection, FToS particularly challenges ToS to converse with Filipino theologians of culture, especially with de Mesa, whose incisive "theological re-rooting" reveals some of the hitherto unexamined emancipatory concepts in Filipino culture.<sup>91</sup> In doing so, religious and cultural

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<sup>87</sup> The various articles in Laura Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan, eds., *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 2002) illustrate this.

<sup>88</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 103.

<sup>89</sup> See Edicio de la Torre, "A Theology of Struggle," 62 and Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, 47.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, V.R. Gorospe, *The Filipino Search for Meaning* (Manila: Jesuit Educational Association, 1974), 194 cited in Rodrigo Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting*, 134.

<sup>91</sup> His theological re-rooting of power using the *Tagalog* word *lakas* in Jose de Mesa, "Providence as Power and Graciousness," in *Toward a Theology of People Power: Reflections on the Philippine February Phenomenon*, ed., Douglas Elwood (Quezon City, Phils.: New Day Publishers, 1988): 37–48 is another example of these culture-based theological reflections of de Mesa that could be useful to ToS and, of course, FToS.

critique truly becomes a critical exercise of identifying the liberating as well as the oppressive forces in culture and religion.

FToS' context of migration also offers possibilities for ToS to engage in religious and cultural critique from an intercultural perspective. The effects and responses of migrant DHs to cultural and religious pluralism, and the status of being the religious and cultural minority, while living out their Filipino identity, provide an excellent background and sounding board for this. From a general point of view, these aspects of the experiences of the migrant DHs can help ToS to clarify its previous investigations of liberating and oppressive forces in the Filipino culture and religion. With regard to cultural values, for example, FTOS presents a challenge to ToS to have a second look at critiques, that have been done so far on popular Filipino values, such as *bahala na* and *utang na loob*, either for confirmation or for further analysis or critique and possible re-formulation. It can also look to the experience of migrant DHs, who convert to other religions, to ascertain and re-engage problematic aspects of Christianity as appropriated in the Philippines, particularly Catholicism, and, at the same time, come up with ways for better Muslim-Christian relations in the Philippines. Second, by interrogating migrant DHs' strategies for struggling against the domestication of their difference, the significant changes they undergo, e.g. *Maria Clara* in Mini controversy, and the role of Filipino Christianity in their oppression and struggle towards liberation, ToS can identify more possibly liberating and oppressive facets in the Filipino cultural and religious make-up. By investigating what worked and did not work with the Filipino religious and cultural identity of the migrant DHs, when it encountered other cultures and religions, notably liberalism and Islam, ToS will be able to articulate a broader, more liberating critique of the Filipino religious and cultural values.

There are a number of other possibilities for ToS' self-clarification and development, in the area of religious and cultural critique, in this interrogation on what happens to the Filipino cultural and religious identity in the context of migration. There is, for instance, the question of transnationalism. Is this the same as ToS' conception of its primary value of nationalism?<sup>92</sup> Are migrants "traitors" because they have "left"

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<sup>92</sup> For example, Edicio de la Torre, who led the Christians for National Liberation, sees the challenge which the Philippine situation presents as, first of all, a nationalist challenge. For him nationalism becomes "the concrete expression of love for promoting...the brother's dignity." Rodrigo Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting*, 110. See

and “abandoned” the Philippines, or, are they, as government officials label them, *bagong bayani* (new heroes) because they save the country from further economic jeopardy? What happens, as well, to ToS’ valuing of the nation or the Philippines as “home,” given the re-definitions that migration brings to the traditional concept of “home” and “nation”? Isn’t transnationalism some kind of culture on its own and one that is peculiar to migrants?<sup>93</sup> These are questions FToS could help ToS find some answers.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion as a theology forged from the experience and perspective of women, notably DHs in the context of migration, FToS brings particular challenges to ToS because of the particular social and epistemological locations from which it is articulated. More specifically, it reveals and evokes methodological issues that either enlarge upon or challenge certain methodological perspectives embedded in ToS and, in the process, the very content of ToS.

FToS takes ToS to task on crucial aspects ToS has ignored, e.g. women’s experience and perspective, as well as contemporary issues, e.g. migration, and approaches, e.g. postcolonial biblical hermeneutics, it has to take note of. Everything considered, the challenges FToS poses to ToS are a matter of expanding the theological horizon. Either from within or without, inside or outside, this is part of the process

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also Horacio dela Costa, “The Filipino National Tradition,” in V.R. Gorospe and R.L. Deats, eds., *The Filipino in the Seventies* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1973), 19 cited in Rodrigo Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting*, 110.

<sup>93</sup> Sylvia Mayuga, “A virtual nation” [http://www.inq7.net/globalnation/sec\\_fea/2004/mar11-02](http://www.inq7.net/globalnation/sec_fea/2004/mar11-02) accessed January 25, 2005 shares how a Filipino major newspaper received a global torrent of letters-to-the-editor indignant about the paper’s editorial titled “Sellout” which excoriated the 2002 medical board topnotcher’s plan to migrate. Mayuga points out how majority of the migrants’ letters took issue to the question of nationalism telling the paper to “quit barking at the wrong tree” for they “wouldn’t have left if [they] could help it”. Mayuga, however, proffers a couple of interesting questions that can shed light on the emergence of this possibly new form of (Filipino) nationalism that may be peculiar to migrants. She asks: “What are these readers telling the most popular Filipino broadsheet about global deep sea change in their old images, perceptions, and habits?” and “What new consciousness are we creating in a new collision of ideas from global Filipino experience beamed back and forth on the Web? Then she inquiringly suggests: “Have we found a path to a larger unity in an evolving, more self-confident, more competent sense of nationhood mediated by the infotech revolution?”

that, I believe, contextual theologies, like ToS, need to go through in order to survive and thrive. Today, it is ToS, tomorrow it will, most likely, be FToS itself, when new contexts bringing new questions come along. The context for contemporary theology is extremely and exceptionally multi-dimensional: global as well as local, diverse in modality, and broad in base, that contextual theologies, like ToS, cannot remain parochial nor unilateral. Based on the world we live in today and the fine points of the challenges that FToS presents to ToS, perhaps the word “contextual” might not even suffice anymore to describe how theology is being done or, at the very least, to capture the direction, that theology is challenged to take. “Inter-contextual” perhaps? Or maybe glocal? The present demands for it, the future awaits.





## CONCLUSION

This book has endeavored to explore the struggle of the domestic helpers in Hong Kong in view of articulating the features of a theology of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration and interrogating how such a theology might help the Theology of Struggle in the Philippines move forward. I have sketched the features of such a theology, which I called a feminist theology of struggle, using the conversation between the experience of struggle of the Filipina domestic helpers in Hong Kong, Delores Williams' theology of survival quality of life, and Jung Young Lee's theology of marginality as reference point.

The mapping of such a theology took a three-stage journey:

Part I, the landscape, started the journey through a survey of the terrain that served as the context for the theological trek. I described the various interconnected experience of domestication of the domestic helpers in Hong Kong based on their identity as migrant Filipinos, as migrant Filipino women, and as migrant domestic workers. I noted here how the domestic helpers' status or identity as migrants is woven into their multidimensional experience of domestication. I then went on to paint a picture of how the domestic helpers deal with their domestication by walking through the labyrinth of their strategies in dealing with their domestication, which I approximated and categorized into submission, resistance, and accommodation. I demonstrated here, however, that the categories are not fixed but that they oscillate, are permeable, and closely linked. Most importantly, I established in this stage that the experience of the domestic helpers in Hong Kong or the context from which they live their faith is that of struggle.

Part II, the markers, continued the journey through the imprinting of the signposts and the touchstones that served as guides for the theological reflection. I, first, identified particular theological themes arising from the struggle of the domestic helpers in Hong Kong, which functioned as signposts by providing clues and talking points in the theological conversation in Part III. I then went into an elaboration of the key themes of the theology of survival quality of life by Delores Williams and the theology of marginality by Jung Young Lee on

the conviction that these key themes and the method through which they have been articulated provide the touchstones or the frameworks for identifying the features of a theology of Filipino women migrant domestic workers.

Part III, the road ahead, embodied the heart and exploratory nature of this theological journey, which is to map the features of a theology of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration and see how such a theology could help the Theology of Struggle in the Philippines move forward. To do this I, first, engaged the experience of struggle of the domestic helpers in Hong Kong, Williams' theology of survival quality of life, and Lee's theology of marginality in a conversation. Having done this foundational prerequisite, I proceeded to outline the contours of a theology of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration and argued that it is a feminist theology of struggle. I then moved towards an engagement of such a theology in dialogue with the Theology of Struggle in the Philippines.

This book forges a path in the dialogue between the social sciences and theology, particularly in migration studies and in the emerging way of doing theology, that is, intercultural theology. Contemporary migration, which has already received considerable attention in the social sciences, is a largely unexplored context for theological reflection. Drawing from sociological, anthropological, and/or feminist studies and theories, this book has demonstrated that contemporary migration is a phenomenon that theology can no longer ignore if it is to be "faith seeking (empowering) understanding," and if it is to rise to the challenge for it (theology) to be transformative not just descriptive. This book then makes a contribution to theology, insofar as it offers a way for it to reflect on and/or integrate the phenomenon of migration in Christian theological reflections. More particularly, within theology, this book constitutes a modest addition in the (further) articulation of intercultural theology, particularly a feminist intercultural theology. As a systematic theological text that locates itself within this relatively new perspective of doing theology, the book then offers an expansion of the field of doing theology and, consequently, the theological imagination.

## BLAZING A TRAIL

One significant character of all theological constructions is how they open up new ways or clear paths toward deeper meaning-making and sense-making or theologizing. As I see it there are three areas in which the theology developed in this book offers possibilities for theology.

The first has to do with the theology on/about Filipino women. As a theology that concerns Filipino women in the context of labor migration the feminist theology of struggle developed in this book contributes to the theology being done by/on Filipino women, including those done by/on Filipino women in the Philippines. It could offer ways toward a more systematic reflection and articulation on the experience or situation of Filipino women as women. For example, it could help not only in coming up with a more exhaustive critique of women-related colonial legacies, like the *Maria Clara* image, but also in unpacking contemporary forms of oppression and struggle toward liberation by Filipino women. To be sure, what can be called a Filipino feminist theology in the likes of Black women's womanist theology remains to be done.<sup>1</sup> Despite efforts by some of the few women theologians much of feminist theological discourse in the Philippines has largely been and, still, is imbricated in nationalist discourse. Filipino women theologians have a proclivity to reflexively affirm a quasi convergence with the vision of struggle towards liberation of the men and women theologians of the Theology of Struggle because both are doing the theology of struggle. While there is verity in the claim that Filipino women's struggle is "integral" to the Filipino struggle as a whole, as articulated by the mostly male theologians of the Theology of Struggle, this is but just one side of the coin. There is an-other side of the coin that Filipino women theologians do not sufficiently give voice and justice to by subsuming the women situation and experience of struggle under the Filipino situation and experience of struggle in general. One cannot simply and spontaneously assume that Filipino women's concerns and vision as women are already taken into full account by any theology that takes as its starting point the Filipino context. Today, the recognition of women as persons who shape and forge their own story is not limited to the emancipation of some bits and pieces of

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<sup>1</sup> This absence of a systematized feminist theology in the Philippines is the primary reason why I decided to engage FToS in dialogue only with ToS in the last chapter.

their lives, because life is not a sum of isolated components but a single reality with many interrelated aspects. How can women theologians in the Philippines even begin to theologically embrace the depth and breadth of the situation and experience of Filipina migrant domestic helpers when they cannot more adequately give voice to the situation and experience of Filipino women (in the Philippines) as women?

The second area concerns feminist theology in general. As a woman's theology and in the face of the millions of migrant women, particularly migrant women workers, whose lives parallel much of the story of Filipina migrant domestic workers the feminist theology of struggle (in the context of migration) developed here raises or highlights some important points for feminist theology. To be sure, as Kwok Pui-lan posits, the experience of the colonized, the (im)migrant, and the diasporic—categories that fit Filipina migrant domestic helpers—raises new questions for and broadens the horizon of feminist theology. How might feminist theology, for example, be defined or re-defined by a transnational approach that foregrounds relation of female subjects in globalization? Then there are the nagging questions: Is economic independence enough for women? Does migration really re-define the gender issue or change gender relations and empower women as some researches suggest<sup>2</sup> or does it just perpetuate, reproduce, or mutate existing gender inequalities?<sup>3</sup> In other words, does it make a significant dent towards the accomplishment of the vision of the women's movement?

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<sup>2</sup> Maruja Asis, "The Return Migration of Filipino Women Migrants: Home, But Not for Good," 51, 56, 66, 68, 69. See also Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo, "Overcoming Patriarchal Constraints: The Reconstruction of Gender Relations among Mexican Immigrant Women and Men," *Gender and Society*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (September 1992): 393–415; In-Sook Lim, "Korean Immigrant Women's Challenge to Gender Inequality at Home: The Interplay of Economic Resources, Gender, and Family," *Gender and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (February 1997): 31–51; and Mirjana Morokvašić, "Birds of Passage are also Women," *International Migration Review* Vol. 18, No. 4 (1984): 886–907.

<sup>3</sup> Others, meanwhile, contend empowerment and liberation for women because of participation in production, and then in working overseas, is at best still a myth. See MFMW, "Still a Long Way to Go," *Migrant Focus Magazine*, Vol. 1, Issue 3 (Jan-March 2001): 14–15. See also Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, "The Gender Paradox in the Transnational Families of Filipino Migrant Women," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* Vol. 14, No. 3 (2005): 243–268. Amy Sim, "Introduction: Women, Mobilities, Immobilities, and Empowerment," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* Vol. 18, No. 1 (2009): 1–15 also offers an interesting and nuanced take on the two positions.

To be sure, a feminist theology of struggle (of Filipino women domestic workers in the context of migration) as a feminist theology from an intercultural perspective offers possibilities in relation to a challenge facing contemporary feminist theology, that is, articulating feminist theology as an intercultural discourse. The past three decades have seen the emergence and proliferation of various contextual theologies within feminist theology as critiques of the essentializing tendency of classic feminist theology and as results of the movements within the women's movement to put the accent on the politics of identity and difference. Womanist and *mujerista* theology are examples of these developments within feminist theology. To these pioneering women's credit this phase in the women theological movement has brought and transformed the movement into a multicultural one. Today, however, there are emerging concerns whether this preoccupation with and emphasis on particular, especially race-based feminist theologies, is stunting or jeopardizing the future of feminist theology as a global resistance movement and the solidarity of women across racial, economic, and religious differences. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, in an essay on the need for a critical feminist studies in religion in-between nationalism and globalization<sup>4</sup> and Kwok Pui-lan, in her book *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* have begun to give voice to this issuing problem on which could very well hinge the future of feminist theology. As a feminist theology which straddles both the local and the global (context-wise and theology-wise) the feminist theology of struggle developed in this book represents a response to this problem. As a feminist theology of struggle in the context of migration it provides a solution or a partial vision.

The third and last area pertains to the growing impetus and movement in theology towards developing or articulating a theology of migration. Evidently, the feminist theology of struggle developed in this book is a provisional theology of migration. It is an attempt at contributing to a theology that is still in the making, a theology that is still evolving, i.e., migration theology. Nevertheless, by elaborating on migration-relevant religious themes, like the church of the stranger, one could say that the theology developed in this research, provides

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<sup>4</sup> See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Studies in Religion In-Between Nationalism and Globalization," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring 2005): 111-9.

significant clues towards the articulation and elaboration of a migration theology.

Ultimately, a truly liberating theology calls into being, what does not exist so that it may be. As an exploratory venture into the largely unexamined plight of women in the context of migration, the feminist theology of struggle that has been constructed in this book rises up to the above mentioned theological challenge. It tries to “call into being what does not exist so that it may be.” This is so in the way this theology has been forged out of going on a pilgrimage in the wilderness of uncharted territories, particularly by negotiating the maze of migrant women’s everyday life at the interstice. This is so in the way this theology offers possibilities to re-imagine migrant humanity and, consequently, the field of doing theology. Indeed, while this theology, like all theologies, acknowledges its provisionality it rests in the knowledge that it could pave the way for new ways of understanding the sacred and the creation of more viable cultures and communities. For, at the end of the day, theologies are not just about journeys into the heart of the sacred. They are, ultimately, cartographies of grace.

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## INDEX

- Abesamis, Carlos, 310, 312–316  
accommodation, 67, 103–111  
aerobics, 74  
Agustin, Patria, 319  
*amah*, 97. *See also* *banmui* and *muijai*  
Amoah, Elizabeth, 302  
Antone, Hope, 140  
Anzaldúa, Gloria, 18  
Aquino, Maria Pilar, 271, 287, 294–295,  
298, 301, 303–304  
Arbuckle, Gerald, 277  
Arguello, Jose, 297  
Arroyo, Gloria Macapagal, 51  
Asian Migrants Coordinating Body, 42,  
56, 82–83  
Asis, Maruja, 14, 308  
Association of Women in Theology  
(Philippines), 265  
*áte*, 259–260  
atonement, 174, 180, 190–191, 198, 201,  
240  
  
*bagong bayani*, 39, 113  
*bahala na*, 77–78, 99, 114, 302–303,  
320–321  
Baker-Fletcher Garth Kasimu, 199–200  
Baker-Fletcher, Karen, 197–199  
Balabagan, Sarah, 58  
*balikbayan* box, 54  
*banmui*, 28, 47–48  
Battistella, Graziano, 312  
Battle of Chater Road, 29  
Benedict XVI, Pope, 139  
Bermisa, Leonila, 266  
Bevans, Stephen, 132–133  
Black mammy, 186, 201  
borders, 14, 50, 121–123, 141, 153, 160,  
268  
brain drain, 15–16  
Brock Rita Nakashima, 149–151, 164, 169  
Burke, Kevin, 147  
Bussie, Jacqueline, 278  
Bussert, Joy, 301  
  
catholicity, 131–132, 168–169, 279–280,  
285  
Cariño, Feliciano, 115, 296, 311  
Carr, Anne, 141  
cell phone mothers, 69  
Chang, Kimberly, 31, 47, 66, 81, 87,  
111, 113. *See also* Julian Mc Allister  
Groves  
Cheng, Shu-Ju Ada, 87, 95  
Chia, Edmund, 132  
Choi, Hee Ann, 198  
chosen people, 311–312  
church, 25,  
Black, 194–196, 235–236, 240,  
245–246  
Hong Kong, 25, 39, 76  
Filipino, 78, 260–262  
Filipina DH, 24, 94–107, 245, 281  
migrant, 110, 132, 235, 247, 257,  
280–283  
intercultural, 286  
Clooney, Frank, 222  
complementarity, 138, 143  
Constable, Nicole, 20, 29–31, 67, 69, 73,  
80–81, 89, 105–106, 163  
Contemplacion, Flor, 82, 84  
contextualization, 156, 204, 291,  
299, 305–308. *See also* contextual  
theologies  
Copeland, Shawn, 136  
Corpuz-Brock Jane, 78  
covenant, 312–313  
Cox, Harvey, 278  
Crowley, Paul, 149  
  
daily reality, 271, 297–299  
Danesi, P. Giacomo, 283–284  
Davanev, Sheila Greeve, 231  
David, Randy, 95, 109  
de la Torre, Edicio, 290, 295–296,  
320–321  
de Mesa, Jose, 259–260, 267, 269, 272,  
276–277  
development diplomacy, 16  
dialogue  
between Christianity and other  
religions, 207–208  
between womanist and feminist  
theology, 178–179, 181–182  
between ToS and FToS, 290–318



- difference, 216  
     cultural and religious, 21  
     gender and sexual, 137  
     geographical, 19  
 Diocesan Pastoral Center for Filipinos,  
     89–90, 98, 102  
 Dizon-Añonuevo, Mai, 70–71, 101, 111  
 doctrine of election, 124  
 domestication, 32, 63–65, 76, 81, 103,  
     114–115, 239, 242–247, 257, 260, 262,  
     264–267, 271, 276–277, 281, 285  
 domesticity, 34, 63, 68, 262  
*doncella*, 37, 72, 252. *See also Maria Clara*  
 double burden, 70, 258  
 dualism, 142–144, 148  
  
*ekkklesia*, 128  
 Elizondo, Virgil, 122, 155  
 Ellacuria, Ignacio, 146–149  
*El Shaddai*, 282  
 Enriquez, Virgilio, 4  
 Escoda, Isabel, 22, 31, 97  
 ethic of risk, 302–305  
 ethnocentrism, 132  
 exodus  
     of Filipinos, 14, 311  
     of Israelites, 126, 311, 313  
     according to Carlos Abesamis,  
         310–311  
     according to Jung Young Lee, 219  
     according to Delores Williams, 190  
  
 Fabella, Virginia, 4, 282  
 feminist, 184, 186, 224  
     ethics, 302–305  
     theologians, 124, 134, 136, 148,  
         159–161, 181, 292, 294, 310  
 feminization of migration, 16  
 Fernandez, Eleazar, 274–276, 279  
*fiesta*, 279  
 Filipino  
     Domestic Helper Dolls, 29  
     labor migration, 14–16  
  
 Gaspar, Karl, 318, 290, 293, 296  
 Gebara, Ivone, 137, 289, 301  
 gendered  
     migration, 16, 32  
     socialization, 32–35, 71, 91  
     subject, 119, 134,  
     violence, 41–43  
 gender dialogue, 292, 297  
 globalization, 135, 152–153, 160, 168  
     and migration, 16, 121, 306  
     and women, 161, 265, 319, 328  
 God  
     as a host, 128, 256. *See also*  
         hospitality of God  
     of strangers, 125, 256  
     of the struggle, 243–244, 247, 267,  
         269, 272–279  
     in the Bible, 124, 154–155  
 Goizueta, Roberto, 80  
 Gonzalez, Joaquin, 15–16, 18  
 Gonzalez, Justo, 18, 123, 133  
 Groody, Dan, 147  
 Groves, Julian McAllister, 31, 47, 66, 81  
 Guiterrez, Gustavo, 137  
  
 Hagar, 175, 180, 190, 183–184, 198  
 Hall, Stuart, 13  
 harmony  
 Harrison, Renee, 198  
 Hashim, Rita Raj, 17, 56  
 Hawwa, Sithi, 100–101  
 Hechanova, Louie, 290, 303  
 Heyward, Isabel Carter, 138  
 Hinze, Christine Firer, 158  
*hiya*, 22, 107–108  
 Hong Kong Land, 29–30  
 hooks, bell, 184–185, 201  
 hospitality of God, 18, 128, 272–274,  
     279–280  
 Hyung, Chung Kyung, 287  
  
 Iletto, Reynaldo, 274–275  
 Incarnation, 144, 155, 253–254  
 Isasi-Diaz, Maria, 122, 127–128, 161, 271  
 Isherwood, Lisa, 143–144  
  
 Jesus  
     as Servant, 147–148, 214  
     as stranger, 125–128  
     as Suffering Messiah, 145–146, 148, 212  
     as surrogate, 190, 198  
 Jimenez-David, Rina, 104  
 Jocano, F. Landa, 77, 84  
 Johnson, Elizabeth, 286  
 jokes, 105, 243, 244. *See also* laughter  
  
*kapwa*, 84, 282  
 Keller, Catherine, 197  
 Kim, Ai Ra, 223  
*kindom*, 127–128, 169  
 King, Ursula, 295  
 Koenig, John, 125, 128  
 Kuschel, Karl Josef, 278–279

- Labor Export Policy, 50  
*lakas ng loob*, 99, 268, 273  
 laughter, 104, 106, 238, 243, 277–279, 286  
 Layosa, Erlinda, 80–81, 102, 105, 113  
 Lee, Jung Young, 202–218  
 Ligo, Archie, 275  
 Liwag, Ma. Emma Concepcion, 32, 38, 258  
 love for the self, 300–302  
 Lussi, Carmem, 1
- Machado, Daisy, 121  
*machismo*, 281  
 Maglipon, Jo-Ann, 46, 74, 76, 101, 112–113  
 Mananzan, Mary John, 4, 27, 32, 37, 145, 260–261, 265–266, 290–297, 305, 310–311, 318  
 Marcos, Ferdinand, 15–16, 50  
 marginality  
   as in-between, 211  
   as in-both, 212  
   as in-beyond, 213  
*Maria Clara*, 36–37, 255, 261, 276, 308, 321  
 Maria the stupid DH, 20, 105  
 Marrujo, Olivia Ruiz, 139  
 Martial Law, 4, 15  
 May, Melanie, 123, 143–144, 150  
 martyrdom, 146–147, 239  
 McBrien, Richard, 1  
*Migrante*, 83–84  
 Min, Anselm, 220–222  
 Miranda, Dionisio, 109–110  
 modern-day slavery, 42, 262, 265–266  
 Moltmann, Jurgen, 146, 163–164  
*muijai*, 28  
 Mulder, Niels, 309  
 mutuality, 138, 166
- Nadeau, Denise, 264  
 New Conditions of Stay, 54  
 Nyitray, Vivian Lee, 223–224
- Obligacion, Freddie, 273, 262  
*oikos*, 139  
 oppression, 18  
 oppressed of the oppressed, 190, 264  
 option for the poor, 124, 137  
 Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration, 51–52  
 Ozeki, Erino, 74, 77, 85, 89
- Palmer, Parker, 128  
 Parker, Cristian, 134  
 Parker, Rebecca Ann, 148–151  
 Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar, 36, 38, 70, 111  
*pasalubong*, 54  
 Pasewark, Kyle, 163, 165  
*pasyon*, 274–276  
 patriarchy, 5, 136, 160, 316  
 People Power I Revolution, 279  
 Phan, Peter, 210, 255  
 Pidgeon, Frank, 24–27, 35, 43, 80, 87  
 Pilario, Daniel Franklin, 289–290, 305  
 pilgrimage, 1–3, 126, 285, 330  
 Pohl, Christine, 127  
 popular religion, 133–134  
 poverty, 293  
   of migrants, 147, 282  
   of women, 5, 136–137, 166, 186  
   in the Philippines, 28, 31, 71, 78, 314
- Power  
   as domination, 161–162  
   as powerlessness, 163  
   as shared, 165  
 Pratt, Geraldine, 62  
*probinsiyana*, 20–21  
 promised land, 2, 121, 204, 311–313  
 Purvis, Sally, 148
- racial discrimination, 5, 27–28, 31. *See also* Filipino Domestic Helper Dolls  
 Rankka, Kristine, 152, 164  
 Rayan, Samuel, 119, 157  
 Regalado, Connie, 83–84, 97  
 resistance strategies  
   by Black women, 177, 181, 187–189, 191  
   by Filipina domestic workers, 82–102  
 Rimmer, Rev. Chad, 2  
 Robb, Carol, 141  
 Ruether, Rosemary Radford, 139–140, 286  
 Ruiz-Duremdes Sharon Joy, 296  
 Russell, Letty, 123–124, 282, 287  
 Ruth in the Bible, 241, 314
- salo-salo*, 246, 281–282, 271–273, 286  
 Sedmak, Clemens, 266–267  
 Schotsmans, Paul, 132  
 Schreiter, Robert, 131, 272  
 Schüssler-Fiorenza, Elisabeth, 5, 119, 128–129, 134, 136, 141, 151, 158  
 Schwartz, Regina, 313  
 Scott, James, 66–67, 103–104  
 sexism, 5, 31, 178, 181, 189, 196  
 shared resources, 251, 262–263, 265–266, 270

- Smith, Ruth, 238  
 Sobrino, Jon, 146–147, 149  
 Sobritchea, Carolyn, 34  
 social mobility, 101, 253, 269  
 Social Teachings of the Church, 283  
 Sotelo, Pierette Hondagneu, 103  
 Spanish colonization of the Philippines,  
 15, 37, 72, 77–78, 96, 104, 109, 246,  
 251–252, 260–262, 275, 309–311,  
 318  
 strangers  
 church of, 279–284  
 hospitality of, 128  
 submission, 67–80  
 surrogacy  
 among Black women, 183–186  
 among Filipina domestic workers,  
 24, 47, 249, 251. *See also tagasalo*
- Tacoli, Cecilia, 33  
 Tadiar, Neferti, 64  
*tagasalo*, 33, 252, 258  
 Tano, Rodrigo, 315, 320–322  
 Tapia, Elizabeth, 292, 303, 305  
 Tellez, Eliseo, Jr., 25  
 theology  
 contextual, 120–121, 158, 168, 323.  
*See also contextualization*  
 feminist, 159, 160, 166, 176, 179,  
 181–182, 291, 301–302, 304–305,  
 317–318  
 intercultural, 166–169, 245, 254–255,  
 284  
 liberal, 146  
 liberation, 124, 137, 148, 151,  
 165–166, 291, 294, 303, 312  
 postcolonial, 157–160  
 womanist, 175–190  
*tiis*, 107–108  
 Tomasi, Silverio, 282–283  
 Tracer study, 24–26, 48
- United Filipinos in Hong Kong, 58,  
 82–83, 90, 97  
*utang na loob*, 77
- Valerio, Rosanna, 34, 39  
 Villalba, May-Ann, 263  
 violence  
 economic, 41  
 redemptive, 149  
 Volf, Miroslav, 132  
 Vuola, Elina, 137, 166
- Walker, Alice, 178, 198  
 Welch, Sharon, 302, 304–305  
 Wijzen, Frans, 169  
 wilderness experience, 2, 174, 180, 188,  
 190, 193–194, 200  
 Wilfred, Felix, 154, 156  
 Wink, Walter, 149  
 Williams, Delores, 176–194
- xenophobia, 122, 124–125, 127
- Ybañez, Rita Faith, 59–60  
*yin-yang*, 207–209, 222–224  
 Young, Josiah, 198–199  
 Youngs, Gillian, 84, 86

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