11. *Tahanan* (Home) for Women Survivors of Domestic Violence in a Synodal Church in the Making

Bernadine Lanot and Marnie Racaza

In the 2022 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), 17.5 percent of Filipino women aged 15-49 have experienced physical, sexual, and emotional violence from their intimate partners.[1] With the COVID-19 pandemic, women were forced to remain at home with perpetrators, leading to an increase in the number of cases of domestic violence, most of which are undocumented. As we learn to navigate a post-pandemic era, survivors of domestic violence are still processing their experiences, trying to rebuild their sense of self, and finding safe spaces. At the same time, domestic violence continues to be a pervasive problem. While there are a growing number of feminist care providers catering to victim-survivors of domestic violence, the "feminist care" approach has not been widely incorporated into the pastoral practice of the church.

Catholic groups in the Philippines are then challenged to discern the call of the *Salubong* (Welcoming Encounter) in the Philippine Catholic Church Synodal Report (2022), which expresses "the need to make the Church into a safe space for abused women."[2] This implies supporting the abused women in their mental health and social-psychological well-being and questioning the church's patriarchal structures, wherever these contribute to the disempowerment of abused women, such as traditional ideas about the value of self-sacrifice and self-denial for mothers, and the relegation of homemaking to women's realm of responsibility. And so, this

[1] Philippine Commission on Women, "Violence Against Women," *Philippine Commission on Women (blog)*, pcw.gov.ph/violence-against-women/.

[2] Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Salubong (Welcoming Encounter): The Philippine Catholic Church Synodal Report* (Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 2022), 8.

chapter would like to focus on Filipino mothers who experience harm and alienation in their families and churches and remain in abusive relationships out of coercion, desperation, the need to protect their children, or the desire to remain the *ilaw ng tahanan* ("light of the home"). There is a need to deconstruct, reconstruct, and reclaim an idea of "home" or *tahanan* for victim-survivors of domestic violence, as well as the church as a whole.

This chapter begins with a survey of the state of domestic violence in the Philippines and its effects and impact on victim-survivors. Second, it gives a review and discusses some structural barriers that lead to the prevalence of domestic violence. Next, this paper presents insights from interviews with two feminist care practitioners from Lunas Collective: Kara,[3] a social worker who used to work with Lunas Collective and helped develop their feminist care approach, and Janine Del Mundo,[4] Lunas Collective's project officer for feminist counseling. Lunas Collective is a volunteer-powered care space for women and people of diverse sexualities who experience gender-based violence (GBV) and have concerns about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Then, it attempts to deconstruct, reconstruct, and reclaim home and homemaking by doing vernacular-postcolonial hermeneutics of *tahanan* as *pananahan ng Diyos* (the indwelling of God) and *pagpapatahan* (giving comfort to stop one's crying). Finally, the chapter suggests a theology of feminist collective care that aims to help the church become more synodal, to be truly a safe space for domestically abused mothers and wives.

[3] Kara, interview by Bernadine Lanot and Marnie Racaza, Zoom, September 14, 2024. Kara is not her real name. She has requested to have her details anonymized and for no other identifying information to be included.

[4] Janine Del Mundo, interview by Bernadine Lanot and Marnie Racaza, September 24, 2024. Janine consented for her real name and identifying information to be shared. Ethics clearance for this project was obtained from the University Research Ethics Office of the Ateneo de Manila University prior to the interviews.

Survey of the State of Domestic Violence in the Philippines

The 2022 NDHS reports that 13 percent of women aged 15–49 have experienced physical violence, and 4 percent have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.[5] According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), gender-based violence has short and long-term impacts on women survivors, affecting their physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health. This includes injuries, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, gynecological disorders, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and self-harm.[6] Women seek help from a range of sources, both formal and informal, including family, friends, and religious authorities. When informal support is lacking, they turn to formal sources such as medical services, mental health professionals, shelters, advocacy groups that take up the issue of violence against women (VAW), and legal services.[7]

In general, do women perceive abuse as undesirable or wrong? The 2022 National Demographic and Health Survey reveals the percentage of women who agree that wife-beating is justified. Reasons cited for wife-beating include burning food, arguments, going out without informing their partner, neglecting children, and refusing to have sex. The survey identifies a declining trend in women aged 15–49 who agree with at least one reason justifying wife-beating, dropping from 24 percent in 2003 to 13 percent in 2013 and further to 9 percent in 2022.[8] An analysis of the 2013 NDHS also indicates that with higher levels of education, exposure

[5] Philippine Statistics Authority, "2022 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) Final Report," psa.gov.ph/content/2022-philippine-national-demographic-and-health-survey-ndhs-final-report.

[6] United Nations Population Fund, UN Women, and UNICEF, "Ending Violence Against Women and Children in the Philippines," *UNFPA Asiapacific*, asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/publications/ending-violence-against-women-and-children-philippines.

[7] Allan B. I. Bernardo and Alicia F. Estrellado, "Locus of Hope and Help-Seeking Intentions of Filipino Women Victims of Intimate Partner Violence," *Current Psychology: A Journal for Diverse Perspectives on Diverse Psychological Issues* 36, no. 1 (2017): 67.

[8] Philippine Statistics Authority, "2022 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) Final Report."

to media campaigns promoting gender equality and empowerment, and awareness of VAW support services, Filipino women are less likely to perceive wife-beating as justifiable.[9]

However, it is one thing for women to perceive wife-beating and other forms of violence as unjustifiable and another for victim-survivors to seek help to stop the violence. The statistics show that two in five women (42 percent) aged 15–49 who have experienced physical or sexual violence have never sought help or disclosed the violence to anyone. One in four women (24 percent) who have experienced violence shared their experience but did not seek help. Only one in three (34 percent) women sought help to end the violence.[10]

While these statistics provide valuable insights, they do not offer a complete picture of gender-based violence in the Philippines. Firstly, the NDHS lacks data on help-seeking behavior for survivors of other forms of GBV, such as emotional, psychological, or economic abuse. The Philippine Commission on Women acknowledges the issue of underreporting due to a "culture of silence."[11] A report commissioned by UNICEF, UNFPA, and UN Women in 2020 noted that many cases might not progress beyond the Barangay level or local social welfare and development offices, leading to unreliable prevalence data.[12] A study on reporting GBV in 24 developing countries between 2004 and 2011 estimated that the actual prevalence of GBV might be significantly higher

[9] Wilfred Luis Clamor, "Justification of Intimate Partner Violence in the Philippines: Attitudes Towards Wife Beating Among Filipina Women," *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* 18, no. 1 (2018): 169.

[10] Philippine Statistics Authority, "2022 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) Final Report."

[11] Philippine Commission on Women, "Violence Against Women."

[12] UNFPA, UN Women, and UNICEF, "Ending Violence Against Women and Children in the Philippines," 16–17. In the Philippines, the barangay is the smallest administrative and political unit of government, serving as the primary site for local governance, basic services, and community-based interventions.

than what health systems data or police reports suggest, underestimating the actual prevalence of GBV from 11- to 128-fold.[13]

Structural Barriers Leading to the Prevalence of Domestic Violence

While awareness among women that wife-beating is not justified is increasing, ending domestic violence remains challenging due to structural and sociocultural barriers for women to seek help or a way out of their situation. Although nearly 90 percent of women are aware of local authorities like the Barangay VAW desk, DSWD Regional Center for Women or Girls, and the PNP Women and Children's Protection Desk, only 1 in 10 women seek help from these government units.[14] Women are less likely to approach the justice system due to its ineffectiveness, corruption, bribery, and the psychological difficulty of facing court proceedings and perpetrators while sharing their stories in public.[15] Narratives from survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Cebu City also reveal their fear of retaliation from abusers if they lose their cases.[16] Some government authorities even subject survivors to humiliation and

[13] Tia Palermo, Jennifer Bleck, and Amber Peterman, "Tip of the Iceberg: Reporting and Gender-Based Violence in Developing Countries," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 179, no. 5 (2014): 602.

[14] Philippine Statistics Authority, "2022 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) Final Report." DSWD refers to the Department of Social Welfare and Development, which provides government-run social protection and welfare services, while the Philippine National Police (PNP) Women's and Children's Protection Desks are specialized units mandated to receive and handle complaints involving GBV, abuse, and exploitation of women and children.

[15] Bernardo and Estrellado, "Locus of Hope and Help-Seeking Intentions of Filipino Women Victims of Intimate Partner Violence," 67.

[16] Simeon C. Bernados, Jr and Lanndon A. Ocampo, "Survivors' Social Construction of Intimate Partner Violence in Cebu City, Philippines," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 36, no. 17–18 (September 2021): 9796–9818.

victim-blaming; for instance, one police officer jokingly told a survivor to have sex with her husband to stop the beatings.[17]

The deeply ingrained patriarchy in the Philippines places women in a vulnerable position and interacts with the legal and protective measures in place. Within this patriarchal system, men are designated as the powerful heads of their families, with ownership and control over family members.[18] Defying gender norms can lead to objectification, shame, guilt, and even the justification of violence, contributing to a culture of victim-blaming.[19] The UNICEF, UNFPA, and UN Women report identifies victim-blaming and the fear of bringing shame to the family as the main reasons for underreporting of cases, as many consider VAW a "private matter" and stigmatize sharing these issues publicly.[20]

Sociocultural expectations place significant pressure on women to be self-sacrificing, tolerant (known as *mapagtiis* or *mapagpasensiya*), and temperate (referred to as *mapagtimpi*) as wives and mothers.[21] These expectations prioritize the family's reputation and honor over women's well-being and safety.[22] Women with children often feel the need to protect their families and maintain family unity, fearing that their children

[17] Roselle A. Jardin and Jucel A. Jaluague, "Inner Strength and Coping Strategies of Women Victims of Domestic Violence in Cebu City, Philippines," *Human Behavior, Development & Society* 23, no. 3 (2022): 48.

[18] Racidon P. Bernarte, Quennie Marie M. Acedegbega, Mariah Louise A. Fadera, and Hanna Jemima G. Yopyop, "Violence Against Women in the Philippines," *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 6, no. 1 (February 2018): 122.

[19] Isabel Kristine M. Valdez, MaVeronica Pia N. Arevalo, Janine Patricia G. Robredo et al., "Violence Against Women in the Philippines: Barriers to Seeking Support," *The Lancet Regional Health: Western Pacific* 23, no. 100471 (2022).

[20] UNFPA, UN Women, and UNICEF, "Ending Violence Against Women and Children in the Philippines," 17.

[21] Bernardo and Estrellado, "Locus of Hope and Help-Seeking Intentions of Filipino Women Victims of Intimate Partner Violence," 68.

[22] Valdez, Arevalo, Robredo et al., "Violence Against Women in the Philippines: Barriers to Seeking Support."

may grow up without fathers.[23] The burden on women is substantial, as they are expected to be the *ilaw ng tahanan* or the light of the home, responsible for creating a safe and nurturing environment for their families. Any perceived failure in maintaining this role places additional pressure on mothers. Consequently, women endure suffering until the violence reaches an extreme and unbearable level, causing long-term harm to their bodies, minds, and families. Mananzan writes:

> The care and education of children is put in a whole package, beginning with pregnancy, and is handed to the woman as her main role. She is conditioned to think that she is responsible for the success or failure of her marriage and that whatever success she may experience in her life, if somehow her marriage does not work, she is a failure. Many a wife-battering is justified because a woman fails to comply with the image of a subservient "good housewife" . . . The fact that a "broken home" is a failure that would be put at her door, also makes her hesitate to separate from a violent husband. So, she endures long years of humiliation and pain "for the sake of the children."[24]

Entrenched patriarchal norms, supported by legal and sociocultural barriers, are also influenced by religious beliefs. For instance, the absence of a divorce law in the Philippines traps women in abusive relationships. Passing the law faces resistance from some religious institutions (predominantly Catholic), who express concerns that addressing domestic violence and promulgating anti-rape laws may lead to more divorces and harm to families.[25] Sr. Nila Bermisa, in her book *That She May Dance Again,* writes scathingly: "The Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines,

[23] Bernardo and Estrellado, "Locus of Hope and Help-Seeking Intentions of Filipino Women Victims of Intimate Partner Violence."

[24] Mary John Mananzan, "Feminine Socialization: Women as Victims and Collaborators," in *Violence Against Women*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and M. Shawn Copeland (SCM Press, 1994), 48.

[25] UNFPA, UN Women, and UNICEF, "Ending Violence Against Women and Children in the Philippines," 15.

despite all its power and influence as an institution and its commitment to be a church of the poor, has not helped to alleviate the subordination and exploitation of women. It has reinforced the silencing of women, especially about violence against women in the home and the church."[26] While women seek help from religious authority and confide in priests, as observed by Sr. Nila, they are mostly unable to provide a safe space. This is because priests are "inculcating self-sacrifice and forgiveness to women victims using theology where women are supposed to give unconditional love to their husbands, serving them 'till death do us part.' Battered wives have been advised to sacrifice for the sake of the family."[27]

Addressing Domestic Violence Through Feminist Collective Care

For battered wives and mothers, their homes have now become spaces of betrayal, abuse, and violence, inflicted by those whom they trust. The trauma caused by domestic violence deeply scars women's lives and compromises their well-being. Thus, what is needed is an ethic of care that will empower women victim-survivors in rebuilding homes for themselves. Carol Gilligan provides a psychological framework and defines feminist ethics of care as "grounded in voice and relationship, as an ethic of resistance both to injustice and to self-silencing."[28] In *The Birth of Pleasure*, Gilligan observes how women have been desensitized to their own emotions and pleasures, as they are made to believe that silencing, concealing, and sacrificing themselves is required for maintaining harmony in relationships, and thus the pleasure of truly expressing oneself is seen as a threat or danger to the relationship.[29] However, dissociation may be an adaptive strategy for survival within patriarchy and a response

[26] Nila V. Bermisa, *That She May Dance Again: Rising from Pain of Violence Against Women in the Philippine Catholic Church* (Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines, 2011), 65.
[27] Bermisa, 72.
[28] Carol Gilligan, *Joining the Resistance* (Polity Press, 2013), 175.
[29] Carol Gilligan, *The Birth of Pleasure: A New Map of Love* (Knopf Doubleday, 2002).

to trauma that creates a split within persons. Instead, true pleasure is found in confiding relationships where there is trust and vulnerability, as one listen to one's own voice and remains true to self and others against patriarchal norms and expectations. Thus, one must undo dissociation by committing to association with oneself and others. Care, thus, is exercised in sensitivity to context, emotions, relationality, and particular needs, enabling women to freely give and receive care.

The services of Lunas Collective are grounded in feminist care principles. Lunas Collective is a volunteer-powered care space for women and people of diverse sexualities who experience gender-based violence (GBV) and have concerns about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).[30] Lunas Collective's services include a chat helpline, education and research on feminist care training and methods, and advocacy and community-building through online and on-ground campaigns on SRHR, mental health, and human rights. As a "community of care," Lunas Collective is an inclusive care space that is home to people of many diverse backgrounds, sexualities, and beliefs, and thus aims to be sensitive to this diversity of social categories and experiences. It is important to note that Lunas Collective is not allied with any churches or religious institutions, though their feminist care principles may also inform our pastoral approaches and teach us ways of accompanying and being with survivors of GBV.

The following are explanations of each principle based on our own understanding and practice as Lunas Collective volunteers, the Lunas Collective website and policy brief,[31] and online interviews with Kara,[32] a social worker who used to work with Lunas Collective and helped develop their feminist care approach, and Janine Del Mundo, Lunas Collective's project officer for feminist counseling. Janine shares that while some aspects of LUNAS, an acronym for Lunas Collective's principles, overlap

[30] "Home," *Lunas Collective*, lunascollective.org.

[31] Sabrina Laya Gacad, "Lunas Collective: Feminist Care Methods as Applied to Pandemic Response," *Lunas Collective Policy Brief*, bit.ly/LCFCPolicyBrief.

[32] Kara, interview by Bernadine Lanot and Marnie Racaza, Zoom, September 14, 2024.

with general Psychological First Aid (PFA) frameworks, LUNAS is specifically tailored for feminist care responses to gender-based violence.[33] The Lunas Collective Feminist Care principles are:

L – Listen
U – Understand
N – Nurture
A – Autonomy and Action Plan
S – Safety and Social Support

Active *listening* means focusing on the survivor and not one's recommendations, judgments, or opinions about what the survivor ought to do. Listening means maintaining confidentiality and asking considerate questions that make the survivor feel safe to share their stories while respecting the limits of what they want to share. Survivors are also respected as "storytellers" or "service users."[34]

Understanding is another important feminist principle, as care providers could also practice reflexivity as they seek to understand how their own experiences and contexts influence how they relate to survivors. Kara shares, "It's not just understanding the situation of the person you're talking to, but also understanding your own situation . . . . You need to be aware of your own biases, trauma, experiences . . . pains, and joys . . . so that you can be ready to help the service user or the storyteller."[35]

Another core idea related to understanding is the power imbalance and dynamics and the intersectionality of social categories that shape power and vulnerability to GBV, which care providers need to continuously educate themselves about.[36] Janine says, "*Madaling mag*-contribute *sa* marginalization *ng taong tinutulungan mo kung mismo ikaw hindi* aware *sa* power *na meron ka at kung ikaw mismo hindi* aware *sa kung bakit*

[33] Janine Del Mundo, interview by Bernadine Lanot and Marnie Racaza, September 24, 2024.
[34] Kara, interview.
[35] Kara, interview.
[36] Del Mundo, interview.

nangayayari 'yun" ("It's easy to contribute to the marginalization of the person you're helping if you yourself are not aware of the power you hold and why (GBV) happens").[37] Thus, care providers must be knowledgeable of structural root causes that perpetuate violence. For Kara, it is also essential to be educated about trauma and its effects on the brain, the dynamics of abuse, and the common experiences of survivors, to manage our personal judgments and biases, and share information with survivors that can help them challenge their own self-blame. "If you don't understand the dynamics of abuse, you will really resort to victim-blaming."[38]

Coming to the principle of *nurturing*, care providers can offer empathy, validation, and support to survivors as well as to themselves through helpful coping or care strategies. The care provider is responsible for their own self-care and ensuring that they are in a good space to provide care for survivors. It is from this space that providers can nurture survivors with "model statements" that reassure them that they are not to blame, that their abuse is not their fault, that they do not deserve to be treated badly, and that we are here to listen without judgment.[39] Even in abusive situations, survivors often take actions to protect or care for themselves, and so care providers can also draw their attention to how they are already taking steps. They can also provide information on other care strategies in case the survivors' way of coping is harmful.[40]

On the question of *autonomy*, care providers value survivors' power and autonomy in making decisions for themselves, creating a safe space for them to come up with their own action plans. Janine shares that while violence may reduce a survivor's sense of power, it never fully extinguishes it, and thus, it is crucial not to view survivors as objects of pity. "We see them as people (that), even at the time of the assault or abuse, they did

[37] Del Mundo, interview.
[38] Kara, interview.
[39] Kara, interview.
[40] Kara, interview.

something to help themselves."[41] "Autonomy" also acknowledges the power in the lived experiences of GBV survivors. Despite the violence inflicted, survivors retain their agency and deserve to thrive in a culture of care and pleasure that recognizes their inherent value and humanity and "reminds people that they are alive, they are living."[42] Thus, care providers and survivors explore together what survivors have already done, what else they want to do about their situation, and how they would like to be helped or accompanied.[43] "Emphasizing that whatever they want to do is their decision, *nandito lang tayo* (we are only here) to help them identify their options . . . pros and cons . . . but at the end of the day, it's their decision."[44]

Lastly, the care provider can assure the survivor that they are not alone and create a sense of *safety and social support*. They brainstorm and discuss with the survivor where they can get help in available networks, including those closest to them, such as neighbors, friends, and family members. Safety planning also involves "things we can discuss with the survivor, [so that] if something happens at home, they can keep themselves alive."[45] This may include plans to ask a neighbor to call the *barangay* or the police when they hear violence escalating and preparing a go-bag in case she and her children need to immediately leave the house, among others. Care providers can also give correct and reliable information about law enforcement, sexual and reproductive health, mental health, and legal support services so survivors can make safe and informed choices.[46] Justice and care should not be sought solely within the legal system, particularly given the presence of structural barriers, but can also emerge through community-based responses within caring communities.

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[41] Del Mundo, interview.
[42] Del Mundo, interview.
[43] Kara, interview.
[44] Kara, interview.
[45] Kara, interview.
[46] Gacad, "Feminist Care Methods as Applied to Pandemic Response."

The LUNAS framework is a holistic and survivor-centered approach to GBV, with a strong emphasis on offering support grounded in feminist care principles, as it seeks to empower survivors by recognizing their lived experiences and addressing the structural imbalances that contribute to GBV. The care that Lunas offers differs from psychosocial support. Janine shares that psychosocial support responds to a specific need that a client may raise, but if we are cultivating a culture of empathy and care, and the awareness of what is happening and why domestic violence occurs, then we are setting the stage for the first essential step, which is to give people the space to reflect on their stories.[47] What makes this feminist collective care approach unique is that it informs how we provide support services, as we understand that uneven gender power relations cause distress and trauma. Gacad writes about feminist counseling that "distress and trauma are in part caused by the uneven gender power relations that persist in our society, and that to liberate individuals from this, care and counseling may be necessary."[48] Feminist care provides a space for survivors to feel safe in their bodies again and take charge of their lives. "When asked for feedback, survivors describe an 'unburdening,' that opening up about their situations and feeling validated and understood all helped them make sense of their complex situations and figure out strategies for self-care or safety."[49] Lunas Collective, therefore, has been exhibiting the conditions and characteristics of being a "synodal third space" where victim-survivors of domestic violence are accompanied in their journey towards healing and flourishing.

[47] Del Mundo, interview.

[48] Sabrina Laya Gacad, "The Making of Lunas Collective: Building Communities of Care," in *Resisting Marginality: Filipino Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights* (UP Center for Women's and Gender Studies and Oxfam Pilipinas, 2022), 138.

[49] Sabrina Laya Gacad, "Care Improves the Power of Gender-Based Violence Survivors," *Rappler*, rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/opinion-care-improves-the-power-of-gender-based-violence-survivors/.

Synodality as Homemaking

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences paper, *The Catholic Family in Asia: Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy*, identifies domestic violence as one of the tensions that commonly breaks the environment of love within the family.[50] The concerns and death-dealing conditions faced by mothers who are victim-survivors of domestic violence in the home have yet to compel church leadership to listen, discern, and act in a critical, proactive, and compassionate manner to end the cycle of abuse and violence in many households. The ongoing synodal movement in the Catholic Church could nurture a fertile ground for the growth and flourishing of spaces that provide healing and belonging for these women. The working document for the continental stage, entitled "'Enlarge the Space of Your Tent,'" released by the General Secretariat of the Synod in October 2022, begins by noting that "synodality is the way of being Church" and if the church does not take the path of synodality, "no one can feel fully at home."[51] The biblical imagery of the tent used in the document is attributed to other images like family, home, and a place where people want to belong and return to.[52] These connections made between synodality and enlarging the space of the tent, and the tent to that of home suggest that synodality is homemaking.

Home could mean a lot of things to people. It is both an ideal, concept, or metaphor as well as a lived reality.[53] Scholars of home differentiate home as a "thing" and home as an "experience" or "process." Home as a "thing"

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[50] Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Central Secretariat, ed. "FABC Papers 151: The Catholic Family in Asia: Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy" (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 2017), no. 14.

[51] General Secretariat of the Synod, "'Enlarge the Space of Your Tent' (Is 54:2): Working Document for the Continental Stage, October 2022, nos. 3, 24, synod.va/en/highlights/working-document-for-the-continental-stage.html.

[52] General Secretariat of the Synod, "'Enlarge the Space of Your Tent,'" no. 29.

[53] Seforosa Carroll, "Homemaking: Reclaiming the Ideal of Home as a Framework for Hosting Cultural and Religious Diversity," in *Colonial Contexts and Postcolonial Theologies: Storyweaving in the Asia-Pacific*, ed. Mark G. Brett and Jione Havea (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 219.

refers to the place and a physical, tangible structure.[54] An important element of home is that a home is a house, dwelling place, shelter, or any physical structure in which people are being housed.[55] The second framework considers home as a "process" that refers to the affective experiences of interpersonal relationships with persons one associates with feeling at home.[56] More than a place where one lives, home is also "an idea and imaginary that is imbued with both positive feelings and experiences of belonging, desire, and intimacy, as well as negative ones like violence, control, fear, and alienation."[57] This framing makes possible the expansion of the notions and realities of home, making it a multifaceted and intersectional concept and experience. A synodal church, therefore, needs to attend and support the undertakings of women victim-survivors to envision, construct meaning, embody, and actualize structures and experiences of home as a crucial part of their recovery and flourishing.

Pope St. John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* and the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines in the *Acts and Degrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* both acknowledged the family as "Church of the Home"[58] and "Church in the home"[59] respectively. Considered a domestic church, Christian families reveal and communicate the love of God.[60] Mothers and wives are identified as the "heart of the home" who, more than the fathers, are in charge of rearing children in the home.[61] Although *Familiaris Consortio* is grounded in the widespread social and cultural tradition that limits women's role to being a wife and a mother, it stresses the need to recognize the rights of women and condemn the offenses

[54] Barbara Jo McClure, "Carrying Home: Theoretical and Theological Reflections on the Politics of Attachment and Belonging," *Pastoral Psychology* 70, no. 3 (2021): 242.
[55] Robyn M. Dowling and Alison Blunt, *Home* (Routledge, 2022), 9.
[56] McClure, "Carrying Home," 242.
[57] Dowling and Blunt, *Home*, 9.
[58] Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 52.
[59] Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 1992), no. 421.
[60] *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines,* no. 575.
[61] *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines*, no. 578.

against their dignity. However, the church's perspectives on the true advancement for women are still tied up more to their maternal and familial roles than other public roles and professions (no. 23). *Familiaris Consortio* even insists on overcoming the mentality that acknowledges women more for their work outside the home than for their work within the family (no. 23). This makes home and homemaking highly contested themes in feminist discourses, including in theology. Some feminists would argue that the comforts and supports of home and homemaking come at the expense of the personhood and well-being of women, noting that their gendered roles and responsibilities experienced and performed at home deprive the women of support for their own identity and projects.[62]

Despite recognizing the oppressions and privileges that the idea of home and homemaking carry historically, Iris Marion Young believes that home and homemaking still carry liberating elements and potentials because of the values they express, especially in the meaning-making endeavors that most women do in the domestic space and work.[63] For feminist scholar and activist bell hooks, the home place is a "space of care and nurturance" and a "site of resistance and liberation struggle" against dominating and exploitative social structures, restoring one's dignity that is denied in the public world.[64] Young emphasized that while it is important to criticize how the nostalgia of home perpetuates conditions that require women to make men and their children comfortable at their expense, it is also equally important to conceptualize the positive values of home and use them to criticize a society that is unwilling to extend these values to everyone.[65] M. Jan Holton defines home place as the "experience of one's physical, spiritual, and emotional relationship with family, biological and chosen; the physical environment, both natural and built, in which one dwells and engages in the practices of daily life; and God or

[62] Iris Marion Young, *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 134.
[63] Young, *Intersecting Voices*, 134.
[64] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Routledge, 2015), 78–79.
[65] Young, *Intersecting Voices*, 161.

the sacred."[66] The home place is deeply connected to the sacred, inviting one to lean closer to glimpses of God.[67] In light of these critical insights from feminist scholars, the synodal vision poses a serious challenge to the church's understanding of family/home in doctrine as well as praxis. It is imperative that the notion of home is redefined in the light of women's experiences and their vulnerability to abuse so that all the Christian faithful can join hands in realizing the vision of synodality.

Vernacular-Postcolonial Hermeneutics of *Tahanan*

This study hopes to contribute to the deconstruction, reconstruction, and reclamation of home and homemaking in feminist theologies by utilizing Agnes Brazal's vernacular-postcolonial hermeneutics on one of the Filipino translations of home, *tahanan*. Brazal defines vernacular-postcolonial hermeneutics as the use of local resources or categories to understand and decolonize the interpretation of the faith tradition.[68] In doing vernacular hermeneutics, the study presents *tahanan* as a spatial imaginary and home place that recognizes *pananahan ng Diyos* in the person of the abused mother and nurtures her individuation, agency, and wholeness. Moreover, from a postcolonial lens, *tahanan* also involves *pagpapatahan*, which is not a silencing or denial of one's suffering but rather the collective task of creating safe spaces for healing through the practice of "feminist collective care" that listens to silenced narratives and supports victim-survivors in the task of homemaking for and within themselves.

One of the Filipino words for home, *tahanan*, aligns with the concepts of home as a spatial imaginary and home place. As a "thing," *tahanan*

[66] M. Jan Holton, *Longing for Home: Forced Displacement and Postures of Hospitality* (Yale University Press, 2016), 14.
[67] Holton, *Longing for Home*, 35.
[68] Agnes Brazal, "Sexuality as *Pangangatawan*: A Postcolonial Feminist Perspective," in *Toward a Bai Theology: Catholic Feminism in the Philippines*, ed. Agnes M. Brazal and Virginia Fabella (Claretian Communications Foundation, 2023), 202.

pertains to a dwelling or an abode, a house or *bahay* in Filipino.[69] On the other hand, as a "process," *tahanan* refers not just to an ordinary habitation or dwelling place but the feeling and experience of comfort, consolation, serenity, and peace.[70] Associations of *tahanan* to these emotions and conditions stem from its root word *tahan,* which has a positive connotation of "cessation" from crying,[71] joking, scolding, or the like.[72] In the Bikolano language, *tahán* is "to endure more than the another."[73] *Tahan* also means residing, living, or dwelling in a place, similar to the meaning of another word connected to *tahanan*, which is *pananahan*.[74] *Pananahan* is the act of living or having residence in a certain place.[75] Lastly, *nahan* is a colloquial variant of *nasaan*, the Filipino translation for the interrogative where is/are.[76]

Home and homemaking have been manipulated and weaponized by religion to perpetuate dehumanizing paradigms and practices against women and other marginalized groups. Examples of these are two housing ideologies: the domestic ideal and the familial ideology. The domestic ideal, which is built on the patriarchal model of assigning men to the public sphere while relegating women to the private domestic spaces, promotes home-work separation and a public-private divide that could be detrimental to women.[77] The problems emerging from this model include making the house a workplace for women, thus burdening them with homemaking and isolating them from accessing social support and

[69] *New Brainworld Dual Dictionary: English-Filipino, Filipino-English* (Children's Press and Bindery Company, 2016), s.v. "tahanan."

[70] Arnel Santos, "Tahan Na," *Philippine Star Opinion*, philstar.com/opinion/2012/09/16/849511/tahan-na.

[71] Santos, "Tahan Na."

[72] *New Filipino-Filipino with English Dictionary* (Encleare Foundation, 2007), s.v. "tahan."

[73] Nathaniel Hermosa, "*Mundo ang Tahanan Ko*," *Rappler*, June 12, 2012, rappler.com/moveph/6885-mundo-ang-tahanan-ko/.

[74] *New Filipino-Filipino with English Dictionary*, s.v. "tahan."

[75] *Pilipino-English Dictionary* (National Book Store, 1983), s.v. "pananahan."

[76] *New Brainworld Dual Dictionary*.

[77] Kam Wah Chan and Patricia Kennett, *Women and Housing: An International Analysis* (Routledge, 2011), 5.

services.[78] The familial ideology, on the other hand, is based on the assumption of the "family as a unit," which is often assumed to be the conventional heterosexual married nuclear family and traditional gender role differentiation within the unit.[79]

Familiaris Consortio categorized two types of family arrangements the church needs to attend to in their various and specialized ministries: those in regular arrangements and those belonging to irregular situations (no. 65). In *Amoris Laetitia*, families in regular arrangements, which comprise a father, mother, and children, are recognized as "fruitful homes" (no. 6). The church and society should strive for the preservation of marriages, with separation being considered as the last resort and a restriction on marrying another person.[80] This category is potentially harmful to wives with abusive husbands. How much pain should the wife endure until she is freed from the abuse and violence of her husband? How long is the woman's *pagtahán* just to keep the marriage? Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza examines the kyriarchal love ethic and its disciplining practices to understand women's continued collaboration in and their submission to domestic and sexual violence.[81] While she recognized Christian theology's work to condemn oppression, exploitation, and victimization, she brought to light the "Christian proclamation of the kyriarchal politics of submission and its attendant virtues of self-sacrifice, silence [or pseudo-*pagtahan*], docility, subservience, obedience, suffering, unconditional forgiveness, male authority, and unquestioning surrender to God's will," covertly advocating patriarchal practices of subjugation and victimization to be Christian.[82] For theologies to be liberating, they have to publicly

[78] Chan and Kennett, *Women and Housing*, 5.

[79] Chan and Kennett, *Women and Housing*, 6.

[80] *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines*, no. 591.

[81] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Ties That Bind: Domestic Violence Against Women: Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality for Life," in *Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality for Life*, ed. Mary John Mananzan et al. (Orbis Books, 1996), 49. "Kyriarchy" is a socio-cultural-political structure of elite male-defined relationships of ruling that engenders multiple forms of oppression, such as sexism, heterosexism, classism, colonialism, racism, etc.

[82] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Ties That Bind," 49.

condemn the institutionalized structures of heterosexist kyriarchal Christian families and church.[83]

The church sees couples who are only civilly wed, divorced, remarried, and cohabitating as imperfectly participating in its life (*Amoris Laetitia*, no. 78). Without a careful understanding of the contexts and causes of these familial conditions, this category may perpetuate a culture of exclusion and marginalization as they are labeled "imperfect" family arrangements. Women who do not belong to conventional family and marriage relationships, like those who are living alone, single mothers, elderly women, or lesbians, may not be able to enjoy full housing rights compared to other citizens.[84] Research shows that domestic violence leads to many cases of homelessness, *kawalan ng tahanan*, of women and their children. Using the feminist liberationist ethical methodology of Traci West, Laura Stivers called out the dominant ideology instilled in the individual-focused "rescue and recovery response" that connects homelessness with individual and character deficiencies, steering away from examining critically the status quo and thus leading to reforming those who are homeless.[85] This ideal image of the "good homeowner" is a heterosexual middle-class nuclear family with certain assumptions that the households are healthy and thus the foundation for economic and political independence.[86]

All this precariousness, insecurity, and vulnerability encountered by women victim-survivors of domestic abuse concerning home, housing, and homemaking are mirrored in the experiences of an Old Testament character named Hagar in Genesis 16. Hagar experienced multiple and intersectional forms of oppression, including domestic abuse, in the household of Abram and Sarai. She was oppressed based on her race as an Egyptian, her class as a slave to Sarai, and her social status as a female in the

[83] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Ties That Bind," 49.
[84] Chan and Kennett, *Women and Housing*, 6.
[85] Chan and Kennett, *Women and Housing*, 6, 54.
[86] Chan and Kennett, *Women and Housing*, 53.

patriarchal context in Israel.[87] She became homeless after being evicted from the family of Abram and Sarai, with no economic resources for survival nor protection because she was a slave without a family.[88] However, amid these dangers and difficulties, in her book *Sisters in Wilderness*, Delores Williams points out Hagar's agency, autonomy, courage, and strength. Hagar dealt with her poverty and homelessness by founding her own house or tribe.[89] Her tradition is not concerned with liberating the oppressed but with showing capacities for survival in the wilderness of racist, sexist, and classist oppression.[90] Hagar's agency and participation in her and Ishmael's survival are a fitting paradigm of the women-centered tradition that many oppressed women in the world may find relevant and appropriate.[91] Hagar's example can help victim-survivors to see themselves not in terms of being victims of unjust structures but rather in terms of possessing the agency, power, and strength to confront these oppressive systems and to rely on the powerful presence of the divine that sustains and liberates them.[92]

Patriarchy has facilitated women's internalization of disdain and alienation from their bodies. The violence inflicted on women's bodies has led to an experience of displacement, compromising how they see their dignity and worth. Hagar's homemaking journey exemplifies the *pananahan ng Diyos,* the indwelling of God in her person. While there are many ways for women victim-survivors of abuse and trauma to articulate or give voice to the power within them, women of faith most often attribute this power to the grace of God. This grace does not come as an

[87] Rasika Sharmen Pieris, "(En)Forced Displacement of Others from Their Own Land: A Feminist Theological Reading of Story of Hagar," in *Displacement and Disqualification: Asian Feminist Theological Perspectives*, ed. Mary Mee-Yin Yuen and Regina Wentzel Wolfe (Claretian Communications Foundation, 2022), 83.

[88] Pieris, "(En)Forced Displacement of Others from Their Own Land," 84–85.

[89] Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Orbis Books, 2013), 32.

[90] Pieris, "(En)Forced Displacement of Others from Their Own Land," 85.

[91] Pieris, "(En)Forced Displacement of Others from Their Own Land," 86.

[92] Pieris, "(En)Forced Displacement of Others from Their Own Land," 96.

external gift endowed from without. Rather, as a woman made in the image and likeness of God, women experience this grace as an internal force, belonging fully to both God and her. This truth can help women victim-survivors to see their bodies as intrinsically good and beautiful and facilitate the re-reading of our religious traditions, which passed on questionable messages about the body.[93] Like Hagar, women can claim the right to bodily and sexual integrity and decisions concerning their bodies.[94] Furthermore, a home place that leans into God entails naming the safe places, where a life-giving and liberating *pagtatahan* or cessation of suffering takes place.[95]

Women victim-survivors have lived in very unsafe home places with their families and now may have moved away from their original home places. Given that their relationships with their families have become ambivalent spaces that foster various forms of violence, and that they are now exposed to additional dangers and vulnerabilities while searching for a place to call home, the church must always remain open to journeying with them. The church is called to be a synodal church that provides spaces for the manifestation of the "*Syn-hodal* God"[96] who accompanies the afflicted in an incarnate way as modeled by Jesus and enables humans to become God's presence in their efforts to nourish and sustain the life of all creation.[97]

[93] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Ties That Bind," 75.

[94] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Ties That Bind," 76.

[95] Holton, *Longing for Home*, 35.

[96] Based on the etymology of the term "synodality"—derived from the Greek words *syn*, meaning "with," and *hodos*, meaning "way"—Kochurani Abraham coined the term "Syn-hodal God" to describe a God who walks with those who are suffering and accompanies them in their struggle for justice.

[97] Kochurani Abraham, "Encountering the Syn-Hodal God: Divine Providence Beyond Patriarchal Spaces," *Concilium* 2023, no. 3 (2023): 65, 71.

Towards a Theology of Feminist Collective Care for Battered Wives and Mothers

A theology of feminist collective care poses a challenge to a church that seeks to practice synodality, grounded in vernacular-postcolonial hermeneutics of *tahanan* and the lived and embodied experiences of both survivors and care providers.

Pagpapatahan

First, a theology of feminist collective care aims to give comfort and consolation (*pagpapatahan*). Building on feminist care principles of listening, understanding, and nurturing, in *pagpapatahan,* we recognize that there is no true comfort in the silencing or denial of the suffering of abused wives and mothers. *Pagpapatahan* requires openness to the woman who had been silenced time and again, as her story must now be received in safety. To care more about being "fair" by claiming that we need to hear the side of the abuser first or that the woman has to offer proof or justification before offering validation and care is ultimately cruel and unjust. The last thing we want to say to a woman who shares her story is, "What were you doing that provoked this man to hurt you?" or "Are you sure he did not intend to do it?" Knowing that the violence can never be justified, one does not need all the pieces of the story to offer *pagpapatahan* to a woman who has been hurt. One only needs to understand that her pain is real and that her story is sacred and demands space for expression. Individuals and communities engage in *pagpapatahan* when they listen to a woman's cry for help, share in her anger and grief, and accompany her in her process of meaning-making, guided by an awareness of vulnerability and power within structures that seek to silence her and deny her right to safety.

Tahanan

Second, a theology of feminist collective care aims to help women rebuild a sense of home (*tahanan*). Connected to the feminist care principles of

autonomy and action plan and safety and social support, *pagpapatahan* is a process that involves creating caring and safe spaces so that women suffering from trauma may once again feel a sense of *teahanan* within themselves and in the world around them. Collective care makes way for the reclamation of one's intuition, confidence, and agency in decision-making, which are all necessary parts of re-building or homemaking. There is already a growing sense among Filipino women that wife-beating is not justifiable, but the freedom to safely flee from an abusive marriage has been denied to many underprivileged women, who remain trapped in their situation because of patriarchal systems and cultures that do not offer them and their children support. A synodal church would not only provide spiritual accompaniment, offering support that alleviates the emotional, mental, and spiritual struggles many women endure, but would also share its power with other groups that can offer women the services that they need and challenge the power of the patriarchy within and outside of itself, especially in ways it had limited women's agency and safety.

Institutions that trap women in abusive marriages and limit their agency and choice, which are required for authentic love, can never truly be *tahanan.* An abused wife does not have to prove that she is at her limit or that she needs a way out of a situation that threatens her safety and well-being. Her story and life are for her to tell and shape. Any choice she makes for her children or for her own self is hers to discern and own. Her children's flourishing depends on her capacity to create a home within herself. A woman who fights for herself and her children, as she demands justice and good moral behavior from her husband, enhances and strengthens the family.[98] A theology of feminist collective care does not call for a mother's self-sacrifice but rather maintains that there should be no false separation between a woman's well-being and the well-being of her

[98] Rizza Kaye C. Cases, Manuel Victor J. Sapitula, and Daniel Franklin E. Pilario, eds., *Sexual Violence Against Women: Victim-Survivors and Faith-Based Responses* (St. Vincent School of Theology–Adamson University, 2023), 251.

family, and it is from this understanding that the rebuilding of home proceeds.

Pananahan ng Diyos

Lastly, a theology of feminist collective care challenges institutions to truly see women as *Imago Dei*. The feminist care principles of LUNAS in a synodal Church are to be guided by the recognition of *pananahan ng Diyos* or the indwelling of God within women, animating a dynamic process of meaning-making and liberation. Wives and mothers are not only *ilaw ng tahanan* ("light of the home") but are also dwelling places of God. God is present and active through women in their individuality, relationality, vulnerability, and power. As *imago Dei*, abused mothers and wives can be like the mother bear who, roaring and with claws out, fiercely expresses her anger to protect herself and her cubs (Hosea 13:8). They can be like Sophia, who holds wisdom and power, demands listening, and brings justice, protection, and transformation (Proverbs 1:23–27; Wisdom 10:15–19).

If women, as created and beloved human beings, are also sacraments of God, how do we love, recognize, honor, and listen to the victim-survivor of violence? If we see women as *imago Dei* and sacrament, we will not force or coerce them into self-sacrifice. To do so would be an act of oppression, since any act of self-sacrifice is a conscious choice that a woman, made in the image and likeness of God, must freely and responsibly make for herself, and not out of fear of more violence either from her husband or from institutions that would punish her for daring to step out of line. To resort to victim-blaming, to sacrifice women to patriarchal gods that disguise themselves as "family stability and order," and to knowingly limit women's options is to fail to recognize them as *sacraments.* The sacred in-dwelling of God in her should not be desecrated by a patriarchal society that does not see women as *imago Dei* by denying them their God-given freedom to discern and live according to the movement of the Spirit within them. As *imago Dei*, the woman suffering from domestic abuse can trust her intuition and body to signal to her when she is at her limit or when she needs to create the light of *tahanan* for and within herself, where God dwells. It is from this space that

she can thrive in relationality and care for her family in the way that she discerns is needed, appropriate, and just in her context.

Conclusion

Against prevailing structural barriers and realities that devalue women, spaces that truly see women as *imago Dei* are critically needed. In such spaces, there is a true sense of *tahanan* for women, as their individuation, agency, and wholeness are nurtured and supported, and their stories are validated and listened to. The challenge before a synodal church in the making is to create safe spaces and communities of collective care for women to take their power back and make free, safe, and informed choices for themselves and their families, as they reclaim wellbeing for themselves and their children.

Truly, it is impossible to listen and accompany women and to practice synodality without seeing them as *imago Dei*, God's dwelling places, free to choose and re-create home as they define and imagine it, amidst oppressive structures that seek to silence, deny, and distort their full humanity.

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