

WOMEN'S GLOBAL NETWORK FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

PASYA ADVOCAZINE

Issue 2. December 2023.

MEET THE
POWER UP!
CAMPAIGNERS



Intersections
of SRHR with Key Issues

Sexual
Harassment
is NO
whistling
matter

Amidst
climate related
disasters

Brief ni Tita
and other creative works

ABOUT PASYA ADVOCAZINE


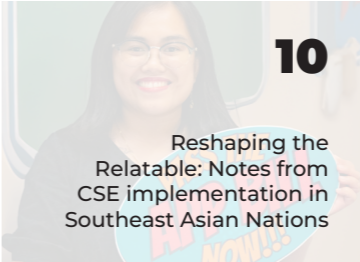
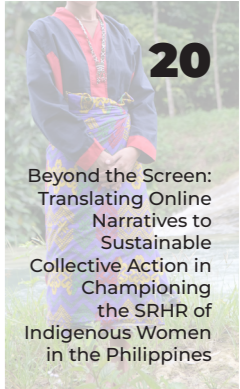

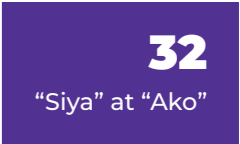




Pasya (pa·sya)
the Filipino word for decision,
or a choice one makes after
thinking carefully.

At Pasya, as SRHR advocates, we believe that when women and girls have the access and capacity to use information, are aware of their rights and entitlements, and have the opportunity to voice their rights, they can effectively demand obligations from duty bearer to bring about change in policy and practice, and create a positive shift in social and cultural norms and values so women and girls are free and able to make informed choices towards having safe and healthy sexual and reproductive health and lives, free from stigma, fear, and violence.

Pasya aims to collect and share learnings and advocacy practices, amplify the stories and demands of women, girls, and other vulnerable and marginalized groups.

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Message from the Editorial Team

Our experience in claiming our sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is shaped by the interplay of our social identities and the structures and systems in place. It may also happen within our experiences of multiple and concurrent crises - the climate crisis, authoritarianism, health emergencies, and extreme inequality, to name a few.

The unique experiences of inequalities based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class, and other forms of discrimination “intersect” to create unique experiences of marginalization. Recognizing and addressing intersecting forms of marginalization and oppression is crucial to better understanding our experiences accessing and exercising SRHR.

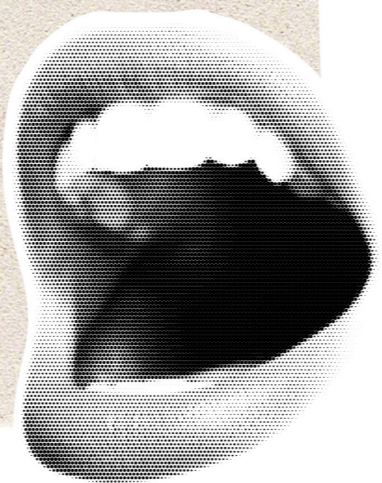
Many factors simultaneously exist with the legal, socio-economic, and political aspects that also impact SRHR. Restrictive laws and policies on SRHR can limit access to essential services, while poverty and inequality can prevent individuals from accessing necessary healthcare services. Weak governance and corruption at the same time can limit the availability and quality of healthcare services. Examining all these factors hindering achievement of our SRHR is vital in upholding human rights, promoting gender equality, improving health outcomes, empowering individuals, achieving social justice, and reducing health disparity. Our work, therefore, is to defend these rights so that all may enjoy them and enjoy their rights equally. #SRHR4ALL means no one is left behind.

For the second issue of Pasya Advocazine, we called for contributions and invited advocates and partners to: share experiences, discuss frameworks and analytical tools that could guide inquiry on the interplay of systems of oppression with inequality and inequity in sexual and reproductive health, illustrate how the concurrence of crises, identity factors, and contextual factors also affect SRHR; and show approaches or strategies used or can be used by social movements and organizations to work together and address the complex intersecting factors that shape people's SRHR.

This issue hopes to support in deepening our understanding of how determinants and varying contexts shape particular group's experiences, and how women and girls in all their diversity are also actively shaping and re-shaping these contexts towards claiming bodily autonomy and the realization of #SRHR4All.

From the Pasta Advocazine and WGNRR Team, we thank our contributors and partners for this issue.

We hope everyone has a happy and thought-provoking reading! #



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The Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) is a southern-based global network that connects and strengthens movements for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and justice.

Our work is grounded in the realities of those who most lack economic, social and political power. Established in 1984, we are now moving towards our 40th year of mobilizing and advancing SRHR and justice for all.

When women from all over the world during the 4th International Women and Health Meetings (IWHM) in 1984 broke their silence and asserted solidarity for women's reproductive health and rights, the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) was born.



The International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 was a watershed year for women's health. WGNRR was part of a coalition that ensured women's voices were heard and represented at the conference. WGNRR was also closely involved in the development of the Programme of Action for the Women's World Conference in Beijing that year. Since then, WGNRR has been mobilizing and campaigning together with partners and allies for the realization of SRHR for all, with notable global campaign periods on May 28 International Day of Action for Women's Health and September 28 - International Safe Abortion Day.

ABOUT



PROJECT

The Sexual Health and Empowerment (SHE) Project seeks to empower women and girls their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in six disadvantaged and conflict-affected regions of the Philippines.

It will improve knowledge and awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights, particularly among women and girls, including the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV); strengthen health systems and community structures to deliver rights-based comprehensive SRH information and services; and improve the effectiveness and capacity of women's rights organizations (WROs) and women's movements to advance SRHR and prevent GBV.

The SHE Project network is composed of 11 organizations:



SHE is undertaken with the financial support of:



SRHR & CLIMATE JUSTICE

Alisandra Lei S. Escobar & Maria Daryl L. Leyesa

Alisandra Lei Escobar is a Project Officer of the Pambansang Koalisyon ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan (PKKK), also known as the National Rural Women Coalition. She works together with rural women leaders in the Philippines to realize women-led and gender responsive resilient communities and to claim and defend women's rights and other vulnerable sectors in emergencies, disasters, and conflict situations.

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*“Mahirap sa buntis kapag nagbagyo at kailangan mag-bakwit”
– Jumra, resident of Purok 11, Barangay Saloagan, Dimataling.*

After hearing her story, “*mahirap*” seems to be an understatement, especially if one would imagine how her six-month pregnant daughter had to be rushed out from their house on stilts that swayed violently against the wind and waves. The makeshift wooden planks that bridged their house to the shore were twice as dangerous during the storm.

When Typhoon Paeng hit the coastal barangay of Saloagan in the municipality of Dimataling, the residents didn't anticipate the strong wind. They were used to the high tide and occasional strong waves, but not to the combination of unprecedented rise of water and strong wind. In their purok alone, 13 households were affected, among the residents were 31 women and 25 girls, of which four are people with disabilities and one pregnant person.

Most neighboring families evacuated to the houses of their relatives. Jumra's family, including her married children and their families, have no relatives living nearby. The designated evacuation center in the barangay was the elementary school. However, Jumra said that they were too shy to evacuate to the barangay proper, typical of their Samal tribe. They sought temporary shelter for the night in one of their neighbor's vacant houses but again felt too embarrassed to stay longer since they were not used to the housing provisions. For instance, they were not used to not having their own urinal pot, which is one of the things they lost during the storm. They also lost most of their kitchen wares. Some of the family members got sick after the storm and were forced to spend the savings originally intended for their daughter's delivery. Now they have less than three months to prepare for the birth and incoming addition to the family, with the challenge of unstable income from fishing.





...the Philippines has the highest disaster risk among 193 countries around the world. This is due to the country's high exposure, vulnerability, and lack of coping and adaptive capacities in the face of disasters.



Jumra's family is only one of the thousands of vulnerable Filipino households greatly affected by Tropical Storm Paeng. According to the 2022 report released by the World Risk Index, the Philippines has the highest disaster risk among 193 countries around the world. This is due to the country's high exposure, vulnerability, and lack of coping and adaptive capacities in the face of disasters. The adverse effects of these disaster events vary among age, class, income groups, and gender. The poor, primarily, are expected to be disproportionately impacted and are in greater need of adaptation strategies. Women and children, in particular those in poor communities are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of disasters, specifically threats to their health. Direct impacts include disruption and lack of access to SRH services while it also bring about heightened incidences of gender-based violence, trafficking, and prostitution in communities due to the crisis.

In the Philippines, there is a National Policy on the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) in Health Emergencies and Disasters that shall be implemented at the onset of an emergency and is guided by the principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality and should make use of national estimates on population data and health care. This includes services on safe motherhood, family planning, STI, HIV, and AIDS, and gender-based violence in crisis situations.

However, despite the recognition and steps taken to realize a more gender-responsive and inclusive climate action and disaster-risk management, it is still not done systematically and sufficiently in all communities and contexts. For instance, sex and age-disaggregated data is not readily available which could have been the basis for a more gender-responsive humanitarian response. Local government manpower addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues in humanitarian situations are often insufficient, e.g. one nurse for three barangays. There is also a higher demand for services on SRHR but resources are limited by the crisis itself. Providers are often unaware or lack sufficient knowledge on how to meet specific needs of women during disasters,

e.g. MISPs are seldom available at the municipal or barangay level during response.

These are just some of the challenges that women and girls face and proactively address. The Women in Emergencies Network (WENet) and Pambansang Koalisyon ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan (PKKK), as advocates of gender-responsive and inclusive disaster risk response and management, have rallied for the following policy demands:

- ◆ Recognition, protection, and support of SRHR towards its incorporation into emergency risk management policies and plans at national and local levels;
- ◆ Estimate the impact of identified SRH risks to strengthen the overall healthcare system and plan for emergency response;
- ◆ Promotion of women-led disaster risk response and climate justice actions, which include the organizing of gender-based violence and sexual reproductive health (GBV SRH) Watch Groups, recognizing that women and other vulnerable sectors have the ability to come up with serious and long term solutions, benefiting the community at large;
- ◆ Conduct participatory capacity & vulnerability assessment (PCVA), and provide early warning for communities and vulnerable groups;
- ◆ Involve vulnerable groups in the development and implementation of community early warning systems ensuring that systems are gender-responsive; and,
- ◆ Create an environment of learning and awareness for the community on the interconnectedness of SRH, climate change, and other social justice issues.

In the recently conducted Conference of Parties (COP) 27 in Egypt, it was observed that there is little discussion on SRHR and climate justice intersectionality, hence not enough to address the problems of gender inequality.

We reiterate our call that climate justice cannot be achieved without gender equality, and gender equality cannot be achieved without the realization of SRHR. #



'RESHAPING THE RELATABLE':

Notes from CSE implementation in Southeast Asian Nations

Eliza Angela Lugtu & Aleah Syrille Reyes



Eliza Angela Lugtu is an Area Studies Major graduate from the University of the Philippines Manila. She was an intern in WGNRR last 2021 and is currently a member of the Young Advocates for SRHR (YAS). As an aspiring physician, she is concerned with SRHR as an underrated aspect of health.

Aleah Syrille Reyes is an Area Studies Major from UP Manila. Her interest for SRHR started in 2021 when she was still pursuing her degree and worked as an intern in WGNRR. Currently, she is a member of the Young Advocates for SRHR.

The return of face-to-face (f2f) classes amid a global pandemic may indicate a country's success because it means that the virus is contained enough to make schools safe again. In the Philippines, the news about the transition to f2f classes concerns not just the parents worrying for their child's safety but also young students who became parents during the pandemic. Some Filipinos seem to be aware of the rise of teenage pregnancy as related memes surfaced in social media upon hearing about the probability of returning to physical schools. For instance, there is one joke about high school students complaining about the f2f setup because no one would look after the baby they gave birth to during the pandemic. There is also one portraying a typical pranked classmate whose belonging was hidden until the victim is about to cry or flip out, but instead of a missing material object like a pencil or a bag, she demands to have her child back. This may seem laughable at first but it is quite alarming when realized that although teenage pregnancy is not a new issue, it has become more relatable.

Sexuality issues of the youth are not new and not just observed in the Philippines but also in the region that it belongs to, Southeast Asia. In 2018, country reports from Southeast Asia show a continuous rise in child marriages, early unions, and teenage pregnancies which urged UNICEF and UNFPA to organize a forum in Bangkok that would discuss these issues and how to tackle them (Islam, 2018). Numerous sexual and reproductive health concerns were identified, and the limited knowledge that further exacerbates the problem was given utmost attention. Thus, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) was determined as a key to empowering the youth in making better informed and responsible choices.

The mention of sex education is sometimes misunderstood as provoking or encouraging

sexual intimacy among students when in fact, studies show that CSE contributes to reducing sexual activities and risks (UNESCO, 2018). According to the 2018 International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education, the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is a teaching and learning process that encompasses different aspects of sexuality including thought processes, emotions, physical feelings, and social life especially regarding relationships. As such, CSE is not about teaching sex. It discusses sexuality as an essential part of life, identity, health, and human rights. The coverage of the CSE seems promising but its implementation is still up to the country that will adopt it in their educational system.

CSE in SEA

If there is evidence to show that integrating the CSE in the educational curriculum contributes to mitigating sexuality issues, how are countries in Southeast Asia implementing it? The CSE implementation in the Philippines could be analyzed or reviewed along with other Southeast Asian countries so that additional recommendations can be drawn from nations that we relatively have a lot in common with. According to the International Planned Parenthood Federation East & South East Asia and Oceania Region (IPPF ESEAOR) (2020) Report, the differences mainly pertain to two matters: 1) how they call their sexuality education, design and deliver the curriculum, and 2) how it is prioritized by the national educational system. A CSE curriculum may vary from being a stand-alone subject or as a topic integrated into existing subjects. Priority may be gauged based on how much a country requires CSE or not. The CSE implementation may also be worth comparing based on the subregions of Southeast Asia (SEA): the Mainland SEA with nations sharing borders and Insular SEA with geographical disconnect.

Out of five countries in Mainland SEA, three mandates a stand-alone CSE at the elementary and high school level. This includes the 'Health Education' in Cambodia, the 'Life Skills Education' in Myanmar, and Thailand that also integrates it with Health Education. As for Laos PDR, they integrate CSE in both school levels with biology, civic learning, and social media use; however, implementation varies per school type, whether public, private, faith-based, or others. Likewise, Vietnam has an integrated curriculum for CSE but due to a decentralized education system, implementation is optional and dependent on the provincial and school authorities' decision.

As for the Insular SEA, only two out of six countries mandate CSE in elementary and high school level, namely, Philippines and Malaysia, while

the rest have optional curricula or none. The Philippines integrated CSE into the K-to-12 curriculum but implementation is school type-based (public, private, or faith-based). Malaysia requires the 'Reproductive Health and Social Education' (PEERS) in all schools and is integrated in health, biology, moral, and Islamic education, however, children are generally not required to attend high school level. CSE in East Timor is similar to the Philippines in terms of being school type-based, and to Malaysia for not requiring high school education except that they do not really have any CSE for high school. For the CSE in Indonesia, there is an optional module called "You and Me" at the elementary level. The 'Reproduction Health' topics integrated with the sciences, physical education and sports, and moral subjects are only mandatory in high school. The IPPF ESEAOR has no data on Singapore and Brunei Darussalam. However, other sources show that Singapore values the role of parents in implementing their "holistic and secular" curriculum, so they are given the choice to opt their children out (Liviniyah, 2018) and Brunei as an Islamic state has none at all.

Efforts of Southeast Asian nations in response to CSE vary as discussed but among these experiences, the factors affecting the program both positively and negatively should be well documented to serve as lessons in moving forward. By doing so, better programs and initiatives could be done in accordance with each country's political, religious, social or

cultural restrictions and limitations including resources that could lead to improved adolescent health outcomes.

Thailand and Indonesia serve as examples in this success when they recorded moderate improvements regarding the important aspects and determinants of safe sex behaviour. Specifically in Thailand, its CSE programs significantly contributed to students' self-disclosure about sensitive, sexuality-related topics. Such achievements in the region of Southeast Asia were attained through community collaboration and participation, integration of CSE in the education sector plan, along with the standardization of the whole implementation and evaluation process. Combining the efforts of stakeholders and decision-makers will make sure that the program would be tailor-fit to the country's needs and context which shall gather more societal support allowing increased reception especially towards the younger population. Yet these actions would require government interventions that would further solidify support towards sexuality education. The country's commitment shall aid in including CSE in the education sector plan which would provide the main action framework and budget to ease the introduction of CSE into the community and employ it in a systematic process. Having a concrete plan and a set of guidelines in the whole implementation and evaluation of the CSE programs shall ensure surveillance, consistency, and even expansion in addressing SRHR issues of young people.

Challenges encountered

However, successful implementation of effective CSE programs is not the prominent case in the region. In contrast, some CSE programs were rather ineffective or non-existent as countries in Southeast Asia face cultural, social, political, and economic challenges. The most distinguished among these barriers is the conservative cultural and religious values which hindered discussions about sexuality. As the social norms established sexual matters as taboo topics, seeking for such knowledge was being discouraged by attaching shame and fear towards anybody going against it. Moreover, this background also caused some governments to have limited laws and policies intending to include CSE components. Conversely, there were also countries who are policy-rich for CSE but there were remaining unresolved gaps such that sexuality education

is still sidelined in other subjects. As a result, there is still inadequate information about sexuality education, and it does not provide an in-depth understanding of sexual matters. Furthermore, there is ineffective teacher training and sensitization which inhibits teachers' confidence to deliver and increase students' receptivity. These factors altogether led to the failure in achieving the desired outcomes for young people. Yet more importantly, failing to overcome these challenges wastes a great opportunity to develop children into becoming better-informed and protected individuals.

“
The mention of sex education is sometimes misunderstood as provoking or encouraging sexual intimacy among students when in fact, studies show that CSE contributes to reducing sexual activities and risks
”

(UNESCO, 2018)

Ways forward

Teenage pregnancy, among other SRHR issues of young people, worsened after the COVID-19 crisis. It was being subjected as jokes in social media but its declaration as an urgent national priority in the country must emphasize the seriousness of the issue. Having this commitment of the national government must lead the community to effectively address the problem. Yet among the actions that they plan to execute, it should also be called upon the leaders to consider improving the CSE implementation in the country as it could serve as an empowering tool for the youth. But it must be done in line with the significant evidence from the region which shall ground it towards the country's specific needs and context. Through this, rather than the alarming SRHR-related adolescent issues being much more relatable, it should be the sexual and reproductive health of young people being more accessible. #

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Matapos ang Duwal

Juleini Vivien I. Nicdao

“All in all, paglilihi is a cultural concept about pregnancy that has endured for a very long time. In *Vocabulario Tagalog-Castellano* published in 1887, paglilihi translated to *la concepción* or conception. Common understanding of paglilihi manifests in many ways: nausea or morning sickness, taking an inexplicable liking to someone or something, and developing extreme cravings for certain types of food... Paglilihi, moreover, supposedly influenced physical attributes of the unborn baby, as well as influence its personality growing up. The truth, however, is more complicated.”

— Gerald Dizon, “The truth about ‘paglilihi’— an expert explains”, *Philippine Star*

Dahan-dahang lumiligwak ang putik mula sa aking bibig. Dahan-dahan ko ring kinakalkal itong bagong-luwal na luwad upang mahimay kung may buto, hasang, kuko, buhok, o perlas. Mabibigo ako sapagkat hindi matatapos ang lahat sa sandali ng hilo at luwa. Sapagkat ito ang simula ang lahat.

Sapagkat mula ngayon, ang lalamunan ay isa nang mag-aaral ng dulas. Sapagkat bawat singhap, sisidlan na ng dahas. Sapagkat darating ang mga araw at gugustuhin kong tikman ang amag, dilaan ang puyo sa ulo ng mangingibig, agawin ang sampalok ng batang hindi naman nang-aalok o ano mang tamis na bitbit ng mapungay na estranghero, ngatain ang pulseras na iniwan sa aking ina ng kaniyang ina, higupin siguro ang hamog. Buong bayan ang manonood. Ngunit sa paghinga at pahinga sa ngayon, katawan ko ang magbibigay sa akin ng pahintulot.

Sa ngayon. Sapagkat mula ngayon, hindi na sagrado ang malamig na sahog ng banyo. Sasangsang ang lahat sa ngalan ng antiseptiko ng klinika, ng sumpa at basbas ng hagikgikan ng mga sakristan, at sa ngalan ng anghel, giit nila, ng angel. Wala akong taglay na oyayi o hiya, kuna o pagkukulang, ngunit buong bayan ang hihingi’t sasamo: Ano nga ba ang nais ko? Sa aking nginig sa ngayon, iadya itong sagot. Hindi gatas o alak, kahel o asukal, ngunit nais ko lamang bigkasin: aking dasal, aking laya, aking lubos, aking oras, aking sukal, aking lugod, aking di-mawaring krimen, pagkababaeng akin. Sa darating na mga araw, lahat ng di-mawaring akin.

Sapagkat darating ang mga araw at buong bayan ang hihipo’t maghuhubo nitong baywang, tititig at aangkin nitong kabataan. Sapagkat maging tadyang, hindi mag-aalinlangang umusog. Ngunit sa ngayon, habang nakaluhod pa rin ako sa banyo, tahimik ang aking katawan. Sapagkat akin: ang garalgal, ang alaala ng putik na gumagasgas sa ngalangala, ang putik na nanunugat, nambubusal. Hinihipo ko itong mga labi, sinisigurong hindi pa nabubura. Kinukutkot itong pusod at hinaharaya ang ngatngat. Pinipitik ang sariling suso at dinadamdam ang bulok, imbis na banta ng mugto.

Sa sandaling ito ng pag-iisa sa banyo, nag-iisa at sagana pa rin ako. Saksi at salaysay ang dalagang anino. Hindi niya ako ipagkakanulo.



Bilat masks speaks volume of freedom

Ma. Diosa Labiste



Ma. Diosa Labiste is a Professor at the Department of Journalism of the University of the Philippines Diliman.

This article was originally published online by Women Writing Women at womenwritingwomen.com.

Editors' Note: This story was updated to remove a reference to Duterte as requested by Zerrudo.

When it comes to statement masks, nothing beats the chutzpah of *f(vagina)* masks that were stitched by women inside the prisons of Iloilo City.

Hand-embroidered on cloth masks were representations of vulvas in various states and dispositions: basking in the sun, surf, and sky; in the garden with a teddy bear, rosary, and a butterfly; becoming a window to catch a glimpse of the summer sun and an ice cream cart; and regal as an odd-shaped, postmodern insect with four menacing tentacles. And many more.

The *bilat* masks were sewn at the height of the pandemic last year, when the country went through what was said as among the strictest lockdowns in the world, the time when cities and towns were placed on a quarantine to stem the spread of COVID-19. When masking was soon required, everyone scrambled to find precious supply of surgical masks. This gave rise to mask-making ventures, that by using some sturdy fabrics the spread of coronavirus might just be contained. (Spoiler alert: it did not.) A "restorative social enterprise" evolved to produce *bilat* masks in prison during the pandemic. However, that is just one aspect of it.

The *Inday* Dolls Project and the vagina masks

The vagina masks were the offshoot of the internationally acclaimed "*Inday* Dolls Project," which started in 2014 and initiated by Ma. Rosalie Zerrudo with a professorial research grant from the University of San Agustin. Zerrudo's class project later grew with the support of local and international institutions and organizations, and with initial funds from the University of San Agustin and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. It is both a psychosocial support and livelihood project for women detainees, specifically an art therapy that brings them income.

The healing process, according to Zerrudo, comes through telling of stories that came alive through process-centered healing workshops, poetry, prison theater performances, embroidery, and the handcrafts that they can sell – dolls, tapestries, and other needle products.

The women behind the doll project came from the cramped city jail for more than 100 women detainees living in a space intended for 30. Some 90 percent of them were facing drug charges. The youngest among them is 18, the oldest, 70. Some were mothers and breadwinners who still support their families, for example, by washing clothes inside the jail.

Zerrudo, together with Dennis Gupa, wrote about the prison project in ArtsPraxis, a journal that analyzes arts in society. Zerrudo is a cultural worker and a multimedia artist who earned her MA in educational theater from New York University while Gupa is a theater director pursuing a doctorate in applied theater in the University of Victoria.



For Zerrudo and Gupa, prison arts and crafts are not only therapeutic, but they also prefigure a better world waiting for the women after their release. They argued that through the "stories of objects," which is a creative process where the women can imagine freedom beyond prison walls through their art, they will be made whole and become productive. In other words, through the stitched dolls, the detainees undergo a self-meaning process that "gives rise to a script of possible future." Simply put, the women became hopeful after realizing their self-worth.



Emblematic of freedom dreamt inside the prison, the *Inday* dolls went on tour around the Philippines and around the world – to New York, California, Canada, Japan, and South Korea. It also earned recognition and received more funding support. Viewers of the doll exhibit were awed by the handiwork of women that demonstrates enormous potential for living productive lives, post-prison.

Inday dolls are so named because *inday* is a term of endearment and respect for a woman among Hiligaynon-speaking areas. Thus, *Inday* dolls embody love and geniality often associated with, and expressed through, dolls.

The *bilat* masks, freedom and defiance

The *bilat* masks take a somewhat different ground because they are out to break taboos and shatter beliefs on women's bodies. Wearing the mask is a form of defiance of beliefs that treat women's bodies as commodities and their private parts, a booty. Women's reproductive organs are also subjected to pernicious controls and appropriations by religion, the state, and media in ways that are too many to be included here.

Like the dolls, the vagina masks are remarkable portraits of a safe and healthy world. The colors, the vignettes, and the scale of some pudenda altogether convey that even in the lingering pandemic, the world would be a lot better, happier, and generous any time soon. For example, one of the masks feature a

vagina of radiating colors with half of the sun on one side and the gloomy prison bars with coronavirus in the opposite side. Surrounding it are ocean waves, a flock of blue birds near the sun, and a blue and red hearts near the prison bars. What could have the woman been thinking when representing freedom on the cloth mask? Another interesting piece is a winking vagina with bemused expression that is both funny and self-deprecating.

Double lockdowns

Since March 2020, the women prisoners experienced a lockdown within a lockdown. The double lockdown is lethal in an event of a coronavirus outbreak in overcrowded prisons. Philippine jails are currently 500 percent beyond their capacity with some 134,000 detainees. Overcrowding worsened since 2016 when the Duterte administration embarked on the so-called war on drugs with mass arrests in hundreds or in thousands.

The courts have not kept up hearing the drug cases. In April 2020, barely a month into the nationwide quarantine, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism noted that the [country's jails are a COVID-19 timebomb](#), leading some humanitarian groups to call for the release of elderly, sickly, and reformed prisoners, including sickly political prisoners. But the call was unheeded by the government. In fact, during the first few weeks of the nationwide lockdown, some 20,000 were arrested for quarantine violations. While many were briefly held, the risks of infection remained because the comings and goings in the jails could easily lead to coronavirus outbreaks.



Emblematic of freedom dreamt inside the prison, the *Inday* dolls went on tour around the Philippines and around the world



Bodies in confinement learned to adjust to the physical constraints but slowly, this blueprint of domination takes hold and individuals submit to strict subjection. The interventions of Zerrudo and other volunteer artists through theater workshop seek to restore the agency of women's bodies, and reverse a condition where "the body is walled, and the morality of women prisoners are subjected into confined rehabilitation and management."



Bodies in prisons are packed to transform them into what French social theorist Michel Foucault termed as docile bodies. These bodies are molded by disciplinary regime of prisons, programming prisoners to become obedient individuals. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault said the scale of control is down to the level of movements, gestures, and attitudes, where overcrowding assures the control's success.

The question that guided Zerrudo and Gupa's research is how might the women in prison exercise their sense of freedom? The answer is through stories that they represent via objects like dolls, tapestries, and other sewing crafts, aside from the theater performances and poetry that they staged. The *bilat* masks are among the objects that contain stories or "object-stories" that project images of freedom through meditative needle art. Thus, even through double lockdowns and fears of COVID-19, the masks double as a searchlight that beams hope. #

The images of freedom offered by the statement masks are what the women prisoners desire. Buying and wearing the bilat masks means supporting their wishes, among them their early release from jail.

(Photos are from the Facebook page, Inday Doll: Hilway Art Project. The photos were cropped and enhanced for better print quality.)

More information can also be found in Instagram: Indaydolls #indaydolls #bilatseries #bayaninginday)



Beyond the Screen.

Translating Online Narratives to Sustainable Collective Action in Championing the SRHR of Indigenous Women in the Philippines

Sophia Alyanna Bonifacio

Sophia Alyanna Bonifacio is currently studying Development Communication at the University of the Philippines while volunteering and working in organizations that also aim to promote climate change mitigation and adaptation through storytelling and other community initiatives as Director General at UNESCO Club-UPLB and Project Staff at Reboot Philippines. She mostly writes about topics on women and gender rights, climate change and energy, and indigenous people's rights in the Philippines.

Last April 23, LILAK (Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights) announced their partnership with Inged Fintailand Congress virtually in funding and promoting their capacity-building and paralegal project Tanggol Karapatan ng Katutubong Kababaihan or TK3 with women from Teduray tribe and Lambangian tribe as participants.

Even if the "patag" (plain) or "bayan" (town) is in the lockdown to prevent the transmission of COVID-19, the highlands were not. The indigenous people (IP) who are residing in the areas of Mindanao can still freely walk around; untouched and undisrupted—just like the cases they filed against their perpetrators on the judicial desk's table. But, how did a Filipina-led organization make the ball of justice roll today?

Indigenous communities, considered as one of the most marginalized sector in the Philippines, were reported to have a perpetuating problem on the lack of resources, accessibility to information, discrimination, and proper health care services.

With the evident gaps in the pandemic response, women and children have become more prone to vulnerability that resulted in the increase of human rights violations in most rural areas where IPs are residing.

Tanggol Karapatan ng Katutubong Kababaihan (Defend the Rights of Indigenous Women), or "TK3", is a legal assistance program that aims to activate community-based safe spaces spearheaded by human right defenders and advocates who are members of the indigenous communities by conducting educational discussions about protecting their rights, which considers their culture and ethnicity as a major component.

JUSTICE INACTION

According to the 2020 report on the impact of the pandemic to the indigenous women written by LILAK, co-authored by Commission on Human Rights (CHR), the worsening poverty, food insecurity, and lack of livelihood forced the rural workers in their respective communities to stay at their home, resulting to multiple cases of incest rape and early marriage in the communities.

"While sworn statements were previously filed with the Philippine National Police (PNP) in cases of rape, the closure of the prosecutor's office due to pandemic would mean that no arrests would be made until a preliminary investigation was completed," according to Atty. Krissi Rubin, Office-in-Charge Director of Center for Gender Equality & Women's Human Rights.

Although, the Commission's Center for Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and regional offices document the ongoing human rights violations against indigenous women and children throughout the said period, such as in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), Region X, and Region VI which received reports of violations of the Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) processes, the closure of courts during the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) has hampered the provision of actions for women who have been victims of violence.

Despite the fact that the Supreme Court has approved electronic filing of cases, limited information dissemination about it among advocates or even within women's desks is a challenge. The statement of the complainant was still waiting for the availability of prosecutors for filing.



WOMEN IN ACTION

Shifting to digital technology for information and communication created difficulty for the lawyers, advocates, and professionals to help and assist the IPs in fulfilling their basic needs but it did not stop the Lilak (Purple Action for Indigenous Women Rights) to reach out to them.

“Providing culturally-sensitive, people-oriented, ethnically-appropriate, and environmentally conscious solutions involve active engagement and participation from the people,” Katrina Magtoto, Indigenous Women Human Rights Defender (IWHRD) and Project Coordinator of LILAK says during an interview.

In the series of webinars and forums administered by LILAK, hunger, inadequacy or unavailability of relief goods and other government support, repressive implementation of lockdown policies, red-tagging and militarization, violence against women, threats of the anti-terror bill, and IP women’s access to education and other basic services were among the issues highlighted to address and demand urgent response from authorities.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST TEDURAY WOMEN

A sixteen-year-old Teduray woman from Cotabato in BABAYE-nihan forum last February recalled how the security of their medical center denied her request to go inside the building and ask for her medicine for pregnancy complications by discriminating her, saying “maligo ka muna bago ka pumunta rito.” (take a bath first before going here.)

The LILAK members reached out to her on January 28, three days after the incident, assisted her in acquiring the medicine and took a proper legal action against the said hospital staff.

She was also invited to an educational discussion about women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and to recount her experience in the online forum.

Despite experiencing terrors in the hands of trolls, she, along with her fellow advocates, persist in going beyond digital campaigns to champion the SRHR of the IP women.



Providing culturally-sensitive, people-oriented, ethnically-appropriate, and environmentally conscious solutions involve active engagement and participation from the people



To also help in monitoring the gender-based violence around the Philippines during the pandemic, the CHR Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights Center implemented an online sector segregated data portal that records the number of files issued by women called “e-report sa Gender Ombud” and supports the complainants by lending legal assistance and referral services.

A story that instills hope in their hearts was the success of indigenous people in Region X who championed their appeal to the Sangguniang Panlalawigan and engaged their local communities in reforming the policies on criminalizing traditional home births in 2018.

These small victories are what keeps them going.

The dreamers in the form of female advocates, professionals, and community members who share the same vision, inquire the same questions, and perseveres in the face of danger in our current socio-political climate are the epitomes of “sheroes” that empower others to defend their rights and to realize their full potential.

They will not cover as they call for a system that works to cater everyone, especially those who are not seated at the high table.

These women believed that they must ensure that IPs are heard and their cases are not left dusted in someone’s desk—to keep the ball of justice rolling. #





I AM WHO I AM

Izo S. Hernandez

I am who I am not just how I appear
physically
I am who I am more than what your
eyes can see
I am who I am and I am more than
just my identity
I am who I am choosing to live my
life and who I was truly meant to be

I am trans and that does not make
me less
I am trans and that does not make
you the best
I am trans not because I choose to be
I am trans because I live my life
with utmost authenticity

Just like you were
human too
Well maybe a little
different, just a
different colored hue
It maybe not be now
or tomorrow, but I
hope in the future
you will realize and
see
That we're no
different,
you and me



Equality, Justice, and Inclusivity: Coming together to advance the right to women-centered, rights-based post-abortion care

*Jesse Antoniette
Sunga*

*Jesse is a feminist and an SRHR
activist. She's the Campaigns and
Communications Officer at WGNRR
where she collaborates with
partners to mobilize campaigns
around SRHR and justice.*



The Stakeholders Dialogue held on March 27, 2023, in Quezon City, Philippines, was an insightful and impactful event that brought together a diverse group of advocates, leaders, and healthcare professionals to discuss “Towards accessibility and availability of women-centered and rights-based post-abortion care (PAC).” This gathering, organized by the Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) in collaboration with esteemed partners, Philippine Nurses Association (PNA), Integrated Midwives Association of the Philippines (IMAP), Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR), Likhaan Center for Women’s Health, WomanHealth Philippines, and the Family Planning Organization of the Philippines (FPOP), embodied intersectoral collaboration by fostering collaboration across sectors and emphasizing the importance of intersectional approaches to women’s healthcare.

The dialogue served as a platform for engaging panel discussions and intimate small-group sessions, which allowed participants to exchange perspectives and narratives surrounding post-abortion care. By exploring current approaches to service delivery, ethical standards, and the lived realities of women, the event enabled a deeper understanding of the issues at hand and highlighted the need for women-centered and rights-based care.

Throughout the event, expert speakers, including Dr. Bela Ganatra and Dr. Ulrika Rehnstrom Loi from the World Health Organization Sexual and Reproductive Health Research, presented global tools for abortion care, offering evidence-based recommendations to guide future practices.

One of the key takeaways from the dialogue was the importance of interprofessional and multi-sectoral collaboration. Dr. Filipina Ramos from the Baguio General Hospital and Medical Center emphasized the effectiveness of partnerships between doctors and nurses, *“mas effective yung partnership actually ng doctors at tsaka nurses kasi almost 100 percent of our post-abortion clients are counseled before they leave the hospital, or they are discharged.”*

Additionally, community-based organization ILAW Shared Community, Inc. underscored the significance of cross-sectoral movement building by working with local governments and health facilities to ensure comprehensive care reaches the entire community or city. *“Mag-iingay kami sa community as part of our commitment na to talk about post-abortion care mag— and then to look for local stakeholders... hanggang sa buong komunidad o buong city ay magtutulong-tulong tungkol po sa post-abortion care,”* shared Venjohn.



...the event enabled a deeper understanding of the issues at hand and highlighted the need for women-centered and rights-based care.



Personal stories and challenges shared during the Dialogue shed light on deeply ingrained issues that affect access to care and service delivery in unique ways. The neglect of community health systems and the lack of proper training and resources for midwives to deliver post-abortion care, as highlighted by Dionica Saquilon of the Integrated Midwives Association of the Philippines, significantly disadvantage marginalized women either by forcing them to shell out exorbitant amounts for care, or to endure long waits in over-congested facilities while in excruciating pain.

Stigma surrounding abortion emerged as another critical issue discussed by stakeholders. WomanHealth Philippines study revealed that women often delay or avoid seeking care for abortion complications due to fear and shame, particularly the fear of negative attitudes from healthcare providers. The Philippine Nurses Association acknowledged the detrimental impact of stigma on their work but emphasized their commitment to compassionate patient-centered care to create safe spaces for women seeking assistance.

The Dialogue concluded with a series of recommendations to advance women-centered and rights-based post-abortion care. The participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) and healthcare facilities from all corners of the country demonstrated the urgent need for comprehensive and intersectional actions. Recommendations spanned from fostering supportive communities and using evidence to combat stigma, to empowering healthcare providers through education and training.

Overall, the Stakeholders Dialogue painted a picture of hope and progress for sexual and reproductive health and rights. By advocating for post-abortion care through cross-sectoral collaboration and a persistent commitment to women’s health and rights, participants solidified their dedication to fostering equality, justice, and inclusivity for all women. The value of cross-sectoral collaboration served as a guiding principle, reminding everyone that only by converging diverse paths and working together can true transformation in women’s healthcare be achieved. #





SRHR amid climate-related disasters

Jill Banta

Jill Banta is a young environmental advocate based in Mindanao. A supporter of peasant and Indigenous Peoples' rights, she volunteers for Liyang Network, a local-to-global advocacy network that amplifies the calls to action of frontline environmental and human rights defenders in Mindanao, Philippines. Together with WGNRR, they were part of the relief mission to Surigao City in the aftermath of Typhoon Odette.



Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) rarely come up in climate change discussions. But experiences of the women that Liyang Network has engaged with during our Typhoon Odette relief mission attest to how SRHR services are essential, yet often lacking in times of climate-related disasters. This sentiment is most especially felt by women from low-income communities, particularly the farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and workers. Already marginalized by unjust economic and sociopolitical structures, women from the said sectors have little power to prepare, act, cope, and recover from a climate-related disaster, less so, demand that their SRHR needs be attended to.

Gloria, a mother of four from Surigao City, narrates, "It was our first time to experience a typhoon as strong as Odette. While we survived, our roofs were blown away. I had to bring a family member to the hospital because of dehydration. And yet, we have only received 5 kilos of rice, some water, and canned goods, which were not enough to last us through the month."

"Our coconut trees were destroyed by the strong winds. We have a plot of land for planting rice, but we don't have the money yet for inputs," adds Mimi, a grandmother to a family of seven from the same city.

Farmers and working class women have the lowest carbon footprint yet they experience the worst impacts of climate change. Drought, rising sea levels, saline intrusion, and stronger typhoons negatively impact health and livelihoods which reduce women's social and economic power. This may drive migration and expose women to exploitation and gender-based violence. Reduced purchasing power may also limit their access to sexual and reproductive health care services and medicine.

As SRHR advocates, we recognize that climate action is necessary for reproductive justice. The drivers of climate change such as deforestation and oil extraction cause changes in our landscape and ecosystems, affecting how we apply and exercise our SRHR. For example, bodies of water drying up could mean changes in women's access to water and sanitation. Greenhouse gas emissions and persistent organic pollutants from coal-fired power plants may contaminate soils and water, and cause birth and developmental defects, all of which infringe on SRHR.



Farmers and working class women have the lowest carbon footprint yet they experience the worst impacts of climate change. Drought, rising sea levels, saline intrusion, and stronger typhoons negatively impact health and livelihoods which reduce women's social and economic power.



Farmers like Gloria and Mimi not only face landlessness or huge debts from landlords and predatory agri-industrial traders; they also incur losses from crop failure due to extreme weather conditions. Meanwhile, women workers who already endure long work hours and low wages in inhumane working conditions lack safety nets when a typhoon ravages their homes. Women in the informal economies such as waste workers and street vendors lose income as they find it more difficult to work in the increasingly unbearable heat.

In a society that has a high social inequality, these women are burdened by increasing prices of food and basic goods amid low wages. With a prevailing patriarchal culture, many of them also take on the responsibilities of domestic work and child-rearing, and experience gender-based violence at home and in the workplace. If they identify as queer folks, then they would have to live through abuse and discrimination.

These conditions make women farmers and workers extra vulnerable when a climate-related disaster strikes. With poorly implemented disaster measures being the norm in the Philippines, one can expect that their SRHR needs are neglected, along with the needs of other vulnerable populations in the society such as persons with disability and senior citizens.

Part of SRHR is exercising bodily autonomy and sexual health. Respect for these rights bring people closer to achieving reproductive justice. In a climate-related disaster, rarely are these considered, as shown in the insufficiency of gender-responsive evacuation centers that cater to the needs of people who are menstruating, pregnant, or breastfeeding. A shared experience among our partners in Surigao is the lack of secure bathrooms which could potentially be an opening for sexual harassment. Relief goods seldom include menstrual pads and diapers for children and adults, even when these items become scarce in the immediate aftermath of disaster.

The impacts of climate-related disasters on SRHR do not end in the days after; its effects could be long-term and life-changing. For example, education, in general, empowers girls to stand up for their rights, including SRHR, and gives them the space to safely discuss sex and gender issues. But losing family members in a disaster may force young women to quit school to work, severing them from accessing adolescent reproductive health information and counseling. Some young women go through early, forced, or child marriages to find spouses who could financially or materially support them and their families. The lack of psychosocial support for survivors of disaster may also lead to misinformed decisions about their own bodies.

“
In a society that has a high social inequality, these women are burdened by increasing prices of food and basic goods amid low wages.
”



Thus, our work as SRHR advocates does not end in lobbying for the inclusion of SRHR in disaster response.



The perennial shortage of aid for rebuilding and rehabilitation force families to find temporary shelters in unsafe structures which make women more vulnerable to sexual violence. If rehabilitation does happen, families with queer parents are often excluded.

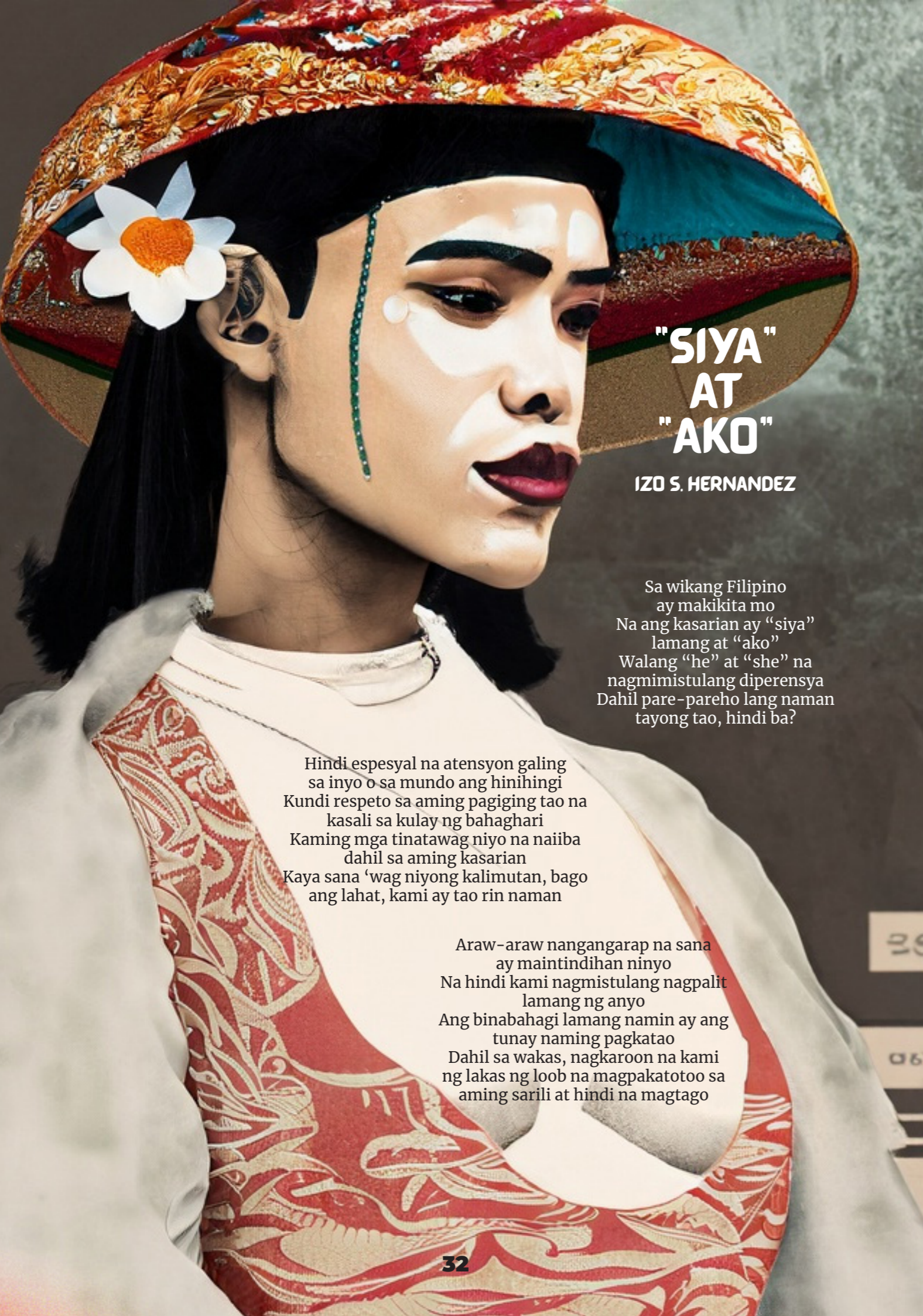
Slow rehabilitation and minimal assistance for livelihood loss drive women to take on exploitative work to meet their basic needs. The rampant sex trafficking in the aftermath of Typhoon Yolanda is [well-documented](#), and reveals how the absence of post-calamity aid drives mothers to act as pimps and subject their children to prostitution.

The inadequacy of SRHR services is a corollary problem to the greater problem of corrupt and inefficient disaster prevention, response, and management. One month after Typhoon Odette devastated Surigao City, the magnitude of its damage was still felt through the arrays of still-collapsed utility poles among fallen trees, homes with makeshift roofs from recycled tarpaulins, and flattened carton boxes bearing the words “WE NEED WATER.” Rehabilitation was at a snail’s pace, and electricity was not yet restored then. Yet, we watch the president publicly [whinging](#) that the budget for Odette response has been depleted because of the COVID pandemic (objectively, another poorly managed disaster), even when pro-people economists have pointed out the [viability of reappropriating billions of funds towards disaster response](#) if the president really wanted to.

There is nothing more frustrating than hearing about the government dragging its feet to address the needs of disaster survivors. Thus, our work as SRHR advocates does not end in lobbying for the inclusion of SRHR in disaster response. We must also stand in solidarity with communities affected by climate-related disasters by demanding for accountability and transparency from the government, and urging it to fulfill its commitments to climate action, just energy transition, and to a holistic, comprehensive, and gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and management.

As we brace ourselves for stronger degrees of climate change impacts, we are also called to support the leadership of environmental and land defenders who are on the frontlines of sustainably managing our forest and waters amid the climate emergency. These defenders are our farmers, fisherfolk, Indigenous Peoples, and environmental activists who risk their lives and face attacks from the state and corporations behind environmentally destructive projects that aggravate the climate crisis.

While the future is filled with grim predictions about irreversible damages from climate change, we look to our past shared victories and the growing number of SRHR and climate activists for hope. The task is for us to sustain the energy of a strong and organized movement of advocates and communities who courageously struggle for the upholding of women’s rights and the people’s right to a healthful and balanced ecology. #



"SIYA" AT "AKO"

IZO S. HERNANDEZ

Sa wikang Filipino
ay makikita mo
Na ang kasarian ay "siya"
lamang at "ako"
Walang "he" at "she" na
nagmimistulang diperensya
Dahil pare-pareho lang naman
tayong tao, hindi ba?

Hindi espesyal na atensyon galing
sa inyo o sa mundo ang hinihingi
Kundi respeto sa aming pagiging tao na
kasali sa kulay ng bahaghari
Kaming mga tinatawag niyo na naiiba
dahil sa aming kasarian
Kaya sana 'wag niyong kalimutan, bago
ang lahat, kami ay tao rin naman

Araw-araw nangangarap na sana
ay maintindihan niyo
Na hindi kami nagmistulang nagpalit
lamang ng anyo
Ang binabahagi lamang namin ay ang
tunay naming pagkatao
Dahil sa wakas, nagkaroon na kami
ng lakas ng loob na magpakatotoo sa
aming sarili at hindi na magtago

SEXUAL HARASSMENT *is no whistling matter*

Yvee Bongosia



Yvee Bongosia and her husband own Yes Pho, a Vietnamese restaurant in Baguio City.

Editor's note: Names have been changed

Two cans of corned beef, a pack of instant coffee, toilet paper rolls, a kilo of detergent, a whistle. On that seemingly ordinary afternoon in Baguio City, the supermarket cashier wasn't the only one scanning the goods as I lined to pay. I noticed a man eyeing me from head to toe. He then wolf-whistled, albeit poorly.

I quipped, "Di ka naman marunong sumipol. At 'di maganda yang ginagawa mo." He looked away and hurriedly left.

Whether it was shame or surprise that prompted him to look away, I wonder, how many more whistles will it take before he realizes that this behavior classifies as sexual harassment?

"Ma'am, your change," said the cashier as she handed me some coins while the bagger placed my groceries in the paper bag, I recognized my own fury. I was just whistled at, I do not like it and I told him so.

I know I am not alone in experiencing public sexual harassment. So many other women and girls do. And this truth is no whistling matter.

StopStreetHarassment.Org defines sexual harassment in street and public spaces as "unwanted comments, gestures and actions forced on a stranger in a public place without their consent, and is directed at them because of their actual or perceived sex, gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation."

These include catcalling, wolf-whistling, unwanted invitations, misogynistic and sexist slurs, persistent uninvited comments or gestures on a person's appearance, relentless requests for personal details. According to Safe Street, Public and Online Spaces Act, the act likely results in "an invasion of the victim's sense of personal safety, regardless of the motive for committing such action or remarks."

Such forms of harassment have become commonplace for many women that something as mundane as grocery shopping can feel so unsafe.

And so does walking home at 10 p.m. along Recto in Manila.

Cathy* was crossing a poorly-lit overpass when a man coming from the opposite direction casually touched her crotch. She screamed, and another man walking just a few meters behind the predator came to the rescue with some martial arts. That wasn't a scene from a Jackie Chan movie, but a real occurrence near Recto Isetan.

"Scary at nakakainis," Cathy shared. "Law student pa lang ako that time, taking up night classes. After that incident, I always walked with a classmate."

One might tell Cathy to avoid dark places altogether but that shifts the blame from the predator to the victim. Harassment happens whenever, wherever – in the dark, under fluorescent lights, even in broad daylight. A 2016 Safe Cities Baseline Study conducted in Quezon City found that 70% of sexual harassment in streets and public places occur during the day, between 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Like in an afternoon of window shopping in Glorietta, Makati.

For 28-year-old Pat*, there's nothing more eye-catching than new titles lining the bookstore window display at the mall. A middle-aged man wearing golf pants and a fancy polo shirt whistled at her.

"It seems money can't buy manners," Pat said. She also left her own manners behind and gave him the middle finger. "I felt disgusted but mostly annoyed. Sometimes I just don't want to wear shorts in public, but if I were wearing pants, it won't make him any less of a pervert." she said.

Even wearing a "decent" office skirt while riding a jam-packed FX (public utility vehicle) does not ward off harassment.

Tired from work, twenty-something Cams* just wanted to go home and recharge. It seems though that the man seated in front of her was getting all comfortable with her skirt, obviously taking pictures. When all the passengers alighted the FX, she used the string of her company ID to strangle the guy, taking him to the nearest guard.

"Nakakapagod na palaging maging on your toes, on your guard. Nakaka-shock na ang lakas ng loob niyang gawin 'yun sa harap ko, as if naman hindi ko kita. Siguradong alam niya na nakikita ko. Anong tingin niya, helpless ako, at tatanggapin ko lang yung ginagawa niya?"

It is not usual for women confront their predators because not everyone is brave enough. In fact, one in two women do nothing after they are harassed, notes the Quezon City 2016 baseline study.

Maybe that's what two guys were thinking in a crowded restaurant in Katipunan.

“

Nakakapagod na palaging maging on your toes, on your guard. Nakaka-shock na ang lakas ng loob niyang gawin 'yun sa harap ko, as if naman hindi ko kita.

”

As 16-year-old Marie* was enjoying her lunch— tacos with a friend in a crowded Filipino-Mexican restaurant— two male staff a few meters away were enjoying themselves as well, peering under her table in obvious desperation to get a glimpse of whatever's under her dress.

The female customer next to Marie's table saw what was happening and she confronted the men. One of the guys reasoned, "Normal lang naman po yun, ma'am." Marie felt paralyzed and shocked, but thanked the lady who intervened. Fortunately, the women had some connection with the owners of the restaurant so she contacted them. The next day, one of the owners sent a message saying that the two staff were fired.

If only this type of quick resolution happens all the time, but harassment in public spaces and in the streets involves an element of transience, as 70% of street harassments are committed by complete strangers.





Chi Laigo-Vallido, director for programs and advocacy of The Forum for Family Planning and Development, says there is an anti-sexual harassment law in the Philippines but is limited to workplaces and schools. *“Under this law, the perpetrators are the boss, teacher or officemate. In the streets, harassers are random people like fellow commuters, strangers who get empowered each time we allow them to catcall. Public spaces harassment requires a different law.”*

Laigo-Vallido is among rights advocates relentlessly working on the passage of laws penalizing gender-based harassment in streets and public spaces.

Since the Anti-Catcalling Ordinance in Quezon City took effect in 2016, predators and violators of the law have been reprimanded: [a garbage collector fired, two police officers faced charges, a construction worker jailed](#). QCPD Police director Brig. Gen. Joselito Esquivel Jr. encouraged women to report incidents of street and public spaces harassment, but falls short of encouraging men to stop harassment in the first place.

In 2018, Manila passed its Safe City for Women and Girls Ordinance. In Baguio City, the Safe Streets and Public Spaces Ordinance is awaiting second reading.

The Safe Spaces Act, authored by Senator Risa Hontiveros, chairperson of the Senate Committee on Women, has lapsed into law on April 21 after President Rodrigo Duterte did not act on a bicameral conference committee report ratified in February.

The Safe Spaces Act, also called the *“Bawal Bastos Law,”* imposes hefty penalties for “any unwanted and uninvited sexual actions or remarks against any person” in public spaces, including acts like “catcalling, wolf-whistling, unwanted invitations, misogynistic, transphobic, homophobic and sexist slurs, sexual comments and suggestions, public masturbation or flashing of private parts, groping, or any advances, whether verbal or physical, that are unwanted and threaten one’s sense of personal space and physical safety.”

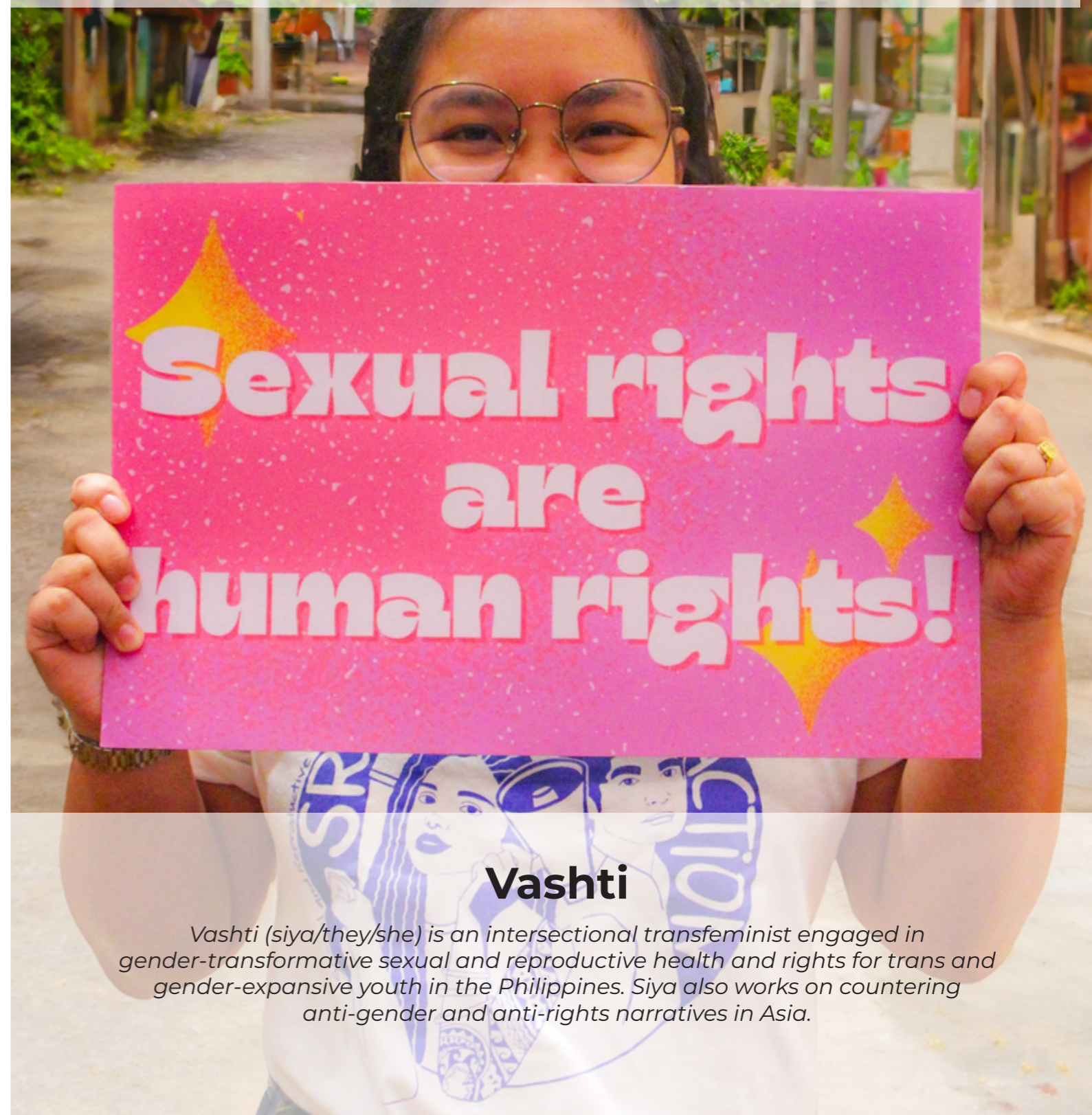
Hontiveros said the law is not only for women and LGBTs as it also protects men and boys from sexist acts and behavior. “The law is not a measure to punish men. It actually protects men from capitulating to sexist acts and gender bigotry by holding such deeds accountable. It is a policy that aims to effect positive behavioral changes in society. And in this effort, we believe men will play a big part in this positive transformation,” Hontiveros said in a statement.

As more laws are penned, pinned, and passed, we rejoice. In an [article](#) published on worldbank.org, Paula Tavares sums it up succinctly: “While laws against sexual harassment are not a cure, they are an important first step.”

Note: The photos in this piece are products of the author’s street photography. They are not the persons being referred to in this story. #

When the gender binary doesn't work:

How the HIV epidemic is heavily impacting trans people in the Philippines



Vashti

Vashti (siya/they/she) is an intersectional transfeminist engaged in gender-transformative sexual and reproductive health and rights for trans and gender-expansive youth in the Philippines. Siya also works on countering anti-gender and anti-rights narratives in Asia.

In [October 2021](#), the Epidemiology Bureau included in its HIV/AIDS & ART registry of the Philippines (HARP) publication the number of reported newly HIV diagnosed clients who did not or were not able to identify as either man or woman, or identified themselves as “other” as a third option for their gender marker at the time they were tested. This seems to be the first time that this type of data is expressed and captured in the monthly published registry. Unsurprisingly, this specific key affected population is reported to be more or less a quarter of the newly diagnosed HIV cases from [October 2021 to February 2022](#). In the period from March to August 2022, the reactivity rate for transgender people dwindled down to 10-15% but the reports have also shown that there are reactive cases of transgender men, and that almost 40% of the reactivity cases during this time do not have information on gender identity. The former is another first for the HARP on capturing transgender men’s exposure to the HIV epidemic.

Despite the very high newly diagnosed HIV cases, people who are not part or do not identify within the gender binary are still very much invisibilised in the country’s response against the HIV epidemic. Usually, they are lumped under the men having sex with men (MSM) group because the only identified [HIV key affected population in the Philippines](#) are men having sex with men (MSM), transgender women (TGW), young key affected population (YKP), and people who inject drugs (PWID).

News about folx who are not subscribing to the gender binary is not new to the Department of Health (DOH). The Epidemiology Bureau under the DOH publishes a study every 3 years that

aims to determine the prevalence of HIV-AIDS and STD in the Philippines. In its [2015 Integrated HIV Behavioural and Sereologic Surveillance \(IHBS\) technical report](#), it documented around 9.2% to 13% of people who identified themselves in the middle of the gender binary, and less than



1% identified as neither. In the latest [2018 IHBS report](#) published in 2021, it recorded about 14% who identified as both man and woman, and 1% did not identify themselves to either gender category. Despite this information on gender disaggregation from the surveillance, this has not been translated to the programs in the previously committed [90-90-90 target in 2020](#) to end the AIDS epidemic in the Philippines.

The gender binary is a barrier in claiming our right to sexual and reproductive health

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, a body that monitors the compliance of International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) released the [general comment 14](#) that highlighted the four elements to our right to the highest attainable standard of health. One of the elements is the acceptability of the freedom to health that is culturally appropriate and sensitive to gender and life-cycle requirements. This demands the fulfillment of health to be culturally responsive to the complexity of the multidimensionality and performativity of gender in different contexts that is outside and beyond the archaic gender binary. This is so folx who are outside the gender binary that are heavily affected by the HIV epidemic can meaningfully access available gender responsive and good quality healthcare. In this particular case on the national HIV response, the binary use of gender missed the opportunity to respond to the recent ~25% newly HIV diagnosed cases of gender diverse and expansive groups.

Furthermore, the recognition of gender diverse and expansive communities are crucial in fulfilling sustainable development goals 3 on health and 5 on gender equality and achieving the [95-95-95 target in ending AIDS by 2030](#) — both are commitments made by the Philippine government.



We already know that gender is relational, but it does not exist only between men and women— as a lot of definitions claim it to be! By reinforcing the binary narrative we are also perpetuating the coloniality of gender. Past and present Philippines shows us that gender has not been immutable and has shown agency and self-determination as a key identification of gender.



Moving beyond the gender binary: a decolonial intersectional approach moving forward

To understand the unique experiences of gender diverse and expansive folx in claiming our SRHR, there is a need to strengthen and mainstream intersectionality as a [human rights](#) and [development](#) framework in our feminist praxis. Intersectionality acknowledges how gender is inextricably linked to our multiple identity factors that affect us in different degrees and proportions. It also offers spaces for cross-movement solidarity, and veers away from single-issue struggle because as Audre Lorde puts it, we are not living single-issue lives.

We already know that gender is relational, but it does not exist only between men and women— as a lot of definitions claim it to be! By reinforcing the binary narrative we are also perpetuating the [coloniality of gender](#). Past and present Philippines shows us that gender has [not been immutable](#) and has shown agency and [self-determination](#) as a key identification of gender. A decolonial intersectional approach to our feminist understanding values and celebrates gender diversity and intentionally works against the systems that oppresses us in all our diversity. Thus, the adoption of a decolonial intersectional approach in Philippine health systems provide feminists and duty bearers better consciousness, analysis and practice in building our feminist infrastructures on sexual and reproductive justice that is transformative to the lives of everyone. #



Vaccines Against Transphobia

Kyn Mallorca

Ms. Kyn (siya/she/her), Trans Pinxy, Feministang Bruja

Let me tell you about a baby
Brought in this world to grow up and become a lady
With those pink pajamas and those pink rattles
To those pink hats and pink baby bottles

Well you see SHE turned six and HE knew
That those dresses and skirts would never do
Then SHE turned nine and HE knew
That this young lady only likes ladies too

Then she turned 13 and HE was lost
What would happen if everyone knew, at what cost?
Then HE turned 16 and HE knew
That hiding himself will never do

Now he's 21, he had his debut too
Living a life's dream, a dream come true
You see this baby was born a woman
But this baby was destined to become a man

He knew
Izo S. Hernandez



The pandemic has affected all people from different sectors of the society but those effects are not equal. Some have been uncomfortably living because they cannot go out to dine in restaurants, to spend their holidays in the hotels of Bantayan Islands and Boracay, or to go shopping at the SM and Ayala malls while many have only been trying to survive, thinking about if and when they can go back to their jobs or get employed to put food on their table. Workers in the informal sector were forced to stop working because of the constant unexpected changes in restrictions. And, transgender people have to deal with all that was mentioned on top of their everyday experiences of discrimination, hate, prejudice, harassment, violence, and murder.

Transphobia is the discrimination, hate, prejudice, harassment, and violence against transgender people.

The lack of SOGIESC-based anti-discrimination ordinances and national laws, especially a gender recognition law, allow these harmful and life-threatening experiences to happen to transgender people every single day – while the pandemic has amplified all these. The senate and many other politicians have continuously expressed their firm stand against trans rights and made clear that those rights will never be a priority especially during the pandemic.

While trans rights are not a priority during the pandemic,

- ◆ a group of trans girls and their friends were punished by barangay officials where they were made to do a “sexy dance” and to kiss each other, in front of the barangay officials, for breaking local quarantine protocols and restrictions.
- ◆ A trans woman from Davao was humiliated and sexually harassed in a resort for using the women’s bathroom – where the resort staff and owner forced her to show her genitals to prove that she is a woman.
- ◆ Support and amelioration programs from the LGUs and national government have been given to parents, couples/partners, and families but excluded transgender people because they were not accepted as “traditional” parents, couples/partners, and families.
- ◆ Joseph Scott Pemberton, the murderer of Jennifer Laude who was a trans sex worker, was pardoned by the current fascist president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte.

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Transphobia is the discrimination, hate, prejudice, harassment, and violence against transgender people.
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- ◆ Ebeng Mayor and Junjie Bangkiao’s dead bodies, a trans man and a trans woman, were found after they were raped and murdered – and they were being misrepresented, misgendered, and deadnamed by the media.

While trans rights are not a priority during the pandemic, many more trans people stayed silent about their horrific experiences before and during the pandemic because they fear of losing their jobs, livelihood, access to education, being disowned by their families, and even losing their lives.

Cebu City and Mandaue City have their versions of SOGIESC-based anti-discrimination ordinances but these experiences of transphobia continue as if it is a vital part of the Filipino culture. Trans-led organizations and groups like CURLS (Cebu United Rainbow LGBTs) have been exhausting efforts to fight against transphobia, and even more during the pandemic. They attended meetings with city mayors and councilors to talk about trans rights, continue to disseminate information about the prevention of HIV/AIDS and

support for PLHIV (People Living with HIV), educate the public about SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights), support sex workers and other trans people to access paralegal and healthcare services, and see the intersectionality of the experiences of transgender people and cisgender folks (non-transgender individuals) by doing community services like distributing clean drinking water for the most affected people of Typhoon Odette and such.

Politicians and other institutions or groups with a COVID-19 response where transgender people are always included, equally and equitably, provide a light of hope for the transgender community.

- ◆ The amelioration programs of Pasig City led by Mayor Vico Sotto which included transgender parents, couples/partners, and families.
- ◆ The implementation of the Safe Spaces Act authored by Senator Risa Hontiveros which makes transphobia somehow a criminal offense.
- ◆ The Guidelines on Affirming Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming (TGNC) Students’ Names, Pronouns, and Titles made by the University of the Philippines Center for Women’s and Gender

Studies (UPCWGS) for the University of the Philippines Diliman and for the whole UP system.

But are all of these efforts enough to defeat transphobia? No.

The community always emphasizes, “there is still so much work to be done.” Just like stopping the COVID-19 virus from spreading, everyone has their responsibility to end transphobia.

While many of us have already received the vaccines against COVID-19, all of us should receive the vaccines against transphobia: (1) education about trans experiences, (2) diversity and inclusivity programs which includes gender-responsive and gender-transformative decision-making processes and developments, (3) respecting lived names, pronouns and titles, (4) everyday doses of kindness, and (5) booster shots of celebrating trans pride and joy!

These vaccines will not produce harmful side effects – only respect, love, peace, progress, and liberation. #

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Forced to Sign a Virginity Pledge

Jasmine Cruz

Katawan ko
Pasya ko!

Jasmine Cruz is a feminist writer who likes political improv comedy. She is a member of Time's Up Ateneo (TUA), a collective of survivors and advocates fighting against sexual violence and impunity in the university and beyond. TUA publishes content on the website <https://timesupateneo.org>.

Have you ever been forced to sign a virginity pledge? I have, and I will never forget that disturbing experience. It was when I was a student in Miriam College High School. I went to high school in the early 2000's, and I had been in Miriam since early grade school. Before my high school years, there was already *Titanic*, the most popular movie in 1997. I remember watching with my mom, and she did not make a big deal out of Rose having premarital sex, and I didn't think it was wrong either. I also remember a scene in *Pangako Sa Iyo* where Yna and Angelo got caught in the rain. I don't remember anymore the convoluted circumstances as to why the two lovers just had to be naked, lying in one bed, and underneath a single blanket, but in that moment, Angelo turns to Yna and says that they will not have sex before they get married. Even back then, I was like, why? If they both wanted to, why didn't they just do it? So there I was, a teenager trapped in an all-girls Catholic school—a bit sheltered but not oblivious. That's why when I was forced to sign the pledge, it didn't sit well with me.

I remember being there in my uniform that looked like an inverted tree--pleated green skirt matched with a tan blouse. I was there seated with my classmates when our teacher distributed pieces of paper and told us to sign it. There was no discussion during that class about what we were signing. The instructions were simple: pass the papers, sign it, then give it back to the teacher. There was no thinking time. Just receive the paper, and then sign it. When the paper got to me, I saw that it said, "I will not have sex before I get married". I was surprised because the class had nothing to do with health (which is what our sex education class was called) or religion. Maybe it was a homeroom class. During that time, I didn't know if the school required it or if it was my teacher's idea.

Though I thought that the sex scenes in movies were hot, I didn't want to have sex during that time. I just didn't care. Maybe my hormones hadn't kicked in yet or maybe it was the fact that the only boys I was exposed to were my Ateneo busmates, and they were smelly. Still, being forced to sign that pledge upset me. I knew that signing it wouldn't stop me from believing or doing what I wanted, but I just hated the thought of being disallowed to do something that I didn't think was wrong. I was also upset that we didn't have a choice, that it was so easy for the powerful to shove this down our throats as though it was an unquestionable fact and not a religious

opinion. It felt invasive and insulting that we had no right to think and make decisions about this very personal promise.

For a split second, I thought about not signing. I looked at my classmates, and no one seemed to have qualms about the pledge. They were all signing, unperturbed. I became afraid to not sign. I was an honor student, and I didn't want to get into trouble. Now I wonder, what would have happened if I refused to sign? Would they give me an offense? Take me down from the honor roll? Expel me? Anyway, I signed, passed the paper, the teacher collected it, and the task was done. The pledge was never discussed again.

Looking back, I shouldn't have been surprised that Miriam would impose that kind of belief on us as they had been demonizing premarital sex for as long as I could remember. We were bombarded with "sex is sacred", "don't have sex before you get married", and "premarital sex is a sin". The teachers in my school would also blurt out their religious opinions without acknowledging the existence of counterpoints to their beliefs or even acknowledge that what they were expressing was an opinion and not a fact. This would happen in English class, Araling Panlipunan, Filipino class, or what have you. The examples are countless, and it's just so accepted and unquestioned. I don't understand why we aren't having conversations about the ethics of imposing religious beliefs on students, especially during classes that aren't religion classes, even if the school is Catholic.

I remember one time when a student told me that a Filipino teacher in another class talked about how when she had a boyfriend, she "never gave into temptation". She knew that if they broke up, she could still look him in the eye and say "wala kang kinuha sa akin". When I heard that, I was like, what's that got to do with the Filipino subject that she was teaching? Why do teachers talk about certain beliefs when the subject that they are teaching has nothing to do with it? I mean, they can share their beliefs if it's relevant to the discussion, but even when it's connected to the topic, teachers shouldn't pretend that their opinion is the only one that exists in the world. Plus, even in high school, I didn't believe that something can be taken away from a woman when she has sex, so the crux of that "lesson" didn't sit well with me.



We were bombarded with “sex is sacred”, “don’t have sex before you get married”, and “premarital sex is a sin”.



The virginity pledge though was the worst because I wasn’t just listening to teachers blather or it wasn’t just me fulfilling my duties as a student by mindlessly regurgitating information for class requirements. By being made to sign that pledge, I felt like I was being compelled to be dishonest about what I believed. It felt coercive. Not gun-to-your-head coercive, but there-is-no-reality-outside-our-Catholic-reality, look-at-us-absolutely-denying-the-existence-of-beliefs-different-from-ours. It was a command that was treated as a no-brainer choice. Sign it. No need to think. No need to have opinions about this. Everyone thinks that this is what’s right. Sign it.

When I decided to talk to Miriam alumni about this pledge, at first I was scared that I wouldn’t find people to interview. Maybe this wasn’t a school policy, and I just had a weird teacher, so only that specific class experienced what I did, so what if I don’t find people to interview from that class? Maybe no one even remembers it. Maybe for other people it was

just a small moment. Maybe it was only memorable for me. Still, I decided to look for people. It was the first time that I ever talked to anyone about this experience. I didn’t know what I would discover.

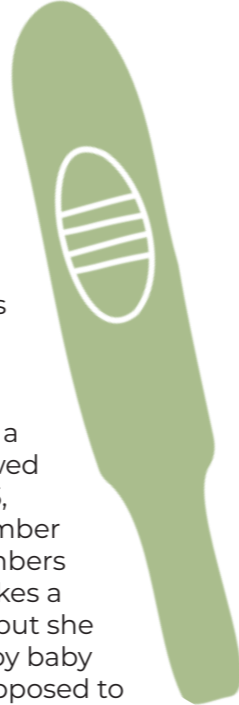
The first response I got was from a former classmate who I interviewed via a Facebook thread on June 15, 2022. She said she doesn’t remember a virginity pledge but she remembers an anti-abortion pledge. She makes a caveat that her memory is hazy, but she says, “I vaguely recall passing a toy baby in a glass bottle that we were supposed to ‘meditate upon,’ then getting a document about how we wouldn’t have an abortion. Sign on the dotted line”. She added, “Catholic school was wild”.

When she shared that memory, I remembered that I too had a vague memory involving a doll which was used to dissuade us from getting pregnant, but that memory wasn’t connected to abortion or the virginity pledge.

When more people responded to my call for interviewees, the first few ones said they didn’t remember the pledge and one person just acknowledged that she received my message. Then, three individuals said they remembered.

One Miriam alumna said that she experienced it during a sex education class when the teacher brought out the TV that was in a wooden cabinet with wheels. In an interview via Facebook chat on June 18, 2022, she told me that on that television, she watched The Silent Scream, an anti-abortion documentary.

That TV in the rolling wooden cabinet was something that I experienced as well. When the Miriam alumna mentioned it, I remembered that I too watched The Silent Scream in class, but it wasn’t connected to my memory of the virginity pledge. Years later, that documentary was exposed for being problematic and for using unethical methods to forward their anti-abortion message, but back then we didn’t know that. On that TV in the rolling cabinet, my class was also made to watch a video of a woman who made a speech about genital warts and how gross those were. The point of telling my class about this and other sexually transmitted diseases was again to discourage us from having sex before marriage. When I saw that video, it was overly effective. I didn’t just want to never have sex before I got married; I never wanted to



have sex forever. My high-school self thought, why would marriage magically save me from genital warts? There’s no way for me to know that the man I’m marrying is a virgin, so I can’t ensure that he won’t infect me with his genital warts, so I don’t want to have sex ever.

The Miriam alumna said she wasn’t so sure that the two events, the anti-abortion film and the virginity pledge, happened one after the other, but she remembers that both happened. When it comes to the pledge, she said her classmates felt awkward. “Nagtitinginan, ganun,” she said. “Like, what the heck is this. And if you don’t sign, majajudge ka. I felt uncomfortable and parang a bit annoyed na why are they forcing this on us? And why are they making our choices for us? But at the same time naisip ko na, oh well, Catholic school kasi”. She went on to explain that she already knew of some people who lost their virginity in grade school. “So what option do they give to them?” she said. “Just lie, ganun?”

One former classmate said that she was made to sign a virginity pledge during a talk where the whole batch was required to go to the theater in the college. In an interview via Facebook chat on June 16, 2022, she told me that the speaker for that talk was from an organization called True Love Waits. “I remember being given a small piece of paper that said I will wait until marriage before having sex,” she said. “We were ‘required’ to sign and submit it, but I honestly don’t remember if I did. At that time, I just received the pledge sheet as one of those things that school made us do, but there was no chance for them to actually monitor that”. She shared that she knew about certain batchmates who already had sex. She also talked to a friend about the pledge, acknowledged that making such a promise was not possible for other people. “I don’t agree with waiting until marriage,” she said. “The message then was you are not empowered pag nakipag-sex ka na. Ang labo lang.”

When I searched online for True Love Waits Philippines, I found a Facebook page with that name. I wondered if this was the same one that my classmate remembers. I looked at their page description and it said, “True Love Waits Philippines is a non-profit organization with the goal of connecting youth to God and His plan for absolute purity. We are committed to impacting youth by teaching them to be pure in heart which will lead them to make the right choices—especially in the issue of

sexual abstinence until marriage. We are also committed to an intensive campaign against HIV/AIDS by spreading the message of ‘Purity and Abstinence’ nationwide”. It also notes their website address, which is, I kid you not, <https://wagmuna.com>. In the website, there were articles that featured their talks in Miriam (<https://wagmuna.com/boy-girl-talk-miriam-college>, <https://wagmuna.com/revolution-talk-miriam-high-school>, <https://wagmuna.com/tlw-miriam-college-high-school>, <https://wagmuna.com/the-boy-girl-talk-miriam-college-qc>), but the dates of the articles were unclear and there was no mention of distributing virginity pledges.

Another Miriam alumna said she remembers the pledge as the “Chastity Vow”. It was in her health class, and she even remembers that the teacher was named Melanie. In an email on June 28, 2022, she said in that class the students had 1/2 sketchpads, and this was used to create the chastity vow. “Parang diploma,” she said. “Tapos kanya-kanya ng pag-design”. She said she didn’t have any reactions to the pledge. “As someone who had low self-esteem that time who never thought anyone would be into me, pre-marital sex was the least of my concern back then,” she said. Reflecting on it now, she said that it felt so backward for the health class to do that, as before that point, the class talked about reproductive health in “a very objective way”. She said, “I remember we were taught the anatomy, hygiene, the abortion process, etc. All of that culminated with a band aid solution of chastity”. Nowadays, she says that the pledge just feels like a good story to tell her friends. “Ridiculous and nakakatawa talaga when I just think about it,” she said. “But it made me think din na hindi pa well-fleshed out ang konsepto ng feminism noon sa Miriam: chastity vow, girls caught making out are suspended, social grace talks where we were taught how to dress appropriately, some teachers preaching that putting on makeup is a sign of insecurity, etc.”

The youngest of my interviewees had her high school years in Miriam around the time of Rodrigo



Duterte's administration, which she described as a regime that was characterized by terror attacks against the youth. In a Zoom interview on June 23, 2022, she told me about how her batch was already aware of the pledge before it happened to them. She said that during that time it was "common knowledge" that eventually every student will have to sign a "Chastity Covenant". In preparation for this, she remembered her classmates met to plan regarding what they wanted to do when the pledge finally materialized. They decided on concrete steps: they would invent a new signature so that signing of the pledge wouldn't be valid, and then they agreed that they would draw a penis or a vagina somewhere in the signature, which will be hidden in the midst of scribbles. She remembered that the pledge was distributed in a Christian Living Education class where her teacher was an old woman who was "the typical terror pero maka-diyos". Prior to the distribution of the pledge, that teacher was talking about chastity and how their bodies were the "temples of god". When the pledge got to her, she remembers it being a small piece of paper with a dove and a border of flowers and leaves. She was expecting a larger document with a more serious look, but no, it was just photocopied papers that were "paper guillotined" in the middle. She said that it seemed like there was "not much thought" put into the pledge that was why it was a measly piece of paper instead of a dignified document. The paper said something like "I (state your name) hereby promise to keep my



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virginity intact until marriage" and underneath was the place where one had to put one's signature over one's printed name. When the paper got to her, she knew what to do. She and her classmates looked at each other as though saying "we got this". She signed her fake signature, and she hid a drawing of boobs in the scribbles. After the virginity pledges were collected and the teacher left, her classmates huddled together. "Galit na galit kami," she said. She describes this as an "empowering moment". When asked if this pledge had a big impact on her, she said yes because she already lost her virginity before she got the pledge. She said it was "weird" for her to sign the pledge. "I was angry for myself and my classmates," she said, and added that, "I won't enroll my kids in Miriam". Though that pledge was not a pleasant experience, she said the silver lining was that she was with a good set of people, classmates who supported each other and understood each other. She also finds optimism in young people who will forward more feminist education in the future and she has faith in a more modern religious youth. As for practices like the pledge, she says, "I hope it becomes passe".

Apart from talking to other Miriam alumni, I also tried to get an interview with a representative from the school. In an email on June 22, 2022, Miriam's Arkel S. Mendoza, Marketing and Communications Head, said that after they tried to figure out who to ask about my email, they were able to consult with the high school Christian Living Education teachers and advisers.

I was told that these individuals "are not aware of any sort of pledge done during [my] time as a student here [in Miriam]". Mendoza concluded that, "Thus, we can't comment on this topic". So I guess the institution's history with this virginity pledge will be shrouded in mystery for now. Only we, the students who were forced to sign this pledge, continue to remember and reckon with this history.

Another late realization happened while writing this essay. Being a kid of a single parent, I knew that my mother had sex before she got married because she never got married, and yet my dad and her got pregnant. The result was me. So there I was, in high school, being made to sign a pledge against premarital sex when my whole existence was because of it. I could have realized that that pledge was shaming me, telling me that the reason why I exist,

that moment that led to my birth, was a moment of "sin", and the woman who I deeply respected, the one who nurtured me all my life, committed that "grave transgression", a "mortal sin" at that. **That pledge was supposed to be "harmless" and a completely "valid" move for a Catholic institution, yet it could have redefined how I thought about myself and my mother. It could have made me think of her as a bad person even if she did nothing but love me. It could have made me hate myself for being a product of something "bad" even if my mother did nothing wrong.**

If only I could, I would really like to tear up that virginity pledge, tear it into tiny little pieces or even burn it. But I don't have the copy with me. So instead, let this essay be a way by which I symbolically tear up that virginity pledge. I'm tearing it up in protest against institutions callously imposing their religious beliefs on students. I'm tearing it up because I don't want any child to feel ashamed of coming from a single-parent household. I'm tearing it up because women have a right to sexually express themselves in the way that they want to and if they want to. I'm tearing it up so I can make a new pledge—I pledge to defend my right to make my own choices and to rule my life. #

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Meet the



POWER UP!

Strengthening Advocacy Capacities for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

campaigners

Through the Power Up! Program under the SHE Project, WGNRR supports organizations to enhance their advocacy capacities, access platforms for linking and learning, and co-create advocacy and campaigns with other organizations. Participating organizations deepen their knowledge of SRHR and intersecting issues, improve advocacy and influencing skills, and create a more significant impact on women's and girls' rights.



Alliance of Magnanimous Youth Leaders (AMYL)



AMYL is a non-stock, non-profit, youth-led organization that advocates active citizenship and peace education through empowerment sessions, capacity development, community immersion, and partnerships with various stakeholders in the province of Maguindanao, Cotabato City and other neighboring provinces.

Project UMI (U Matter, Inay) of AMYL which means "My Mother" in Muslim culture, is a community-based project under Power Up! that aims to lessen unwanted pregnancies among adolescents and increase protection for the well-being of teenage mothers through awareness campaigns on teenage pregnancy prevention, conduct of culturally appropriate discussions on contraceptives and

family planning, inclusive household education about proper parenting, mental health, and psychosocial support services. Project UMI was implemented in Nuling National High School in Barangay Salimbao, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao Del Norte and originally targeted 12 young mothers yet were able to accommodate 21 participants including out-of-school youth and student leaders. Project UMI served as a venue for discovering and rediscovering pressing issues faced by young parents and other youth that affect their SRHR, including mental health; and it also provided a safe space among the youth, especially young mothers who are also students.

Partner with AMYL, email at: johanakamir26@gmail.com



Center for Women's Resources (CWR)

CWR is a non-stock, non-profit, non-governmental women's service institution that provides research, education, training advocacy and publications, library and data banking service for and about women. CWR is one of the pioneering institutions for women that aims to empower grassroots women through awareness-raising and supporting their efforts in improving their situation through structural change.

Ensuring women's health and safety in the workplace through awareness and education is the core of CWR's project under Power Up! The goal of their project is for women workers to be empowered to reclaim

their right to health and safety, including their SRHR. On November 27, through the "Women Unite!" forum-workshop, women workers who participated were able to identify occupational health and safety issues, gender-based violence and harassment, and minimal or insufficient regard for pregnancy, childbirth and lactation. The results of the workshop were presented through an online legislative dialogue among 22 women workers, labor rights and women's rights advocates, and representatives of legislators.

Partner with CWR, email at: cwr@centerforwomensresources.org



Citizens' Disaster Response Center (CDRC)



Mainstreaming SRHR in Disaster Settings is the central focus of CDRC's campaign under Power Up! On November 9, 2022, CDRC conducted a forum on Mainstreaming SRHR in Disaster Risk Reduction and Management: Learning from SRHR Champions. Participating disaster risk reduction organizations were taught basic concepts of SRHR, its existing laws and policies in the Philippines, and the importance of addressing SRH issues during disasters including an orientation on the Minimum Initial Service Package for SRHR. An action plan was developed together with the participants on how disaster risk reduction organizations can work towards promoting

SRHR and engaging in advocacy and strengthening coordination capacity in delivering SRH services in their humanitarian responses.

CDRC is a non-government organization that pioneers and promotes community-based disaster management in the Philippines. CDRC operates nationwide through a network of regional centers affiliated with the Citizens' Disaster Response Network (CDRN) and through people's organizations.

Partner with CDRC, email at: info@cdrc-phil.com



Community Development and Research Society (ComDRS)



ComDRS is an independent, community-oriented medical student organization rendering medical services to the most marginalized, educating people on the right and adequate information on health. They envision transforming all Filipino medical students to become holistic advocates and physician-leaders of the future in pursuit of healthcare for all.

bridge the disconnect between indigenous practices and evidence-based practices on menstrual health management. The project strives to conduct research that is culturally-sensitive and will meet the needs of the community when it comes to menstrual hygiene management. Twenty women of the Aeta tribe in Cabangan, Zambales participated in the assessment. Most of them expressed interest in receiving menstrual kits and learning more about menstrual health and reproductive health, and have a positive attitude towards learning more about the female body.

Under the Power Up! campaign, ComDRS' project is an **Assessment of Menstrual Health Management (MHM) of Indigenous Filipino Women** in Cabangan, Zambales. The research-advocacy aims to improve their SRHR by campaigning for proper menstrual health management of indigenous people. It aims to

Partner with ComDRS, email at: plm.comdrs@gmail.com



ILAW Shared Community



#Empowered Go further! is an empowerment-focused project on awareness raising and stigma reduction campaign addressing SRHR with a particular focus on unwanted pregnancies, HIV/AIDS, SOGIESC, and Gender-based violence (GBV) in Iligan City. This campaign led by ILAW under Power Up! Campaign was able to gather the issues of sexual exploitation, unprotected sex due to inaccessibility of services, and stigma surrounding HIV. It also resulted in continuous partnerships with schools in providing SRHR interventions, including services; sustained engagement with the SK Federation and the

LGU of Iligan City; and, realization of members of the organization to fully embrace SRHR and make a decision to include abortion care as part of their focus area for 2023.

ILAW is a civil society organization and a recipient of the "Serbisyo Awards 2020" as one of the most outstanding organizations in Iligan City in Humanitarian Services. ILAW serves youth, women, LGBTQIA+, and PLHIV on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Partner with ILAW, email at: ilaworg@gmail.com



Initiatives for Dialogue and Empowerment through Alternative Legal Services (IDEALS)



IDEALS is a service institution that addresses the legal and technical needs of the marginalized, disempowered, and vulnerable groups particularly farmers, persons and communities affected by disasters, and victims of human rights violations.

mechanisms on SRHR and prevention of gender-based violence, enhancing the scope of their advocacy to include women's rights. Acquiring knowledge on SRHR and GBV-response will allow them to integrate these topics in alliance-wide trainings which will ultimately reflect in their activities as an alliance. At present, the BRAVE alliance has proposed to lead a human rights information campaign in their networks; this may be accompanied by the GBV and SRHR campaign if the members gain adequate and continuous training on those topics.

IDEALS' project under the Power Up! campaign aims to consolidate and capacitate members of the **BRAVE-TRUTH Alliance**, a woman-led group of human rights advocates formed by surviving family members of victims of extrajudicial killings. With the goal of transforming victim-survivors of human rights violations into advocates of sexual health and reproductive rights, the project capacitated the alliance on concepts and accountability

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Liyang Network



Liyang is an advocacy network with volunteers around the globe. They amplify the calls to action of grassroots communities in the Philippines, mainly the indigenous communities in Mindanao. Liyang helps to promote local practices on environmental protection and sustainability, gender and development, agroecology, and other related work through research, seminars, and exchange programs.

Liyang Network's Power Up! campaign seeks to **increase the awareness about SRHR among women, girls, and LGBTQ+ community** in Purok Bontong and Bolonsuri in

Barangay Camaman-an in Cagayan de Oro City, build partnerships with other civil society organizations (CSOs) and local barangay units to make SRHR services more accessible to the community, and to promote a culture of collectivism and peer support among women, youth and LGBTQ+ through the support and assistance of Mindanao Business College of Cagayan de Oro City. Liyang Network improved accountability for SRHR by building the capacity of teachers, and helped develop the LGUs relationship to the school.

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Maguindanao Alliance of Youth Advocates (MAYA)



MAYA is a youth-led organization that aims to eliminate all forms of violence against women. The membership of MAYA comprises three municipalities - Mamasapano, Datu Saudi Ampatuan, and Guindulungan. MAYA engages in campaign and advocacy work in policies and programs concerning the youth. MAYA's **ReSHElient: Learning Hub for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)** is a project under Power Up! campaign designed to empower young mothers by providing awareness on SRHR.

The activities under the ReSHElient project of MAYA were conducted on November 20, 2022,

engaging young mothers in a seminar to increase access of young mothers on SRHR services, engage stakeholders, and debunk misconceptions. While the community education conducted on December 18, 2022 focused on empowering the Bangsamoro youth about SRHR, increase their awareness on Prohibition of Child Marriage law, contextualizing the Model Family in Islam, and promote the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health law.

Partner with MAYA, email at: mayamag2k20@gmail.com



Mindanao Pride

Mindanao Pride are a diverse group of gender equality advocates, LGBTQIA+ allies, and human rights activists who are staunch supporters of justice, equality, and freedom. They are Mindanaoans, contributing to the growth, liberation and pride LGBTQIA+ community through SOGIESC education, LGBTQIA+ Economic Empowerment, and Pride activities.

KulturaSaGugma 2.0: Beyond the Rainbow is a Power Up! campaign led by Mindanao Pride that aims to exhibit stories of Transgender individuals about their transitions and struggles and triumphs. On November 23, 2022 a story gathering was conducted among Mindanao-based transgenders and their health status entitled "Kamusta na?". Ten Mindanawon LGBTQIA+ individuals with unique experiences related to their pre, during, and post transitions were identified and will be featured in a video to promote awareness and inclusivity of healthcare among the community. KulturaSaGugma also features Trans-up! a symposium on transgender health and struggles.

Partner with Mindanao Pride, email at: secretariat@mindanaopride.org



Open Arms Organization



Open Arms Organization is composed of volunteers of health professionals working and interacting with persons with disabilities and their families. The VulnerABLE Project is the flagship activity of Project Color, the gender arm of the Open Arms Organization. The Project aims to promote disability-inclusive Sexuality Education, and capacitate parents, caregivers, and educators in providing age-appropriate sexuality education for children and adolescents with disabilities.

The **VulnerABLE** Project featured an online campaign on Disability-inclusive

Comprehensive Sexuality Education and workshop on Disability-Inclusive Sexuality Education for caregivers and educators of children and adolescents with disabilities. The workshop featured games and a learning session on the topic on safeguarding children with disabilities from abuse by prevention, noting signs, and reporting cases of abuse, and topic on age-appropriate strategies in teaching sexuality education.

Partner with Open Arms Organization, email at: executivedirector@openarmsorg.com



UP Babaylan

Established in 1992, University of the Philippines (UP) Babaylan is the longest-existing duly recognized LGBTQI student organization in the Philippines and in Asia based in UP Diliman.

The Power Up! Campaign supported UP Babaylan in organizing **UP Pride 2022**. The UP Pride encapsulates the role of pride in campus activism, flaming the queer movement and reclaiming positive changes inside and outside the university. A huge catalyst for various LGBTQI movements, UP Pride also contributes to responding to issues of sexual and reproductive health rights. UP Pride 2022 featured activities such as the UP Pride Opening and Exhibit, Equality Talks, UP Pride Film Festival which also offered on-ground HIV testing service, and UP Pride Night.

Partner with UP Babaylan, email at: upbabaylan.official@gmail.com

Wagayway Equality



Wagayway is a coalition of individuals and organizations working together for LGBTQIA+, PLHIV, MSM and Youth wellness and empowerment.

Wagayway's Power Up! campaign "**Beyond Rainbows and Ribbons**", is a baseline report on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the context of Batangas. The report purports to present the unique context of Batangas, specifically of the two high burden sites in the province, namely Batangas City and Lipa City. The collection of data gathered from focus group discussions and interviews, documentary analysis, and survey questionnaires will enable individuals to become empowered to speak up and to process their narratives into a research.

The project aims to bring institutional change by influencing communities to be more open in normalizing timely and relevant conversation on SOGIESC and gender equality in the hope to have a cultural shift in how we perceive inclusivity, especially in laws and policies that safeguard the rights of the oppressed.

Partner with Wagayway Equality, email at: wagaywayequalityofficial@gmail.com



Young Advocates for SRHR (YAS)

YAS creates spaces for young people's voices and actions for our sexual and reproductive health and rights. Established in 2018, YAS envisions a world where everyone, especially young people, can make informed choices over their body and live the realization of their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Under the Power Up! campaign, YAS conducted the "**Strength in Diversity: Debunking Myths and Misinformation on HIV and AIDS and Adolescent Pregnancy**"



campaign to break the taboo surrounding SRHR, while also increasing young people's understanding of the issue and empowering them to advocate. The campaign engaged communities coming from the LGBTQIA+, youth with disabilities, indigenous people, teenage parents, and minors.

Partner with YAS, email at: yas2srhr@gmail.com



Youth for Reproductive Health Awareness (YouRHealth)



YouRHealth provides peer education training on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health, Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Health Information Session and Counseling and Community Based Screening for HIV/AIDS. YouRHealth is a member of the Provincial Youth Development Council of Misamis Oriental and Local Youth Development Council of Tagoloan.

The **TaGoalOne** project of YouRHealth under the Power Up! Campaign aims to enhance the holistic wellness of students in target

secondary schools in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental and effectively address their needs for health and protection through education by ensuring that they are equipped with comprehensive information and appropriate life skills. The Peer Educators Training conducted under the project saw a significant increase in the awareness, engagement, and support for the organization and its mission.

Partner with YouRHealth, email at: yourhealthmisor@gmail.com

BABÁNG-LUKSÁ

Abel Dionisio Soto

Nang hindi umuwi ang panganay ko isang gabi ng Sabado, inisip ko na kinapos na naman siya ng pera para makauwi ng bahay. “Hindi ka na nasanay sa panganay mo; uuwi ‘yon,” wika ng aking asawa. “At tsaka, ‘nay, alam n’yo naman pong gabi na ang tapos ng klase ni Ate Ella kapag Sabado, pero hindi pa naman po siya pumapalya kahit minsan sa pag-uwi,” dagdag pa ng aking bunso.

Matatapos na rin ang Ate Ella ko ngayong taon sa kursong pinangarap niya: CRIMINOLOGY. Ewan ko ba kung bakit gustong-gusto niyang maging pulis. Kahit si Ate Lyn na nasa Italy na at matagal na niyang kasintahan ay hindi siya napigilan sa pagtutuloy sa kurso niyang ito. Nauna ako sa ate ko ng dalawang taon dahil huminto siya ng tatlong taon upang maghanap-buhay para makaipon kahit kaunti at makapag-aral kaming dalawa.

“Butch” ang ate ko, at kung naging lalaki siya, natitiyak kong mas guwapo siya sa akin. Napakabuti at napaka-maalalahaning tao ng ate ko. Puwede ko nga siya ipagpatayo ng monument dahil sa kabutihan niya. Marami namang mabait na tao, pero hindi lahat ng mabait ay mabuti. Ang ate ko, pareho: mabait na, mabuti pa.

Nakatulugan na naming mag-anak ang paghihintay kay Ate Ella. Natapos na yata naming panoorin ang lahat ng palabas sa telebisyon. Walang umuwing Ate Ella sa aming tahanan nang gabing iyon...

... at wala nang uuwing Ate Ella sa lahat ng mga gabing bubunuin naming mag-anak.

Matagal na akong gising ngunit ang aking mga magulang ay tila nakalupagi pa rin sa banig nitong nakagigimbal na trahedyang sinapit ng aking Ate Ella.

“Ellaaaaa!” sigaw ng aking ina na nasa harapan ng telebisyon habang napapanood niya ang Pangulo na nagsasabi sa kaniyang mga pulis na, ‘Pag walang baril, bigyan niyo ng baril.’ Habang patuloy pa rin ito sa paulit-ulit na pagsigaw ng pangalan ng aking Ate Ella, at mahihinto siya sandali sa pagsigaw, kasabay ng pagmuwestra niya ng pagbaril sa Pangulo gamit ang kaniyang mga kamay, habang tumutulo ang luha nito na nasusundan ng kaniyang tumataginting na halakhak. Parang sinasaksak ang puso ko sa dalamhati ng aking inang pinanawan ng katinuan dahil sa masaklap na pagkamatay ng kaniyang panganay.

Kay dami kong mga tanong na hindi magpatahimik sa aking nagpupuyos na damdamin... mga tanong na parang mga dagang ngumangatngat sa mga nagkagula-gulanit naming pangarap ng Ate Ella ko: Ganito ba dapat maging kalupit ang kapalaran sa isang taong napagbintangan lamang? Kahirapan nga ba ang dahilan upang maging tampulan ng bintang na nauwi sa kamatayan? May mayaman bang ganito ang sinasapit na kapalaran? Ganito na ba talaga kamura ang buhay ngayon ng mga maralitang kagaya namin?

Lahat ng mga tanong ko noon ay inakala kong liliparin lamang ng masamang hangin at wala na ring mararating na tugon. Para bang isang episode sa isang teleserye na nagwakas nang mas maraming iniwang mga tanong kaysa sagot, kung kaya’t marahil patuloy lamang sa panood at pagsubaybay ang buong bansa, dahil tinanggap na lang nila na marami ang namamatay sa isang pelikula ng digmaan. Hindi pa tapos ang teleserye. Naghahari pa ang kontrabida.

Ngunit sino nga ba ang bida? Hindi ko rin alam kung sino. Ang alam ko lang sa bawat kuwento ay may bida.

Isa sa mga kakaunting sandata ng mga maralitang pinagkaitan ng kanilang karapatan ay ang kanilang tinig... ang kanilang kuwento. Batid ko ang katotohanang ito, sapagkat ito ang aking naging sandata isang taon mula nang mawala sa amin ang Ate Ella ko: ang aking tinig at pagsasatinig ng kuwento naming mag-anak.

“Gaano man kalungkot ang kuwento ay may kapangyarihan pa rin itong taglay: ang katotohanan,” mariin kong pagsasabi sa aking mga Grade 12 na mag-aaral sa Malikhaing Pagsusulat. “Huwag na huwag ninyong bibitiwan ang inyong mga kuwento, bagkus ay palayain ninyo ang mga ito sa madawag na lipunan na nababalot ng panlilinlang, pagpatay, at pagyurak sa karapatang-pantao. Nasa mga kuwento natin ang pag-asa, ang pagbangon, at ang pagbababa sa ating mga luksa.” Itinuring kong radikal na pagkilos laban sa berdugong pamahalaan ang aking pagtuturo. Ngayoy batid ko na ang isa sa mga bida sa teleseryeng patuloy kong bibigyan ang kuwento ng bagong tunguhin. Sa kuwentong ito ko pinalaya sa mas malawak na mundo ang isang pagbabagong nais kong maranasan ng aking mga mag-aaral sa hinaharap na inilawan ng kanilang mga pangarap.

Sa kuwentong ito ko rin sisimulang ibaba ang aking luksa.

META MORP OSIS

At nagkaroon tayo ng kamuwangan sa ating mga sarili. Nakatagpo natin ang mga masisidhing damdamin sa ating kalooban habang hinuhubog ng mga ito ang ating mga realidad at mga pagpapasya. At dahan-dahan tayong inilagay sa iba't ibang mga kategorya at pagpapangalan ng ating lipunang mapanghusga. Dahil iba tayo sa tingin ng maraming tao. Dahil bakla tayo. O dahil bakla tayo?

Anu't ano pa man ang inyong opinyon sa bagay na ito, sa kaibahan nila tayo ikinulong, maliban pa sa masaklap na katotohanang marami rin sa mga "bakla" ang nagpasyang ikulong ang mga sarili nila sa bilanguan na matagal na rin nilang binata. Ang iba'y nakakulong pa rin hanggang ngayon sa piitang sila na rin mismo ang may gawa.

Pinangalanan ng mundo ang ating mga sarili o ang ating katauhan sa pagtatangkang pangalanan ang mga bahagdan ng ating pakikilahok at pakikibahagi, subalit nakabuo tayo ng mga kasunduan at mga pangako, mga pagkakaibigan, at mga relasyon sa ibang mga nilalang na namumuhay nang magkakatulad na buhay kagaya ng sa atin ... walang pagkakaiba. Naisip tuloy natin ang totoo, na dapat naman pala ay wala tayong maging pagkakaiba sa kanila. Natutunan natin na tayo ay natatanging magkakaiba sa mga detalye, ngunit magkakatulad sa mas malawak na saklaw at mas magarbong kaayusan ng mga bagay-bagay.

Siguro nga'y tama ang isang makata nang sabihin niya na tayo raw ang mga nilalang ng pagtatangka at pagkakamali. Kailangan pa nating maramdaman ang ningas ng apoy para lamang malaman kung ano ang ibig nilang ipakahulugan sa "masaktan sa pagkakadarang". Kung kaya't nagpatuloy ang hapdi ng ating paglago, ng ating mga pagbabago. Dahil bakla tayo. Kahit bakla tayo. O dahil bakla tayo?

Ang ating pagbibinata't pagdadalaga'y dumating nang may pag-atake ng kaguluhan sa ating mga hormon, mga mas kakaibang pagbabago sa ating katawan, at ang daluyong ng ating pagkamausisa sa ibang tao na humikayat sa ating maging higit pa sila sa kaibigan (lamang). Nakaramdam tayo ng pagnanais na gumawa ng mga bagay-bagay na kadalasan ay mas sinasadya natin kaysa hindi (kagaya ng pagnanasang umasa sa kalinga, malasakit, at pag-ibig ng kapwa natin, ng katulad natin ... sa kasarian man o sa iba pang mga aspeto ng pagkatao). Ang maghawak-kamay, yakapin ang isang minamahal, magnakaw ng halik, magnasa, at magsulat ng mga liham ng pag-ibig para sa isang minamahal na pinangangakuan ng walang-maliw na pag-ibig at ng mga walang-hanggan, kahit pa sa edad na katorse pa lamang. Ang mga pag-ibig na ito'y madalang na tumagal nang walang-hanggan, ngunit hindi kasama rito ang kanilang mga iniwang alaala na marahil hanggang ngayon ay dala-dala pa rin natin sa banal na lundayan ng ating mga gunita: ang ating PUSO. Dahil nga ba bakla tayo. Kahit pa bakla tayo. O dahil ba talaga sa bakla tayo?

Gaano man kainonsente at kadalisay ang mga ito, natutunan pa rin natin na kahit ang pag-ibig ay nakasakit din nang labis ... kahit "bakla" ka pa. Ang unang kabiguan at kasawian sa pag-ibig ay maituturing na ring pagkitil sa buhay ng isang nilalang sa **hukuman ng diwa at damdamin**. Marapat nga lamang marahil ito, bagaman ang sidhi ng sakit na naidulot nito'y humuhupa rin naman.

Hindi ko alam kung maituturing nga bang kamalian na mapahintulutan ang tao na dumama nang may lalim para sa isa't isa, para sa kapuwa niya, lalo na sa isang mundong determinadong lumikha ng mga labis na huwaran at pamantayan, at pagkatapos ay ipapako ka lamang pala sa krus nang dahil sa hindi mo naabot itong mga labis na kalabisan ng mga huwang pamantayan. O huwad na pamantayan.

Nasasaktan tayo...at labis din ito, sa paniniwalang walang sinoman ang nakauunawa sa lalim ng ating mga sugat, kagaya nang wala pa ring ganap na makaunawa sa ating pagiging bakla at kung bakit hindi mapigilan ang ating pagdami, paglago, at ang ating metamorposis. Ito ang hindi nila mababatid nang may kaganapan kahit kailan!

Kagaya ng mga iba pang pighati at mga dalamhati na inihawan ng lipunan sa ating mga daan, mas natutunan nating ipagdiwang ang kalungkutan sapagkat tinanggap natin na maging ang pighati ay isa ring pangkalahatang wika ng buhay, isang mapagpalang pangungusap na ating malugod na niyayakap.

Sa bawat segundo'y tumatanda tayo, at ating daigdig ay nag-iiwan ng mga kabatiran at mga kaalaman na humuhubog sa ating mga pagkakakilanlan. Lumago tayo, nalanta, namilipit sa hirap ng pananatiling nagpupunyagi at sa pagpapatuloy na paglaban. Natalos natin na sa kabila nitong mga sakit at pagpupunyagi ay ang pagwawagi. Sa bawat balakid at suliraning nagbigay sa ating mga bakla ng pakiramdam na tayo ay isang mahinang nilalang, mayroong sandali ng pagsupil sa damdaming ito na nagpanatili sa ating buhay at lumalaban. Hindi tayo winasak nito kagaya ng naramdaman natin sa mga panahon ng masidhing pakikipagtunggali sa mga hamon ng buhay, at hindi ito kailanman dapat na maging hadlang sa patuloy na pag-usad sa susunod na aral na naghihintay sa atin upang gawin tayo nitong mas ganap na tao at makatao.

Isa itong kabalintunaan na walang kaganapang kongklusiyon o katapusan, at wala pa sa hinagap na ating maaapuhap. Sa bawat tanong, may mga umuusbong na ibang mga sanga-sanga at laksa-laksang tanong. **Ang mabuhay ay mabigo**, at ang kabiguan ay nangangahulugan lamang na tayo'y kumikilos at gumagawa, na tayo'y tunay na buhay at natututo pa rin nang walang humpay. Isa itong siklo sa ating patuloy na paglago patungo sa ating mga kaganapan. Lahat tayo. Bakla man hindi.

Dapat lang nating maramdaman bilang mga bakla na tayo'y pinagpala sa ating sariling malaya at mapagpalayang espasyo sa isang malawak na mundo, patuloy na lumalago at nagpapanibago, sapagkat tayong mga bakla ang mga huwaran ng isang napakaganda at malikhaing espirituwal na metamorphosis na nagpapalaya at hindi lamang nagpaparaya.

BRIEF NI TITA

Gerome Nicolas Dela Peña

KAYHIRAP TANGGAPIN SUBALIT minsan, nasasabihan akong suplado. Totoo at hindi. Dalawang bagay sa akin ang pagbabansag na ito. Una, kailangan kong linawing kailanman, 'di ako isnabero, at hindang-hindi ako maaaring mag-ala-Guidance Counselor sa isang estudyanteng pasaway kanino man.

Lumaki akong leader sa aming klase, sa maraming mga organisasyong pangkabataan, at nitong nasa kolehiyo na nga'y nakatsamba akong maging pangulo pa ng samahan ng mga Filipino major at university student council. Ma-PR daw ako. Palakaibigan, madaldal, mabiro. Mahilig magpatawa. Masarap kasama. Ipinanganak para makiisa't makihalubilo. Pero minsan, hindi ko rin maintindihan ang sarili ko. May mga oras na kusang umiiwas ako ng tingin (ako ba talaga iyon o mata ko lang), lalo pa't pakiramdam ko, may pagkakasala o pagkakamali ako sa tao—nag-eexist man ang ideya ng “kasalanang” ito sa isip ng taong iyon o hindi.

“So, nagbi-brief ang tita mo?”

Pagsakay ko sa tricycle pauwi galing sa supermarket sa 'min, nakita ko ang tita ni Seby. Medyo nagulat ako sa sarili ko dahil kahit umaandar na ang tricycle, nilingon ko siyang pilit. May kulay pa rin ang buhok niya gaya nang dati pero halatang tumanda na rin. Halos pareho pa rin naman ang hitsura niya, ang 'di ko maintindihan, ang urge kong tingnan siya kahit pa sa malayo. Nahagip ng mata ko ang malaki niyang suso, mababa kasi ang neckline ng suot niyang damit. Kailan pa? Napailing ako. 'Di ko alam kung anong dapat kong isipin, maramdaman.

Kaibigan ko si Seby. Dating crush. Actually, marami kaming magkakaklase na may gusto sa kaniya. Elementary days 'yon. Ang ganda-ganda niya at ang puti-puti pa. Bukas na libro sa marami ang buhay niya—half-Japanese siya ngunit 'di ko na maalala kung nabanggit ba niyang nagkita na sila ng tatay niya. Sa pagkakaalala ko'y hindi. Pati nga nanay niya, hindi ko alam kung kasama ba nila, o kung dinadalaw man lang ba siya. Kaya alam ko noon na nag- struggle sila financially. Hindi siya gano'n katalino pero sobrang talented. Bawing-bawi. Hanep sumayaw. Lagi siyang laman ng stage sa lahat ng aming mga field demo at cultural show. Siya na ang ginagawang choreo, siya pa ang nasa gitna. Walang hindi nakakikilala sa kaniya.

'Yung tropa kong si Raven ang pinakamalakas ang tama sa kaniya. Grade 6 kami no'n. Sobrang pasikat ni Raven sa klase dahil bukod sa matalino, maputi ito at may hitsura rin. Math ang forte. Bata pa lang kami, ipinangangalandakan na niya sa lahat na magiging engineer siya sa future. Wala namang kumontra sa kaniya kasi totoo namang hindi iyon imposible sa kaniya. Kaso nga lang, si Raven, sobrang libog.

May isang grading noon na naglipatan ng upuan. Lagi itong ginagawa sa klase, lalo pa't mas bumibigat ang kompetisyon. Nirarambol ng adviser namin noon ang seating arrangement, para raw hindi kami masyadong palagay at umasa sa mga katabi't kaibigan. Malapit na noon ang graduation. Para raw tumimo sa isip naming sarili lang namin ang lagi naming aasahan, lalo na pagdating sa high school. Si Raven, nailagay sa likod ni Seby. Hulog ng langit iyon para sa kaniya. Katabi ko naman si Raven pero kabilang row ako. Nasa aisle kami pareho. Palihim na tumatawa at bumubulong-bulong si Raven, parang demonyong may binabalak gawin.

Si Seby, kahit pa maraming nagkakagustong lalaki sa kaniya, hindi siya nagiging gano'n kasaya. Kinaiinisan siya ng ilang mga kaklase naming babae. Siguro dahil sa maganda siya at sikat pa. Siya ang laging napapansin at ina-assign ng mga teacher tuwing may labang kailangan ng beauty at talent. Ang kakaiba kay Seby, never siyang nagpaapekto. Noon pa man alam na niya ang goal niya, at alam niya ang lahat nang dapat na gawin para hindi mapurnada ang mga ito.

Mga babae ang nagbunyang sa pinakaitinatagong sikreto ni Seby, na sa tingin ko'y sumubok nang husto sa kaniyang tatag at pasensiya. Binanggit sa mga kaklase naming tsismoso. Bakla ang nagpalaki kay Seby, “tita” niyang kapatid ng nanay niya.

Noong una, hindi ito uma-attend sa mga meeting pero noong nagkaroon ng komosyon sa klase isang beses na sumagot si Seby kung anong problema sa pagiging bakla, ito na ang laging present sa lahat ng mga ganap. Kapag may laban si Seby, presentation, field demo man o Mr. and Ms. UN, laging naroon ang tita niya. Kumpleto ang mga gamit sa makeup o kung ano-ano pang anek-aneke at kolorete—kahit pa ang lahat ng damit at accessories na kailangan ni Seby, advantage na sa parlor ito nagtatrabaho. Natural nang

maganda si Seby at simpleng ayos lang sa kaniya'y kayang-kaya niyang mag-standout. Mas lalong tumindi ang galit ng mga kaklase naming babae.

Laging ipinapatong ni Raven ang paa niya sa ilalim na bahagi ng upuan ni Seby. Tapos ugali pa nitong tawagin ako at ipakitang inaalog-alog ang upuang nasa harapan. Mas nanggigil pa siya kapag nagtatawanan ang mga katabi. Minsan nga ay ipinakita niya ang kumakapal nang bulbol at iminuwestra pa niyang balak niyang mag-jakol. Umiling-iling na lang ako sinabihan siya ng “fuck you, ang baboy mo.” Tumawa lang ang loko.

“So, nagbi-brief ang tita mo?” biglang tanong ng isang kaklaseng lalaking hindi ko alam kung paano nakapasok sa amin sa section 1. Dito ko unang beses narinig na nagtaas ng boses si Seby at nagsabing “Hindi ninyo ba ako tatantanan? O sige, kahit ako na lang, ako na lang, 'wag na si Tita. Wala naman siyang ginagawang masama sa inyo, ha? Siya lang ang pamilya ko. Huwag naman sana siyang madamay sa galit ninyo sa akin.”

Pagpasok ng teacher sa klase, walang umiimik. Ni walang nagbabalak mag-recite. Nakabibinging katahimikan. Tanong nang tanong ang teacher: “What's wrong with you, guys?” Gusto kong magsalita pero nanahimik na lang ako. Kung paano ba naman, hindi ako makapagsalita kasi kahit ako, palihim na natawa sa tanong ng gago kong kaklase. Lumaki akong pinagtatawanan sa lugar namin ang mga bakla. Lalo na sina Tutsi at Mona. Mababang mababa ang tingin sa kanila, kahit pa ng mga kapwa namin mahirap. Matapobreng mga kapitbahay. Pero kapag mayaman at propesyonal na bading, iniidolo naman nila. Mga tao nga naman.

Nang makita kong muli 'yong tita ni Seby, mga higit sa limang taon ko na itong hindi nakakasalubong. Nangibang-bansa kaya? Noong nag-highschool kami, palipat-lipat ito ng salong pinagtatrabahuan. Sa tatlong salon ata. Naalala kong bigla si Seby at Raven. Dalawa na ang anak niya. Si Raven naman, buhay-binata pa rin batay sa post niya sa FB, wala atang balak mag-asawa. Parang gusto ko sila ulit kumustahin.

Alam kong napatingin siya sa akin nang sumakay ako sa tricycle habang nasa backride ako, pero iniwas ko agad ang mata ko. Tumingin sa Jollibee sa tapat ng terminal. Nasilaw ang mga mata sa ilaw ng nasabing fastfood. Pumikit. Naalala niya kaya ako? Na madalas kami noong nasa bahay nila kapag may groupings na si Seb ang leader. O kaya, kapag pumupunta siya sa school at nag-a-assist kay Seb sa performances at pageants nito, naaalala niya kayang isa ako sa mga officer na nag-organize ng event? Naisumbong kaya ako ni Seb na isa ako sa mga madalas na mang-asar sa kaniya, lalong-lalo na sa kaniyang kasarian? Hindi ko alam.

Makalipas ang maraming taon, nang piliin kong maging guro at mananaliksik, biyaya at naambunan ako kahit paano ng mga teorya at namulat sa katotohanan ng tunay na dinaranas ng mga bakla, tomboy, at iba pang may piniling kasarian sa lipunan. Ang LGBTQIA+ community na lagi't lagi kong sinasabi sa mga mag-aaral (at piliit isinusulat sa mga akdang nalilikha) na isa sa mga pinakamatatayang na nilalang sa mundo. Kung masahol pa rin sa maraming mga lugar sa daigdig ang tingin sa kababaihan (sex objects, pambahay lang, mahina, atbp.), tiyak, maging sa mga may piniling kasarian magmamarka ang talim ng pangil ng sistema. Lalong-lalo na sa mahihirap. Pagkataas-taas ng tingin natin kina Vice Ganda at Boy Abunda, pero diring-diri naman tayo sa mga baklang kontesera at parlorista. Kaipokritohan at its finest. Pera-pera pa rin talaga.

Mortal na kasalanan sa lipunan ang magpakatotoo. At sa kanilang sitwasyon, pagkapahiya't pandudusta lang naman ang kabuluhan ng buhay; minsan pa nga'y kamatayan ang nagiging kahulugan nito. Anong mapapala natin sa mundong pinaghaharian pa rin ng mga bully? Ng mga maton. Ng mga siga. Ng mga malalakas. Ng mga lalaki. Ng mga batang pinalaking tulad ni Raven. Ng mga gaya ko rin.

Ngayon, kung sa hinaharap, magkaroon man ako ng anak na bakla o tomboy (o kung paano man sila mag-self identify sa kani-kanilang mga sexual orientation at gender identity), sasabihin kong “Anak, spread your wings. Mahal ka ni tatay, ano ka man. Sino ka man. Ikaw ang buhay ko. Susuportahan kita.” Sa pagdating din ng panahon, sana hindi ko na siya iwasan ng tingin. Sana, masuklian ko na siya ng ngiti at makatingin na ako nang direktso sa kaniyang mga mata. Sana, madama niya ang pagkilala at pagrespeto ko sa kaniya at sa lahat ng tulad niya, hindi man na niya ako kilala; hindi man niya ito hingiin mula sa akin.

Salamat sa mga tulad niyang higit na kayang magpaka-ama at magpaka-ina, sa panahong tinatalikuran ng mga ito ang sari-sariling responsibilidad sa sariling dugo at kaluluwa.

Fire Sexual Harassers

Jasmine Cruz

So there's a sexual harassment controversy that erupted in the office of my friend, yeah. And the administration sent a memo to everyone:

Company Memo Regarding Proper Decorum

Oct. 16, 2019

TO ALL EMPLOYEES:

Considering the responses we've received about the current social media post that accused a senior employee of sexual harassment, we would like to assure everyone that you are in a safe space. There is no need to worry. Everything is under control. We would also like to remind people about proper decorum especially on social media when it comes to unnecessary public discussion.

Remember, when we are under fire, we don't combust. We carry on. That is why we would like to encourage everyone to continue to perform their daily tasks and responsibilities. This institution prides itself for its reputation of excellence.

Always keeping things aflame. Ignis to you all, and thank you for your cooperation.

Respectfully,

Jonas Thung Chu
Director
Department of Humanity and Recreation

When I read that, I was like *Hmmmm*.

For Christmas, the administration gave all the employees long umbrellas with a sling case that they can hang at their back, and all the employees were like, *wow, this institution is so proactive about addressing the issue of sexual harassment that they've given us weapons to defend ourselves, like Hunger Games.*

You know the employees were like, *we feel like Katniss Everdeen right now and we can't help but explode like Vesuvius, explode with truth*, but then they were like, *but we have to explode kindly and peacefully, lest we be called the bitches of the human race, so when we explode, we will explode into song.*

This girl is on fire
And hopefully not fired
For speaking about
Sexual harassment
Oooh sexual harassment
Oooh sexual harassment.
Oooh sexual harassment.
We better stop talking.
We better stop talking.
If we like our jobs
Oh oh.

And the administration reminded the employees that this office is so holy, an office blessed by Jesus Christ, and the employees were like, *yes, we can see all the gold here and the people praying right. This makes us feel like how dare we say that sexual harassment is happening in this prestigious institution, anyone who questions this institution's sacred reality feels immoral for speaking up.*

So let us pray instead.

Responsorial Psalm.
Let our response be:
This institution is full
of the goodness of the Lord.

Blessed the institution whose hierarchy rules like a Lord, the employees have not chosen subordination yet the powerful's eyes are upon those who get salaries, as they are not allowed to complain about the powerful's friends.

Response?
This institution is full
of the protection of the Lord.

Souls are waiting for a better memo, that will help enlighten everyone about the issue. yet the institution wants to shield hearts to find joy. The institution trusts people's forgetfulness, like a history that likes to move on.

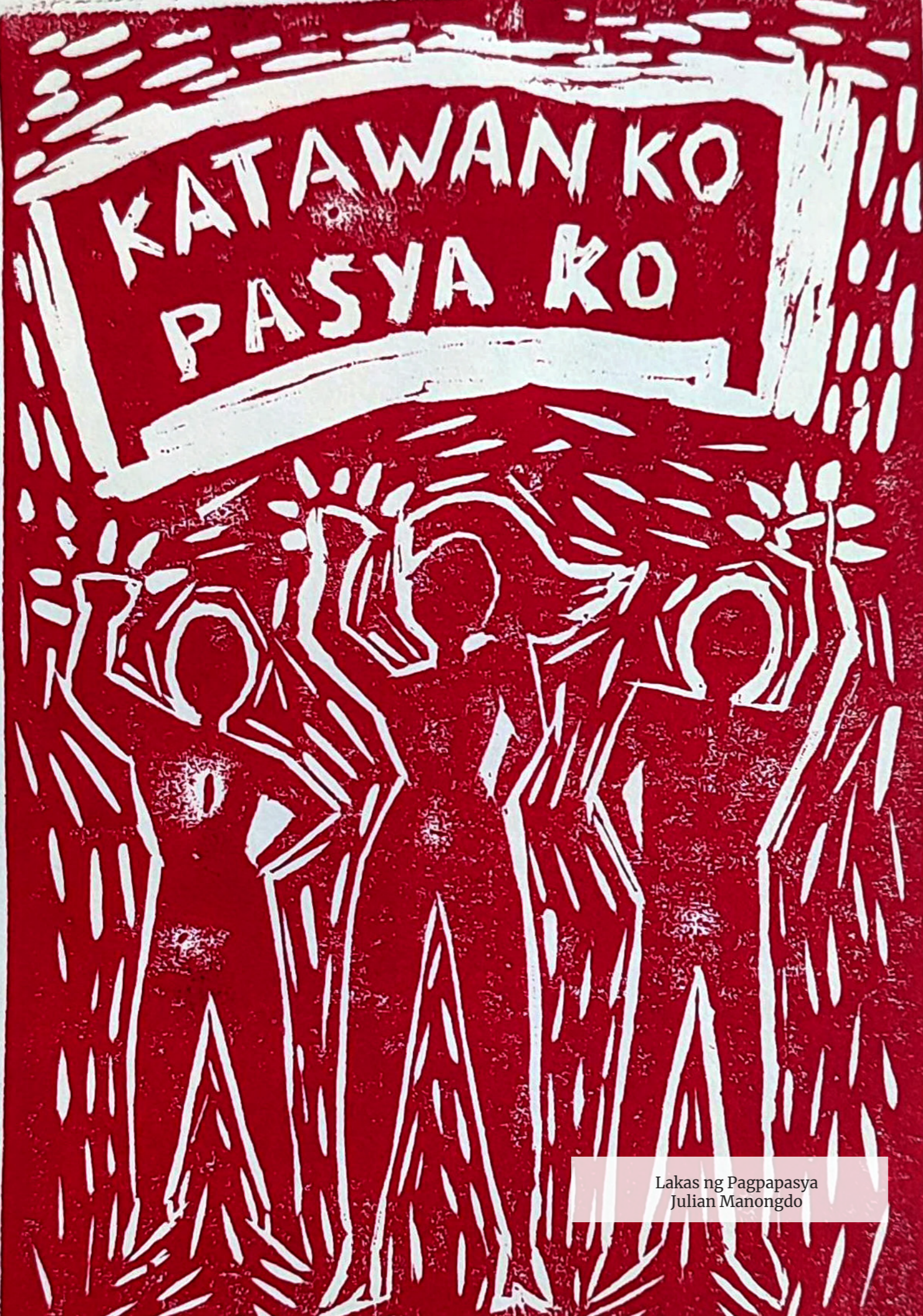
Response?
This institution is full
of the mercy of the Lord.

For the institutions, what's important is to protect its reputation peace and harmony at all costs, there is wisdom in silence, and the institution be glad.

Response?
This institution is full
of bullshit.

Glory! Glory!
Mother Mary
Nuestra Senora dela Luz.
Our lady, lady of fire.
You'll protect your institution
Until you're freakin' freakin' holy
Having silenced all your ghosts.

Don't you smile weakly at us
When we have questions.
We have questions.
We have questions.
Don't you smile weakly at us when we have questions.



Lakas ng Pagpapasya
Julian Manongdo

Authors of poems, short stories, and artworks

Abel D. Soto is the Division Chief of the Academic Affairs of the National Academy of Sports. Abel is the great, great, great grandson of Juan Crisostomo C. Soto, the Father of Capampangan Literature. He is a musician, poet, and educator

Si *Gerome Nicolas Dela Peña* ay kasalukuyang guro ng Filipino at Panitikan sa Manila Tytana Colleges at mag-aaral ng PhD Malikhaing Pagsulat sa Unibersidad ng Pilipinas – Diliman. Awtor siya ng 7pitong aklat ng mga tula at sanaysay, kabilang ang *Birtuwal: Mga Bago at Piling Tula* mula sa Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF Publikasyon) noong 2021. Nailathala ang kaniyang mga akda sa *UST Tomas Journal*, *Ani 41: Lakbay ng Cultural Center of the Philippines*, *Liwayway* magazine, *Kalazine Journal ng UP Kolehiyo ng Arte at Letra*, *Bulawan: Literary Journal of Northern Mindanao*, at iba pa. Patuloy siyang nagtuturo, nagsusulat, nagsasaliksik, at naglalakbay para sa panlipunang pagbabago.

Jasmine Cruz is a feminist writer who likes political improv comedy. She is a member of *Time's Up Ateneo (TUA)*, a collective of survivors and advocates fighting against sexual violence and impunity in the university and beyond. TUA publishes content on the website <https://timesupateneo.org>.

Izo Hernandez is a trans activist who has a very strong passion for writing poetry and food. His poetry styles are always in rhyme and he would often write poetries at very random moments, spark of inspiration is what you can call it. He is an out and proud transgender man from the Philippines who believes that visibility and voice are the keys to educating and sharing knowledge about living life as a transgender individual. He works as an active member of the LGBTQ+ community by volunteering and life-sharing. He also openly shares his transgender life and everything that comes with it via his social media as his way of relaying information to help his fellow trans brothers. Izo's confidence in being himself and proudly identifying as a transgender man are rooted in the lines a priest told him when he shared about being transgender during a face-to-face confession: "Kapag wala kang tinatapakang ibang tao, wala kang ginagawang mali."

Julian Manongdo is the current Secretary General of Millennials PH.

Lakas ng Pagpapasya was made to honor the power and right of all women and persons who are able bear children to make decisions over their own bodies, including their right to accessible, affordable, and safe abortions. This artwork was done for the Telling Truer Stories, an initiative that collects feminists narratives in various art forms (visual art, poetry, essays, music, film), all to shift from the usual conservative caricatures and stereotypes to the underrepresented diverse realities that women (and their loved ones) live every day. In commemoration of the International Safe Abortion Day on September 28, 2022, WGNRR together with the Philippine Safe Abortion Advocacy Network and Filipino Freethinkers, held discussions and art workshops to showcase the intersection of abortion rights issue with women's rights and other social rights and justice issues.



SRHR mobile app

tara! SRHR mobile app is designed to support:

- **learning** of young people and support peer education strategies of organizations;
- **finding** facilities providing SRHR-related information and services in the Philippines; and,
- **joining** activities and campaigns of young people



Want to partner with us?

E-mail us at office@wgnrr.org

Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) conducts collaborative campaigns for Women's Month, May 28 International Day of Action for Women's Health, September 28 International Safe Abortion Day, and 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence.

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