From a Culture of Domination to Safe Spaces

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Abstract

This paper examines the culture of domination and oppression that poses a challenge in creating safe spaces. This culture normalizes oppression affecting marginalized groups, particularly women. This culture threatens safe spaces, which hinders women's participation in society without the fear of being silenced, dismissed, and excluded. But how can we establish safe spaces in a culture where dominant groups control the narrative of society? This paper analyzes the culture of domination in the Philippines using the philosophical lenses of Iris Marion Young, bell hooks, and Judith Butler. Young's *Five Faces of Oppression* and hooks' notion of intersectionality were used to analyze the intricate relationships between oppression's multiple manifestations and how they affect Filipino Women. Butler's work is also cited to explain how social constructs like gender as performativity shape women's experiences and actions in different spaces. Finally, this paper suggests creating safe spaces when this oppressive culture persists.

Keywords: Culture of Domination, Oppression, Safe Spaces, Feminism, Patriarchy

Introduction

Creating safe spaces raises conflict among those who seek to utilize such spaces. In a society where the culture of domination perpetuates, the marginalized group struggles to achieve a certain degree of inclusion and equality. The power and privilege granted to certain groups foster a culture of domination, enabling them to control the narrative and structure of society. This control leads to the assigning roles for every member, resulting in the silencing, exclusion, and dismissal of the non-dominant groups. This culture normalizes the experience of domination and oppression. Hence, it provides us with the struggle to create safe spaces.

Generally, a safe space is defined as a place intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, or conversations.[1] In such spaces, people could express themselves freely and authentically and participate in society without fearing being excluded and discriminated against. Safe space is necessary to humanize the experience of every individual. However, achieving safe spaces is difficult considering the society's structure. For example, Karl Marx argued that in any given society, two distinct classes exist: the bourgeoisie (the ruling class) and the proletariat (the working class).[2] This class distinction results in class struggle where there are oppressors or exploiting class and oppressed or exploited class. Indeed, throughout history, the conflict between social classes has consistently propelled humanity toward domination and oppression. The ceaseless strife between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat persists because the former has control, power, and privilege while the latter grapples with exploitation and marginalization.

Every society has its unique narratives of domination and oppression. The Philippines, a country colonized for more than 300 years, embraces an unconscious acceptance and tolerance of domination and oppression. It is embedded in Filipino culture and affects life socially, economically, and politically. The history of colonialism significantly impacted Filipinos' lived realities, particularly women, resulting in marginalization, gender-based

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[1] "Definition of Safe Space," in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, August 24, 2023.
[2] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (Marxists Internet Archive, 2010), 28.

violence, and cultural inferiority. These experiences situate women in an unsafe space. Hence, it raises the discussion on safe spaces. Bearing that the norm of domination for Filipinos persists, it presents a problem of how to create safe spaces to humanize the experience of every Filipino woman. The existence of this norm raises the question, "How can we create safe spaces in a culture where the domination of power and privilege exists?"

As the country faces critical issues in creating safe spaces for everyone, it is essential to analyze the factors hindering such spaces' creation. One of them is the norm of the culture of domination and oppression, which is strengthened by the patriarchal structure of society. Consequently, this paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on creating safe spaces. Moreover, this paper uses critical reflective analysis to answer the question above.[3] To do this, I first define the meaning of safe spaces to frame the use of the term. Next, I examine the culture where a demonstration of domination leads to the oppression of women in the Philippine condition. I use the lens of selected feminist philosophers: Iris Marion Young, bell hooks, and Judith Butler. Finally, I provide an avenue on how marginalized groups and individuals may create safe spaces.

What is a [Safe] Space?

Space is neutral. It does not possess any inherent prejudice or qualities. It is a place where people exist and coexist. In people's co-existence, understanding spaces are influenced by their social relations, perspectives, biases, and norms. With this, space becomes a concern since the significance we attribute to these spaces is shaped by societal, political, historical, and personal factors. Our perception and experience of safety within specific spaces become precarious within societal structures.

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[3] Critical Reflective analysis uses reflection to analyze certain problems, phenomena or situations. Reflection is a crucial cognitive practice in the research field. Reflection aims to understand the forms of intelligibility by which the world is made meaningful; in the heuristic context of the research work, reflecting means to elucidate the epistemic acts developed amid the inquiry process (See Mortari, 2015).

Our experience of safety varies on how people perform and identify their identity in it and how space is used and controlled.[4] The idea of safety generally relies on an underlying threat of violence.[5] Violence affects our lives, and its presence erodes our sense of security, which produces adverse effects like fear, exclusion, and oppression. To address this critical issue, we must dismantle systems that sustain unsafe spaces for people, like patriarchy, which results in male domination and a system of oppression, sexism, and racism. Everyone has a responsibility to create safe spaces. Thus, creating and maintaining safe spaces is crucial and necessary.

Defining a safe space is complex. In gender studies, it explores the "mutual constitutions of gendered identities and spaces."[6] Gendered norms and beliefs create acceptable behaviors for men and women.[7] These gendered norms influence their actions in certain spaces. Considering that our society is patriarchal, power and privilege were given to men, affecting space safety. As such, safe spaces respond to the often patriarchal, heteronormative, racialized, and classed construction of safety.[8] The discussion of safe space challenges oppression operating within the dominant culture.[9] Unsafe space excludes the marginalized and the oppressed, while safe spaces usually support and affirm marginalized identities since they may offer a "safe base" and site for organizing resistance.[10]

In this paper, these definitions were used to analyze the unsafe place of women in society. Their experiences of oppression must be examined to provide a way to create and maintain a safe space for them. The cultivation of safe spaces is a way of practicing social justice that recognizes, emphasizes, and in some ways encourages social difference.[11] Cultivating safe spaces requires examining the norms of domination that cause inequalities among groups.

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[4] The Roestone Collective, "Safe Space: Towards a Reconceptualization," *Antipode* 46, no. 5 (2014): 1349. Ibid, 1349. See also Bondi and Rose 2003:234 and Valentine 1989:389.

[5] The Roestone Collective, "Safe Space," 1349.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Sarah Metcalfe, "Adolescent constructions of gendered identities: the role of sport and (physical) education" *Sport, Education and Society* (2018), 1.

[8] The Roestone Collective, "Safe Space,"1349.

[9] Ibid., 1352.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 1360.

Oppression and the Culture of Domination, Power, and Privilege

Safe space is threatened by oppressive structures brought by a specific culture of domination, power, and privilege in societies. This prevents and limits women from accessing and enjoying spaces without seeking approval from the dominant group. Safe space can be a refuge from these structures, yet this culture impedes its realization.

This section provides three different feminist lenses, including Iris Marion Young, bell hooks, and Judith Butler, that explain how this culture works as a system of oppression. Their philosophical ideas are essential to analyze how the complex ways of power and privilege intersect with gender and other social categories that sustain structural injustice within the society, affecting Filipino women in the pursuit of safe spaces.

Young: Structural Injustice and the Five Faces of Oppression

Iris Marion Young (1949-2006) is a feminist political philosopher whose philosophy is "focused on gender, race, justice, equality, democracy, globalization, and international relations while immersing herself in activism and political organization."[12] In her book, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* she provided a critique against the systemic structure. Young is known for her significant contributions to social justice. In her analysis, social justice is closely linked to oppression. Oppression, for Young, is structural. She argued that "its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules."[13] She claimed that oppression is a systemic constraint on social groups that leads to injustice.[14] In oppression, social groups are immobilized and diminished. A social group is a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of

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[12] Feorillo A. Demeterio III, *Young's Theory of Structural Justice and Collective Responsibility* (De La Salle University (DLSU) Publishing House, 2019).

[13] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990),41.

[14] Ibid.

life.[15] They have a specific affinity with one another because of their similar experiences and way of life.

Young provided categories and distinctions experienced by certain social groups to explain the complex norm of structural injustice. The five faces of oppression are adequate to describe the oppression of any group since oppression is a condition of groups. The five categories or faces are exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.[16] Exploitation occurs when one social group has a steady process of transferring the results of the labor of one social group to benefit the other.[17] For example, in capitalism, the wealthy benefit from the working class's struggle, which results in economic inequality. Yet, exploitation enacts structural manifestations of oppression experienced by social groups, particularly women.[18] Another is marginalization. It is a form of oppression where certain groups are excluded from meaningful social participation, leading to material deprivation. Young provided two categories of injustice in marginalization: first, the provision of welfare that takes away the rights of others; second, the welfare state prevents opportunities despite reducing material deprivation.[19] Young argued that even though the welfare system addresses basic needs, it creates new forms of injustice by enforcing rules and sustaining power imbalances among social groups. Next is powerlessness, which is characterized by the inability to be autonomous.[20] Powerlessness highlights that people in this situation lack agency and control over their experiences. Some restrictions prevent them from realizing their full potential. For example, Young distinguishes powerlessness between professionals and non-professionals. The former has a privileged status as compared to the latter.

The non-professionals are the specific victims of powerlessness.[21] Cultural Imperialism involves universalizing a dominant group's experience and culture and establishing it as the

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[15] Ibid., 43.

[16] Ibid., 40.

[17] Ibid., 49.

[18] Ibid., 49-50.

[19] Ibid., 54.

[20] Marella Ada V. Mancenido-Bolaños, "Iris Marion Young's 'Faces of Oppression' and the Oppression of Women in the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012," *Kritike* 14, no. 1 (June 2020), 104.

[21] Demeterio III, *Young's Theory of Structural Justice.*

norm.[22] They reinforce their position by bringing other groups under the measure of its prevailing norms.[23] This creates deviance and inferiority to the non-dominant groups. Due to the widely disseminated cultural expressions of the dominant group, they become universal expressions. Last is violence, "it is systemic because it is directed at members of a group simply because they are members of that group."[24] Young identified women as a social group who experience frequent physical violence. Violence as a form of oppression is a phenomenon of social injustice since social context makes it possible and even acceptable. Thus, violence is a systemic and social practice.[25] Thus, the existence of institutionalized and systemic group-directed violence is a clear threat to women's ability to create safe spaces.

bell hooks: Power, Privilege, and Oppression

bell hooks or Gloria Jean Watkins, is an American scholar, feminist, and activist. She is known for her work by examining the connections between race, gender, and class. In her book, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, she critiqued the existing feminist discourses, arguing that the current feminist discourse only privileges white bourgeoisie women and neglects the plight and experiences of black women. Hence, she proposed a new lens of the feminist movement that seeks to "fight to end sexist oppression and exploitation without neglecting other forms of oppression such as racism, classism, imperialism, and others."[26]

hooks proposed a "revolutionary feminism"[27] to make a difference in the plight of women. It is a response to the existing feminist theory by white people. For example, hooks critiqued Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, arguing that the book described the

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[22] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 59.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 62.

[26] Hazel T. Biana, "Extending bell hooks' Feminist Theory," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, no. 21-1 (2020), 13.

[27] Revolutionary feminism proposes a more holistic actualization of the self that can eventually give birth to a global political restructuring. The self-development of a people will shake up the cultural basis of group, which is oppression. (See Biana "Extending bell hooks' Feminist Theory", 17.)

condition of women is referring "to the plight of a select group of college-educated, middle and upper class married white women—housewives bored with leisure, with the home, with children, with buying products, who wanted more out of life."[28] For hooks, Friedan "made her plight and the plight of white women like herself synonymous with a condition affecting all American women."[29] Hence, there is a neglect of experience by women outside of their class. For hooks, there is racism in the writings of white feminists, strengthening white supremacy.[30] Due to white supremacy, class structure in the American setting has been shaped. Thus, affirming class struggle and oppression of black women. According to hooks, "As a group, black women are in an unusual position in this society, for not only are we collectively at the bottom of the occupational ladder, but our overall social status is lower than that of any other group. Occupying such a position, we bear the brunt of sexist, racist, and classist oppression."[31]

Furthermore, for hooks, class matters in the discourse of feminism. In her book *Where We Stand: Class Matters,* she argued that there is class conflict and struggle which is an interlocking system of race, gender, and class. She added that it is crucial to face the issue of class to become more conscious and know how best to struggle for economic justice.[32] It is significant to talk about class because class warfare may be the people's fate if we do not collectively challenge classism. For hooks, this class conflict is already racialized and gendered.[33] In this book, hooks argues the importance of class in understanding and addressing inequalities. Women's experiences of oppression are shaped by their class background. Poor women and rich women may experience differences in how society treats them. Thus, domination is intertwined with social class. Social class reinforces hierarchies and social class segregation. All of these sustain oppression and affect our path toward safe spaces. hooks' ideologies were extended by Hazel Biana, who claimed that hooks' ideas would be problematic if presented to third-world brown women since racism is also experienced from other vantage points, not only the black

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[28] bell hooks, F*eminist Theory from margin to center* (New York: South End Press, 1984),1.

[29] Ibid., 2.

[30] Ibid., 3.

[31] Ibid., 14.

[32] bell hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 8.

[33] Ibid., 9.

vantage point.[34] Thus, for Biana, hooks failed to address the voice of the oppressed from developing nations, like the Philippines.[35]

Butler: Gender as Performativity

Judith Pamela Butler, popularly known as Judith Butler, is a feminist American philosopher whose theories of the performative nature of gender and sex were very influential within feminist philosophical discourses and cultural theories. In her best-known work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, she argued that gender is socially constructed.[36] For her, there is no inherent natural basis in which men naturally behave as masculine and women as feminine; rather, these are the social conventions.[37] She argued that gender is not something internal but is a repeated performance of acts, gestures, and desires evident on the body's surface.[38]

For Butler, gender is not just a process, but it is a particular type of process, "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame."[39] The idea of gender as performativity states that gender proves to be performativity, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing.[40] However, this kind of performativity is already determined within the regulatory frame. Gender performativity is constituted through repeated acts performed within societal norms. These norms prescribe specific roles for individuals of their assigned gender. These arguments tell us that gender is not a voluntary choice but a process influenced by social structures and power dynamics. Considering this, the dominant culture's gender performativity could oppress the marginalized, particularly women. Hence, gender performativity should be changed

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34 Biana, "Extending bell hooks," 19.

35 Ibid., 21.

36 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble,* (Abingdon: Routledge classics, 1990), 16.

37 Ibid., 6.

38 Joy Jenkins; Finneman, Teri, "Gender trouble in the workplace: applying Judith Butler's theory of performativity to news organizations," *Feminist Media Studies* 18, no. 2 (2017).

39 Sara Salih, "On Judith butler and performativity." *Sexualities and communication in everyday life: A reader* (2007), 56.

40 Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 25.

by raising awareness and disrupting and challenging traditional gender norms and expectations to create a safe space.

Status of Filipino Women: Subordination, Oppression

Based on the metric system, the Philippines is one of the leading countries in promoting gender equality; being ranked first in Asia, second in the East Asia and the Pacific (EAP) region, and 16th place globally.[41] This shows significant progress, highlighting our commitment to address gender disparities. Yet, it is crucial to acknowledge that no country has achieved full gender parity. Based on the pace of progress, it will take approximately 131 years to reach full equality.[42] More effort is needed to enhance our means of addressing gender issues. We need to address the norms affecting the people's behavior, which create a culture of domination and oppression. Particularly, Filipinos still hold fundamental biases against women.[43] These biased gender social norms impede our progress in achieving gender equality and empowering women.[44] While some Filipino women may consider themselves empowered, it is essential to recognize that many still face ongoing struggles in their quest for empowerment.

Like any other [oppressed] women in the world, Filipino Women who have yet to attain empowerment and full agency often experience various forms of "otherness"[45] that impact their way of life. This norm of "otherness" positions them at a disadvantage as the societal structure fails to provide them with equitable privileges, power, and authority. The persistence of biased gender social norms, inhibiting women from attaining full agency, perpetuates their

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[41] World Economic Forum, "Global Gender Gap Report 2023" https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2023.

[42] Ibid.

[43] United Nations, "2023 Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI)," Human Development Reports, June 12, 2023, https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI.

[44] Ibid.

[45] The term is used similarly to the idea of Simone De Beauvoir, who argued that women throughout history are treated as the "other" in relation to men. These norms position women as only a secondary sex and a subordinate as compared to men. So, there is a subordination of women and domination of men. The latter becomes an invisible reality and the former is acceptable. (See Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1949).

experience of subordination and oppression. This situation persists because some groups uphold biased gender social norms and inequalities.

Our society is structured where Filipino women's gender performativity is constructed as victims of domination. They are described as symbolic victims of the movement of social dialectics and not just of male domination but also of political economy.[46] The periods of colonization and neo-colonization transformed the Philippines into a patriarchal system.[47] The subordination of Filipino women subjected them to male domination.[48] They were compelled to domestication through enforcement of the traditional gender roles.[49] Once they failed to conform to these norms, they were often considered potential servants of evil powers.[50] These periods changed the status and role of Filipino women. They instilled false consciousness among Filipinos, sustaining male domination and subjecting women to unsafe conditions.

Male domination reinforces patriarchy, solidifying Filipino women as victims of oppression. Oppression could happen to any Filipino woman in society who does not have full agency. Patriarchy hinders the full agency of women. "It can be conceptualized as a system or systems producing and reproducing gendered and intersectional inequalities, men's power and women's subordination."[51] It is embedded in our political, social, and economic system, which creates a structure of gender. For some feminists, patriarchy is the primary cause of women's oppression. It reinforces traditional gender roles, unequal power dynamics, control, violence,

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[46] Rodrigo Abenes, "The Genealogy of Male Domination in the Philippines," *Baybayin* 1, no. 1 (2015): 23–36.

[47] Abenes, "The Genealogy of Male Domination," 27. Also, see Feorillo P. Demeterio and Leslie Anne L. Liwanag, "The Philosophy of Sr. Mary John Mananzan: Some Contributions to Filipino Philosophy," *International Journal of Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (2017) and Tran Xuan Hiep et.al, "Women Education in The Colonial Context: The Case of The Philippines," *Psychology and Education 58, no. 1* (2021).

[48] Carolyn Israel Sobritchea, "American Colonial Education and Its Impact on the Status of Filipino Women," *Asian Studies* 27, 72.

[49] Demeterio and Liwanag, "The Philosophy of Sr. Mary John Mananzan," 193.

[50] Ibid., 186.

[51] Sofia Strid and Jeff Hearn, "Violence and Patriarchy," in *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, & Conflict*, ed. Lester Kurtz, Third Edition (Academic Press, 2022), 319–27.

and abuse. To further understand Filipino women's experiences of patriarchy and oppression, let us examine their colonial and neocolonial experiences in the context of Young, hooks, and Butler.

Patriarchy, for Young, is a systemic and structural form of inequality. Her notion of the five faces of oppression explains the dimensions of oppression within patriarchy. These five faces of oppression are reflected in Filipino women's experiences, where they could experience one or more, as these faces are often interconnected with their experiences. Cultural Imperialism happened when the Philippines became a colony of Spain, America, and Japan. In colonialism, particularly during the Spanish regime, male domination was legitimized by Roman Catholicism and has been accepted as a natural phenomenon.[52] Roman Catholicism transformed the social structure of the Philippines, converting it into a patriarchal system. The teaching of the church is male-centered and male-dominated. Centuries of colonization have instilled a certain degree of inferior consciousness in Filipinos, particularly women. For example, the Hispanic and American education systems shaped the subordination of women. In the Spanish period, women were discriminated against and excluded. Their education is very minimal, and the formal training beyond primary grades was generally a male privilege.[53] Many institutions were established exclusively for males, and higher learning for girls was meant for daughters of Spaniards and other local elites.[54] This is a deliberate neglect of women's education because of the existing norm that they will just do housework. Because of Roman Catholicism, women are taught to be obedient to elders and always subservient to males and should only concentrate on developing skills that would turn them into excellent daughters, homemakers, mothers, and servants of God.[55] Furthermore, the American education system in the Philippines helped to broaden the range of learning opportunities for women.[56] Nonetheless, this has the same gender bias and ideologies inculcated among Filipinos. It did very little to dismantle the patriarchal structures that the Spaniards implanted in us.[57] By

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[52] Abenes, "The Genealogy of Male Domination," 35.
[53] Sobritchea, "American Colonial Education," 72.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., *74.*
[56] Hiep et.al, "Women Education in The Colonial Context," 5219.
[57] Sobritchea, "American Colonial Education," 79.

strongly emphasizing domestic skills and moral teachings, the schools delimited the career opportunities of women to those compatible with their mothering and housekeeping roles, which later posed more serious obstacles to the improvement of women's status.[58]

Neocolonialism has brought Filipino women to another struggle. Capitalism emerged as a new social structure, exploiting and dehumanizing women.[59] Capitalism itself became the colonist.[60] It became the new form of cultural imperialism. Considering this, the Philippines is regarded as one of the world's top migrant-sending countries.[61] Among the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), women have a more considerable number than men.[62] The majority of them were engaged in elementary occupations.[63] Although we consider them modern heroes, OFWs experience several forms of discrimination and violence. Moreover, these OFW women continue to support households and economies despite challenges such as low pay, a lack of legal protection, and discrimination.

Marginalization is experienced not just by OFWs but also by women residing in the Philippines. Filipino women experience economic insecurity.[64] In seeking employment in the Philippines, few companies would avoid employing married women.[65] Women's vulnerability and subordination under the existing gender hierarchy

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Abenes, "The Genealogy of Male Domination," 34.

[60] Ibid., 29.

[61] Jean Encinas-Franco, "Filipino Women Migrant Workers and Overseas Employment Policy: An Analysis from Women's Rights Perspective," *Asian Politics & Policy* 8, no. 3 (2016), 495.

[62] The number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) or Filipino workers who worked abroad during the period of April to September 2021 was estimated at 1.83 million. By sex disaggregation, more women were reported to be working overseas, accounting for 60.2 percent or 1.10 million in 2021. (see Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021 Overseas Filipino Workers, Final Results)

[63] Elementary occupations involve the performance of simple and routine tasks, which may require the use of hand-held tools and considerable physical effort. It includes cleaning, restocking supplies, and performing basic maintenance in apartments, houses, kitchens, hotels, offices, and other buildings; washing cars and windows; helping in kitchens and performing simple tasks in food preparations; delivering messages or goods; carrying luggage and handling baggage. (See Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021 Overseas Filipino Workers, Final Results)

[64] Lesley McCulloch and Lara Stancich, "Women and (in)security: The case of the Philippines," *The Pacific Review* 11, no. 3 (2007), 422.

[65] Ibid.

are taken advantage of in these companies, allowing exporters to squeeze even more profits from the underpaid workforce.[66] Moreover, Filipino women are marginalized because of their home care responsibilities.   Many women are held back from productive employment opportunities by their family responsibilities.[67] The belief in gender-specific roles limits Filipino women's full participation in society, sustaining marginalization.

Filipino women also experience violence and exploitation. As argued, capitalism as a new form of social structure exploits and dehumanizes women. In 2019, estimates revealed that there are around 2.2 million OFWs deployed internationally, where the vast majority are working in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).[68] Among these OFWs, women comprise more than half, with domestic workers constituting the majority. However, women are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and trafficking in persons.[69] In 2021, nearly 5,000 cases of abuse for OFWs were recorded. Domestic work for women has been a venue of exploitation, maltreatment, and dehumanization among Filipino women.[70]

Filipino women experience exploitation through unpaid or underpaid labor. They still bear the burden of two full-time jobs, managing their full-time work and household chores, and caring for the family members.[71] These enduring societal gender norms regarding unpaid care work for women indicate that they continue to shoulder a significant portion of domestic responsibilities at home. Balancing these responsibilities with their professional career is indeed challenging. This situation highlights the ongoing existence of gender-based discrimination in the workplace. Thus, this norm

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Helle Buchhave Nadia Belhaj Hassine Belghith, "Overcoming barriers to women's work in the Philippines"

[68]   Philippine   Statistics   Authority, https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/survey/labor-and-employment/survey-overseas-filipinos Accessed May 23, 2023.

[69] ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking, "Overseas Filipino Workers vulnerable to trafficking will be protected under new Philippines Department of Migrant Workers"

[70] Abenes, "The Genealogy of Male Domination," 32.

[71] Oxfam, "Survey: Filipinos still believe gender stereotypes on breadwinning, unpaid care work but positive changes seen," Oxfam Pilipinas. Accessed May 24, 2023.

confines women in a space where achieving complete self-sufficiency is hindered by traditional gender roles.

Violence Against Women (VAW) remains a prevalent societal issue in the country. For example, one in four Filipino women aged 15-49 has experienced physical, emotional, or sexual violence by their husbands and partners.[72] It is disturbing that VAW persists despite efforts to solve the issue.[73] The gender-based violence experienced by Filipino women stems from unequal power relations. Societal norms position men in dominant roles while relegating women to subordinate positions, leading to instances of violence. VAW is men's way of asserting dominance over women to retain power.[74] Unfortunately, victims of VAW in the country are unreported because of the "culture of silence."[75]

Powerlessness happens when there is a "culture of silence." Many cases of VAW remain unreported due to the prevailing belief that speaking up would not make any meaningful change.[76] This can also be observed through societies' dismissal and lack of interest in adequately addressing the suffering of the victims. Tragically, there are situations where, instead of helping, the victims are unfairly blamed for the incidents they have experienced. These things collectively contribute to an environment where women victims hesitate to voice their experiences.

Consequently, this culture of silence renders women powerless, stripping away their ability to be autonomous. Women lack agency and control over themselves because of the violence they experience. To further situate the struggle of Filipino women, let us see it through hooks' notion of class struggle. Patriarchy for hooks does not work in isolation but intersects with other forms of oppression, such as racism and classism. It is also about power imbalance and cultural and symbolic domination. We must analyze social "class" to understand oppression. Social classes exacerbate the systemic oppression experienced by women. And I agree that hooks' idea is relevant in the Philippines. As a colonized society, we are

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[72] Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), "Violence Against Women" accessed May 24, 2023.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Charie Mae F. Abarca, "Ending the 'Culture of Silence' in PH's Fight vs Violence against Women," Manila Bulletin, November 26, 2022.

subjected to colonial rules, significantly impacting our existence. Considering that the Philippines is classified as a "third world,"[77] women's experience of oppression is laden with poverty, which is difficult to overcome since the society lacks policies and infrastructure.[78] Hence, Filipino women's colonial and neocolonial experiences put them in a specific social class that shaped their collective experience of oppression. This "class" positions them at the bottom of the hierarchy. Considering economic status that makes social class distinction, wealthy and privileged Filipino women do not have the same level of oppression as women who do domestic and unpaid work in their work and homes. Like Young, hooks' ideologies can be reflected in the five faces of oppression experienced by Filipino women. Thus, the existence of oppression against Filipino women threatens their safe spaces.

For Butler, patriarchy is closely tied to her philosophy of gender performativity and the social construction of identity. For her, gender is not inherent but a performative act. With this, the situatedness of oppression experienced by Filipino women is a result of the regulatory frame that leads to the performativity of Filipino women into specific gender roles. These social constructs were practiced repetitively from the period of colonialism to neo-colonialism. Patriarchy operates by conditioning Filipino women to perform activities that treat them as inferior to men.

On the other hand, Filipino men are unconsciously placed in a position of domination over Filipino women. Both adhere to these roles of domination and subordination and are viewed as conforming to accepted social norms. This domination is not a personal expression but is learned and reinforced through social means. Social norms coerce Filipinos to conform to the system of gender performativity, affecting safe space for Filipino women. Any man who failed to conform to these masculine gender social norms was judged by their social group as weak. So, individuals, particularly those in positions of power and privilege, contribute to reproducing oppressive power structures. In this situation, the power dynamics set by the colonial

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[77] "Third world" is the term used by bell hooks to describe and explain the condition and experiences of marginalized black women within Western societies. (See bell hooks. *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center.* South End Press, 1984.)

[78] Biana, "Extending bell hooks," 8.

and neo-colonial experiences of Filipino women maintain and reproduce their struggles and oppression.

Safe Spaces in the Culture of Domination?

Creating safe spaces is a struggle in a culture of domination. The presence of this culture makes a gender social construct supporting patriarchy and putting Filipino women as symbolic victims. Considering the situation of women, how do we create a safe space for them?

The Philippines enacts laws to promote safe spaces for women. These laws aim to protect and promote their rights. Some noteworthy laws are the Republic Act (RA) no. 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women (MCW), RA no. 9262 or the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children (AVAWC) Act of 2004, and RA no. 11313 or the Safe Spaces Act. The MCW seeks to eliminate any form of discrimination against women through recognition, protection, fulfillment, and promotion of the rights of Filipino Women, especially those belonging to the marginalized sectors of society.[79] The AVAWC is a law that protects women and their children from any form of violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse.[80] The Safe Spaces Act is the law that penalizes gender-based sexual harassment done in public spaces, both physical and online.[81] These laws are essential in safe spaces.

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[79] Philippine Commission on Women, "Republic Act 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women", accessed May 24, 2023.

[80] Violence Against Women and their Children refers to any act or a series of acts committed by any person against a woman who is his wife, former wife, or against a woman with whom the person has or had a sexual or dating relationship, or with whom he has a common child, or against her child whether legitimate or illegitimate, within or without the family abode, which result in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering, or economic abuse including threats of such acts, battery, assault, coercion, harassment or arbitrary deprivation of liberty (see RA no. 9262, Section 3-A).

[81] Based on the Safe Spaces Act, public spaces refer to streets and alleys, public parks, schools, buildings, malls, bars, restaurants, transportation terminals, public markets, spaces used as evacuation centers, government offices, public utility vehicles covered by app-based transport network services and other recreational spaces such as, but not limited to, cinema halls, theaters, and spas (see RA no. 11313, Art. I sec. 3-g). This also includes online spaces as gender-based sexual harassment may be done online as stipulated in article II of RA no. 11313.

While all the laws mentioned are significant in creating a safe space and advancing women's rights, we cannot deny that the oppression of many Filipino women persists. These laws have challenges and limitations that make it difficult to create safe spaces. For example, while the MCW is a comprehensive law that promotes women's rights, the oppressive cultural and societal norms engraved in the traditions and beliefs of the people pose significant challenges to the effective creation of safe spaces. The normalization of oppression hampers the establishment of safe spaces. Patriarchal norms obstruct the implementation of the law and sustain the faces of oppression and class struggle among Filipino women. Although the MCW recognizes the existence of patriarchal norms and tries to advance gender equality and empowerment, it does not lay down explicit mechanisms to dismantle the patriarchal system itself. The law primarily focuses on providing and securing women the rights, opportunities, and access they need for equality and empowerment. The MCW is a significant legal framework that serves as a foundation. Still, it requires a collective effort to create safe spaces.

Another law is the AVAWC. The legislation of this law guarantees rights, protection, support, and legal assistance for women and children who are victims of violence. Despite this, many women still experience violence. This is a result of the unequal power relation between men and women. The culture of silence makes women endure the abuse they experience since society lacks safe spaces that will safeguard their pleas. The lack of confidence in the authorities reflects our government's law enforcement. Victims are reluctant to report what happened because speaking up may not yield meaningful results. Instead of having help, society views them as responsible for the violence they experience. The feelings of fear and shame are also strong restraints for women. This occurs when society establishes biases that blame the victims instead of holding the perpetrators accountable.

Lastly, the Safe Spaces Act addresses gender-based sexual harassment in public spaces. This law faces implementation challenges because it requires the full participation of all institutions. However, suppose a patriarch controls institutions; effective law implementation remains challenging. Some may consider offensive actions like catcalling, misogynistic remarks, sexist slurs, and stalking normal because of the false consciousness perpetuated by patriarchy.

These actions go unchallenged as they are wrongly deemed acceptable by society, leading to the objectification of women. Moreover, institutions controlled by a patriarch may not deal with these situations seriously and urgently. This hinders the enforcement of the law.

As mentioned earlier, the laws are significant legal reforms in achieving a safe space for women. Yet, merely relying on the legal penalties for the perpetrators would not solve the problem. These people will just defend their actions as right based on the accepted norms shaped by the culture of domination. They will not see any wrong in their actions. Furthermore, the laws penalize individuals, not the collective social group or class that sustains the system of structural oppression.

Moreover, the poor implementation of these laws reflects the patriarchal structure of society, considering that they do not see the urgency of addressing patriarchal norms because they will lose control and domination over women. Men want to stay on this kind of gender performativity or the traditional gender norms because it gives them convenience, power, and privilege. So, we need to reinforce our means of addressing the oppression experienced by Filipino women. This includes more legislation to realize women's full participation in society and grant them full agency. But, creating safe spaces should go beyond legislation. It requires changing the culture of domination so that women will be given equal opportunities, access, and resources. To achieve safe spaces, confronting and dismantling the culture of domination, particularly patriarchy, is necessary. It requires collective resistance against this dominant culture that sustains oppression and class struggle. Through resistance, the dominant social group could be aware of the injustice and oppression experienced by women. Thus, a collective and transformative approach is needed to create safe spaces in the country.

Toward Safe Spaces: Collective Critical Consciousness, Action, and Responsibility

There is a need to address the issues of a patriarchal system that sustains the intersectional oppression experienced by Filipino women to have safe spaces. It is necessary to reconstruct the gender performativity being practiced by the dominant class or social group

that causes the oppression of women. We can only reconstruct it if we recognize that the idealized patriarchal system is not a safe space and is oppressive. People just cannot recognize these because the culture of domination necessarily promotes addiction to lying and denial.[82] Lying and denial because the culture of domination suggests that oppression no longer exists and the feminist movement has been successful. But this is not the reality. Women are still victims. The dominant social group or class silences the oppressed through lying and denial. In this kind of domination, how could we recognize oppression?

Critical consciousness-raising about the oppression that hampers the realization of safe spaces is essential in creating safe spaces. Through critical consciousness-raising, we could make the invisible oppression experienced by Filipino women visible as a crucial starting point in having safe spaces. Victims should resist the patriarchal system. The oppressed social group and class should have a collective consciousness to resist the oppressive norms collectively. In resistance, the marginalized group must speak and analyze their situations and make a firm position against the norms that obstruct their full participation in society. They should come together to raise awareness and fight the societal structure for social justice. Critical consciousness-raising of the oppressed group and class could lead to collective action and the formation of social movements aiming to restore the dignity and humanity lost in the culture of domination. Their union and collective action could establish a movement that would deconstruct the narratives, biases, false consciousness, and perspectives embedded in society. Through critical consciousness-raising, Filipino people would understand the multiple layers of oppression that intersect with class, race, gender, and other social categories. Thus, we should not look at oppression in one dimension or category only but how it intersects with societal norms.

Three significant spaces were identified that play a critical role in developing critical consciousness for having safe spaces. These are school, home, and society. School can be a source of constraints but also a potential source of liberation.[83]   As a source of constraints,

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[82] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 28.
[83] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 28 and Specia, Akello & Osman, Ahmed, Education as a Practice of Freedom: Reflections on bell hooks, *Journal of Education and Practice* 6, no. 17 (2015), 196.

traditional schools have biases that uphold and maintain supremacy, imperialism, sexism, and racism that corrupt and distort the education system.[84] On the other hand, as a potential source of liberation, schools transform students by providing them with the foundations for critical thinking where students could question the status quo and develop an awareness of social inequalities and injustices. Schools are significant places for creating a safe space because this is where people learn ideas, values, and beliefs. So, schools should be inclusive and empowering. Valuing this norm, schools could lead students to become socially responsible citizens.

Consequently, schools should develop inclusive curricula where oppression norms are analyzed, criticized, and addressed. In this way, schools could promote social justice, reshape false consciousness, and make education liberating. The Philippine education system should defuse the curricula that sustain structural injustice and the cultural imperial ideology hampering women's full agency, which normalizes oppression and class struggle in the country. School curricula must include discussions about the terrain of oppression embedded in our history during colonialism and neocolonialism to fully understand and examine the experienced domination and oppression in the country. Our colonial experience has left significant traces of why women are subjugated by men which were sustained in the neo-colonial period. Our education should critically examine the layered experience of oppression among Filipinos embedded in our political, historical, and personal experiences. Learning this should be a requirement for all academic institutions, from basic education to higher learning. Educational institutions should provide a clear mechanism, direction, program, and policies for realizing safe spaces.

Teachers and scholars have a critical role in developing critical consciousness. As intellectuals, they must transform society. They should not remain aloof in ivory towers; instead, they should be agents who engage with social issues and offer solutions.[85] In the classroom, teachers' pedagogies should teach students to "transgress" against dominant norms to achieve the gift of freedom.[86] Significantly, individuals will become self-actualized through education because it

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[84] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 29.
[85] see hooks, *Teaching to Transgress.*
[86] Ibid., 29.

allows people, particularly the marginalized and discriminated, to acquire critical consciousness. Hence, teachers must create a learning environment where students can actively engage in discourse without threat or discrimination. As facilitators of learning, teachers should encourage students to reflect and construct their knowledge, particularly on issues involving domination and oppression.

In understanding the culture of domination, teachers and students should have a critical inquiry to defuse the hierarchy perpetuated in our society and create a sense of community. Philippine schools should not be the site where teachers indoctrinate their students with a culture of domination. It is where students engage in a critical dialogue on issues affecting human development. Also, it should not be the space where the culture of silence is sustained; schools should be liberating. So, classrooms should be a safe space for everyone to discuss important issues freely without being silenced, dismissed, or excluded. Through critical discourse, the teacher and the students could arrive at a new set of liberating ideas and values. Critical dialogue fosters intellectual curiosity that will help students understand the dynamics of oppression and domination, which are crucial in building a just society. This kind of discourse could contribute to developing proper means to address conflict and promote peaceful dialogue, leading to safe spaces. So that when students leave schools and are exposed to the realms of society, they have the appropriate knowledge and values that will guide them when faced with domination and oppression. They will be the agents of social transformation, promoting safe spaces.

Another significant space is home. At home, family members first learn the values and norms that influence them in viewing society. These values either support or refute patriarchy. In the traditional family setting, the culture of domination brought by patriarchy is present. As discussed in the previous sections, its presence threatens safe spaces, including homes. To have safe spaces, homes should not sustain patriarchal norms. A Filipino family typically comprises a mother, father, and children.[87] Fathers are said to be the *haligi ng tahanan,* while the mothers are the *ilaw ng tahanan.* This is an example of gendered roles that separate the roles of men and

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[87] This is the traditional or nuclear family set-up. Nonetheless, there are other forms or types of family structures you could observe in society, including, extended family, single-parent family, step family, same-sex family, and foster family.

women at home. Women's roles are limited to providing emotional strength and nurturing, while men are considered the pillars and breadwinners of the family. Considering these dichotomic gender roles that favor men, women frequently experience violence from their partners. To eradicate hierarchy inside homes, there is a need to eliminate sexism within the family. Thus, families should not reinforce any gendered roles at home. So, parents can be both *haligi at ilaw ng tahanan*. Critical dialogue is also significant in making homes a safe space. Having this, each member could speak and share their perspectives to better understand one another. Moreover, families must have a mutually liberating agreement involving child-rearing, family duties, love, respect, and empathy. For example, in child-rearing, women and men should value fatherhood with the same meaning and significance as motherhood.[88] However, since societies construct these traditional gender roles of men, they avoid responsibility for child-rearing because it is considered feminine. By placing parenting solely as the responsibility of women, social issues may arise, like female parenting gives children few role models of male parenting. This reality could perpetuate the idea that parenting is solely a woman's job leading to the reinforcement of male domination.[89] Thus, we need to revolutionize parenting. We need to educate men about their shared responsibility to women. As hooks argued, men will not equally share parenting responsibilities until they are educated, ideally from childhood.[90] If men fail to learn their caring relation and responsibility to their children, many women will be victims of having children with them, like the cases of single mothers. Thus, to have a safe space at home, women must discuss childcare and other essential issues with men before they have children. To ensure that women and men are educated, society should require all hopeful parents to attend sessions or programs to teach and enlighten them on parenting and creating safe spaces within every family.

Finally, society is another essential space. As argued, establishing safe spaces faces layers of challenges in the culture of domination and oppression. Structural injustice sustains the power

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[88] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (United States: South End Press, 1984), 137.
[89] Ibid., 140.
[90] Ibid., 137.

and privilege granted to the dominant social group and class. To realize safe spaces in such a society, we must have a collective action and responsibility to eliminate all forms of structural injustice that intersect with the different social categories. Injustice makes an unsafe space, and collective action and responsibility would rectify the problematic structure. For Young, collective responsibility is proactive and forward-looking since it aims to stop the recurrence of a given structural injustice.[91] Where should we begin this call for collective action? We need to acknowledge systemic structural injustice and intersectional inequalities in how our society is organized. Critical consciousness about this reality will help us to analyze and understand how the different forms of discrimination operate and intersect. Young argued that since oppression is structural, blaming individual actions would not solve the social issue. Instead, we must shift our focus from individuals to the systemic and structural factors that perpetuate inequalities. Through critical consciousness, we can make society realize that addressing structural injustice is not just the duty of the oppressed but, most importantly, the duty of all social groups in any given society.[92] Thus, collective action and responsibility should lead to social, economic, and political movements. This should advance the society's advocacies, raise social awareness, and influence citizens' democratic participation and public policy. In the Philippines, systemic structural injustice is experienced by oppressed Filipino women. That is why, to have safe spaces, they should be given the voice to participate in the decision-making process. Our legislative body should ensure their participation with full agency and free from external control. When adequately represented in legislation, it ensures that policies and systems are passed with their inputs and perspectives, empowering marginalized social groups, and classes. Adding the idea of hooks, addressing oppression requires breaking the silence about class, but this cannot be done if only a few people are aware of class hierarchies.[93] Thus, safe spaces could only be realized when structural injustice and class struggle are addressed.

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[91] Feorillo A. Demeterio III, *Young's Theory of Structural Justice,* 209.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Hazel Biana, "The Matter of Class: COVID-19 in the Philippines," *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (2020), 28.

Conclusion

Safe spaces promote social justice and are free from patriarchal norms. However, the culture of domination perpetuated in the society normalizes oppression affecting certain social groups and classes, such as Filipino women. This creates structural injustice, making them vulnerable to several forms of oppression. Oppressed women had no full agency over themselves and were controlled by a patriarch. Thus, safe spaces are needed to restore the dignity and humanity lost in the culture of domination. Despite the Philippines performing well in international rankings on gender equality, Filipinos still hold fundamental biases against women. While other Filipino women may consider themselves empowered, many still struggle in their quest for empowerment. So, we need safe spaces to safeguard their fundamental rights. To do this, we need to dismantle patriarchy.

The philosophical lenses of Iris Marion Young, bell hooks, and Judith Butler are utilized to examine the culture of domination and oppression experienced by Filipino women. Their ideas help unveil the complex and intersecting social categories, like gender, race, and class, that sustain the structural injustice within society, affecting Filipino women in the pursuit of safe spaces. To create safe spaces, the Philippines enacts laws, such as RA no. 9710, RA no. 9262, and RA no. 11313. These laws are significant legal frameworks in safe spaces. However, these laws still need to be revisited and implemented because a patriarchal society is unwilling to lose its power and authority over women. Considering this, there is a need to eradicate patriarchy, as it is a solid barrier to creating safe spaces.

Critical consciousness-raising is a significant starting point toward safe spaces. This paper identified three essential safe spaces. These are the school, the home, and society in general. In these spaces, structural injustice should be addressed through collective action. Everyone, after all, is responsible for creating safe spaces.

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