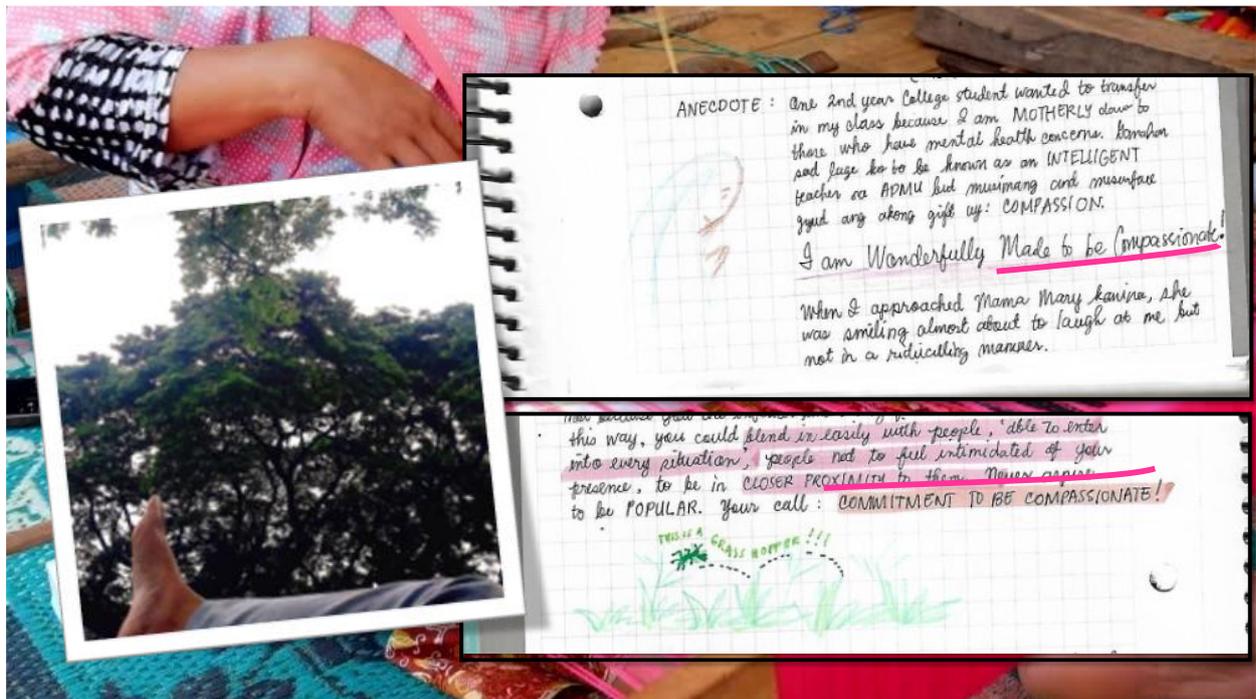
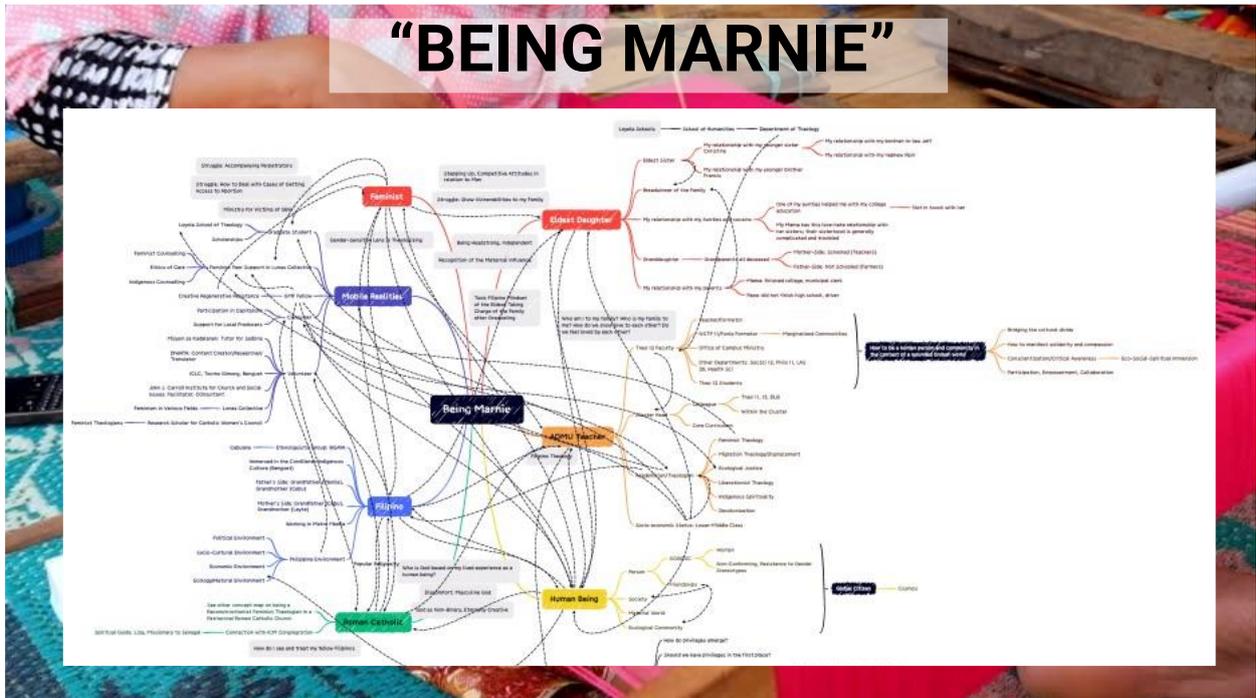


Marnie's GMF Lakbay:
A Creative and Regenerative Disruption Towards Being Compassionate
by Marnie D. Racaza (Philippines)

Answered Prayer. My journey with GMF began when I did a retreat last June 2021 to celebrate my 33rd birthday. The number 33 is quite significant to me as a Christian because, based on our tradition, this was the age that Jesus Christ died and was also resurrected. It was the year that I intentionally prayed to be renewed. Significantly the readings every June 24 are these: Psalm 139 in which one of the verses said God knit or weaved me in my mother's womb and in the Gospel, a question was asked: "What then this child will be?" This is the essential question I always ask myself every time I celebrate my birthday. During this retreat, I penned in my journal that "I am wonderfully made to be compassionate" and that my calling is to be committed to being compassionate." I wished and prayed to God to help me in nurturing this calling, and commitment. Three months later, I received the invitation to participate in the Gandhi-Mandela-Freire Fellowship program which seeks to provide us with a learning journey on compassion and conscience. So yes, my prayer was and continues to be answered.



Being Marnie. Like I always tell myself, I must be careful with what I wish or pray for. I did not expect that GMF would take me on a journey of hacking, rebooting, and reclaiming myself as Marnie. There were so many little and huge symbolic deaths that I went through in the program. I am struggling with so many issues. I fear rejection, and I seek approval and acceptance. I fear failure, and I aspire for achievement. I usually perform, pressure, and prove myself to others. I tend to work hard to meet their expectations. I even define myself by the work that I do. I am more of a human "doing" rather than a human "being." Is this who I truly am? Is this the truly wonderfully created me? I grappled with this question and sought help from God in my prayer to help me recover my deepest, truest self and "be" that self. GMF greatly helped me in exploring these questions and supported me in passing through those "deaths". One is to die from personal structures which are not truly liberating and life-giving. The utilitarian mindset which is deeply embedded within me is one I can think of; how I tied up my being and my worth with the results of my work and performance. A realization came to my mind: "Life should not be a performance."



Embracing my Womanhood, budding to be a Feminist. I explored and continued to dig into the many narratives, both enslaving and liberating, which are interwoven in my life. I struggled and continue to strive to weave into my life those that were lost to me and untangle those areas twisted by oppressive and enslaving scripts knitted on me by the dominant paradigms of the world characterized by domination, subjugation, stereotyping, prejudices, and marginalization, especially as a woman.

One of my favorite learning encounters in GMF is our session with Radha Paudel on the Politics of Menstrual Discrimination. Menstruation is so intimately unique to the experience of our womanhood. It is an experience that is a sign of life within us and yet there are dominant voices and forces telling us that it is dirty, disgusting, and destructive. Our menstruation is but one of the many narratives and realities of women relegated by the dominant patriarchal society to the margins, kept hidden in the darkness, and silenced because it is unsettling. We don't talk about it often in public, especially with men around, because of the anxiety and the fear to disturb the status quo that dictates how we should express and experience life through our bodies.

In one of our learning encounters here in GMF, the Ignatian Contemplation which is given to us by Fr. Jojo Fung, I have come so intimately connected and reconciled with my humanity as a woman. I had my menstruation during that time. In the contemplation, we were asked to feel the various flows in our body: the flow of our thoughts, the flow of our breath, the flow of our emotions, the flow of our chi/energy, and for me, in addition, the flow of blood going out of my body. The complexity and beauty of being a woman! And then we were asked to connect with our room and the things in it, with our house and all there is to see, with our neighborhood, our community, our country, with the world, and with the universe, and then going back slowly and slowly, ending with our bodies. And I realized, I will see and experience the world so differently, so uniquely because I am a woman.

Discovering, examining, acknowledging, and reclaiming the uniqueness of my experience as a woman have not been deeply done not until I decided to commit to the GMF journey. I would always say that this program IS ONE HUGE DISRUPTION IN MY LIFE, literally and metaphorically. Much of my life is characterized by performing, producing, and proving. It is a rabbit hole I am struggling to get out of. The learning encounters, rebooting sessions, and other engagements in the program have been truly helpful in getting to know, understand, and engage with myself and the world in its most primordial, intimate, and authentic ways.

One of which is uncovering, reclaiming, and celebrating my feminist roots firstly in my name. I just recently found out that my family "Racaza" was from my grandmother's. All this time I thought that Papa is bringing the family name of his father who left him and my grandmother when he was still very young. Considering myself as a bud in being a feminist and in doing feminist theology, this primal story is very moving and empowering because I saw my Lola's defiance and non-conformity to social norms dictated on women like taking on your husband's surname in your and your children's names. I saw her resilience and agency amidst the many adversities she encountered, like many women in the world. My Lola was a symbol of strength!

And then there's my middle name, which is of course from my mother who is an exemplar of tenderness, courage, care, leadership, and of being defiant of gender roles and, particularly, of expressions. And then there's my father, in which the Mar in my Marnie is from, exhibiting gentleness, humility, undisturbed with doing domestic, household chores in our family. These are the narratives that I would allow myself to be influenced/shaped with instead of those which, for many years, tell me that if I want to survive successfully in this world I need to compete, beat, and get ahead of others or to be accepted, I must be prim and proper, obedient, passive and unquestioning of the status quo. These stories which are embedded in my name and the awareness of the necessity to break out from molds and mindsets which are detrimental to my and others' growth are my nourishments. Dr. Nat posed an essential question to us, "What narratives or stories do I want to live by and nurture?" As a budding feminist, I want to honor and bring with me the stories of courage, empowerment, and countering patriarchal forms of enslavement exemplified by the many women and men in my life.

Along with reclaiming and spreading out my feminist roots, recognizing and breaking out from the shell of the seed, that is gender stereotypes that I have imbibed and perpetuated due to patriarchal mindsets and values, is necessary. Patriarchy thrives on domination and subordination. In subtle and unconscious ways, I have been influenced by these ways. I used to view empowerment as competing, beating, and getting ahead of the males in my social circle. I used to see feminine expressions and ways as weak while being masculine is cool. My ideation of an ideal woman is more on decency, discipline, and propriety. I cannot forget this one instance wherein I told my students to dress appropriately so that they would not be harassed. Mea culpa, mea culpa. I realized that I should not have said this because showing respect is not dependent on the person's clothes. Part of growing is the awareness and breaking out of these few of the many indicators of internalized misogyny.



Being a Feminist Catholic Faithful and Theologian. I am the type who does not want to rock the boat. As a people-pleaser, I am scared to upset people with any act of defiance or disobedience. I like following rules and regulations because it is a more convenient route. I do not question authority or the status quo for fear of rejection and punishment. But playing safe and staying on the shore are blocking my growth and flourishing.

Still afraid, I hop on the boat, sail, and brave the tides. One of the unsettling journeys which I am braving about now is in my ministry of doing Theology, particularly feminist theology.

In the 11th century, Anselm of Canterbury defined theology as faith-seeking understanding. These are efforts at making sense of the faith, asking questions, and searching for meaning. Here in GMF, one of the invitations we need to respond to is building a question bank, to ask essential and even eccentric questions.

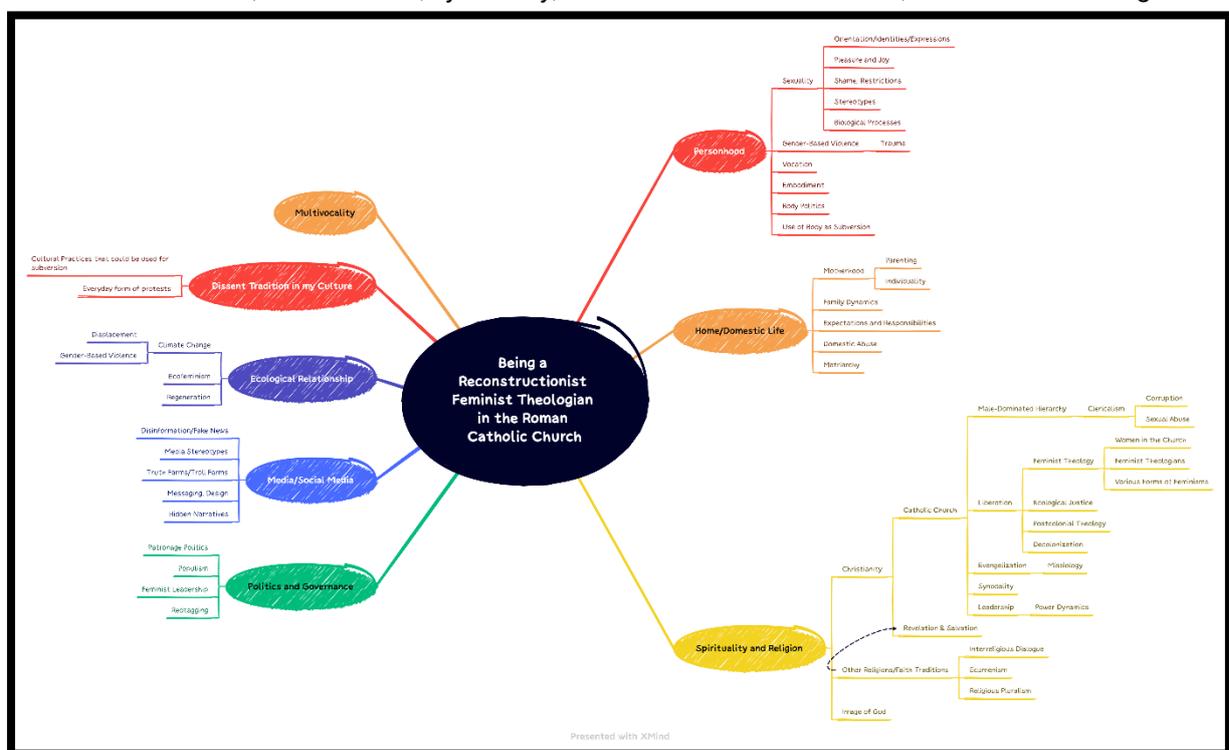
And there are different ways, approaches, models, or frames in doing theology, but most theologians seem to agree on considering human experience as a locus theologicus, meaning a source or space for the theological reflection. Using human experiences as our source or space for theological reflection

means our starting point is not about abstract ideas but concrete STORIES, SITUATIONS, and STRUGGLES. Some of the essential questions to ask here are, "Whose human experiences are considered, included, or prioritized in the theological discourse? Whose theological reflections are privileged, listened to, and reproduced?"

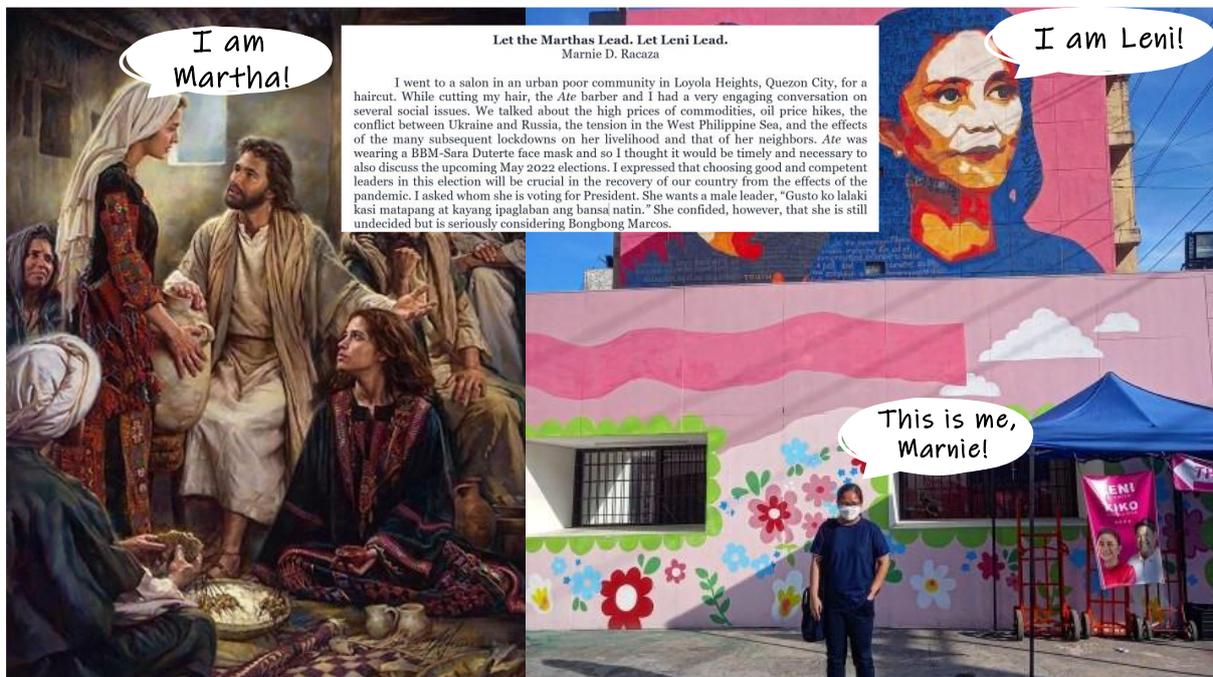
To be a woman and at the same time, a feminist in Theology and in the Catholic Church is a BIG DISRUPTION because these areas are dominated mostly by men. Patriarchy, a social structure that promotes male privileging, is palpable in these human institutions. We did frames-mapping exercises in our rebooting sessions, and it revealed how complex and challenging my social location as a feminist theologian is in a patriarchal Catholic framework.

I've seen and discovered oppressive frames emerging like clericalism, including sexual abuses and withholding women from taking part in the decision-making processes of the Church, sexism by unjust biblical and doctrinal representations and teachings of and about women, mansplaining about what constitutes our dignity and vocation, androcentrism like generalizing human persons under the label of "man/men," and anthropocentrism as human-privileging over non-human creations which contributes to environmental degradation.

These narratives could be what Johann Baptist Metz calls dangerous memories that could potentially DISRUPT the status quo and are subversive because of what they expose. And there are frames that are going against the dominant tides like feminist liberation theologies, intersectional theology, feminist biblical hermeneutics, ecofeminism, synodality, basic ecclesial communities, and interfaith dialogues.



I made an essay about a misunderstood female biblical character in the New Testament, and it is published in our university's portal. Her name is Martha. I bring up the character of Martha to examine gender stereotypes on women as leaders and bring to light energizing elements of her person that could exhort women to take on their important spaces in the public sphere. This is my first feminist-toned theological reflection, and I am so nervous as to how it will be received. I could be bashed, judged, or criticized for it but I just keep telling myself that Martha's voice needs to be heard by the public.



I also am determined now to contribute to the discourses and initiatives of reclaiming the empowering characteristics and narratives of Mother Mary, how radical, creative, and regenerative her compassion was. I am also renewing my relationship with her. During my birthday retreat last June 2022 in the ICM's House of Prayer in Baguio City, I was met by a statue of Our Lady of Compassion. Mother Mary's presence in my life has always been constant despite my lack of intention to connect with her. The connection I felt with her before was a bit shallow. But because of feminist theology, I realized that my seemingly superficial connection with the Blessed Mother was because of my stereotypes of her: that she is submissive and passive, characteristics that an independent woman like me does not appreciate. Feminist theology taught me that her love is radical, active, and abiding. In her Magnificat, she showed her prophetic courage and stood with the disadvantaged, dispossessed, and marginalized by the dominant oppressive powers of her time. I shared with my students that Jesus' first exemplar of being prophetic and showing radical love that seeks and goes to the margins is his mother.

I also began and continue to question my image and experience of God. I have admitted to myself that I do not experience God as Father. I just don't have an affinity for this God. I felt so uncomfortable calling God as Father. And so, I asked myself, "What is my experiential truth of God?" For now, as a fruit of my contemplation, my experiential truth of God is the "Eternal Creative," continually generating and expanding life in all forms and a God of Diversity ever present in all of creation- both humans and non-humans, not confined in just one religion or asking us to be part of one religion.

While undergoing the GMF program, I was also taking a course on Religious Pluralism. Taking this course became so meaningful because the composition of the GMF community is so diverse in terms of nationality, culture, ministry, advocacy, and to specifically mention, faith tradition.

Two theologians we studied in the academic course I took were Karl Rahner and Jacques Dupuis in their Theology of Religions. Both Rahner's and Dupuis' theology of religions recognize the universality of God's saving will, revelation, and grace. Both acknowledge our limitations, finiteness, and imperfect conceptions of God, the Infinite One but assert that we all have this universal yearning for transcendence and that we can have an authentic encounter with the divine. Rahner's insight on revelation as God's self-communication in divinizing grace can be seen as a new mode of human awareness which is also applicable to other religions according to Dupuis. This divine grace (which is universally offered) discloses God as communicating Godself and the human subject as tending toward transcendental fulfillment in union with God.

This is very evident in the experiences of Buddhists, Muslims, Catholics, and even non-denominational people in the GMF fellowship. Our Buddhist fellows share their experience of the "More", of something beyond themselves, of oneness with the universe in their meditations and prayers; our former Muslim fellow's deep dedication to praying five times a day is something crucial in deepening her faith in Allah; and deep connection with the divine experienced by two of our educators who are Sufi Muslims and those who are practitioners, like me, of the Ignatian contemplation which is part of the Catholic tradition. I believe that recognizing that each religion or faith tradition aspires and strives to experience the divine,

the sacred, and the Absolute is such a beautiful starting point in interreligious encounters and dialogues.

Rahner and Dupuis both teach that the Spirit of God is universally present and active, before and after the Christ event and that the world is drawn to its spiritual fulfillment by the Spirit of God, who directs the whole history of the world in all its length and breadth towards its proper goal. As Christians, we believe that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In the GMF fellowship, I have witnessed how the Spirit is palpable in the lives lived by my co-fellows from other faith traditions. The fruit of the Spirit is evident most especially in their commitment to eco-social spiritual healing. Our fellowship is coming together to contribute and collaborate to the endeavor and struggle to have a more just and compassionate world.

The GMF community has been such a creative and safe space where we can share experiences that are very meaningful to us, many of which are religious, and spiritual experiences. I could still freely share about my faith, hope, and love for Jesus Christ (I even tell them that I see Jesus Christ in them) but without explicitly saying that Jesus Christ is constitutive to their salvation. Growing and flourishing in their respective faith traditions would lead them to the fullness of life which is willed by God for all. Dupuis talked about mutual complementarity as an attitude towards other religions. This implies mutual enrichment and transformation. Hom, one of our Buddhist fellows, and her many spiritual experiences in her prayers and meditations have deeply enriched my life as a Christian. In some instances, I also share about feminist theology, and this helped them in reshaping their perspectives and attitudes toward women. We had learning encounters on Sufism, Zen Meditation, Shamanism, Ignatian Contemplation, Chi Meditation, and Engaged Buddhism. All of these are helpful to our becoming.



Eco-Social-Spiritual Immersions: Finding Radical Regenerative Creative Spaces of Compassion. One of my favorite English words is CREATE/CREATIVE. Bell hooks, an author, social activist, and feminist, defines in her book *Yearnings* that choosing the margins is making radical creative space that affirms and sustains a person's subjectivity giving us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world. For me, being compassionate is being a radical creative space for a person, group, or community. I remember Dr. Nat saying that compassion needs to be contextual and so the need for it to be creative: open, flexible, sensitive, responsive, and life-giving to any conditions or situations. We could be creative spaces where people can share and be listened to about their stories of woundedness and healing, pain and joy, desperation and hope, oppression, and liberation, etc. I remember when we had our learning encounter on Shamanism. Shamans are healers in their community. All of us here are radical creative embodied spaces of healing.

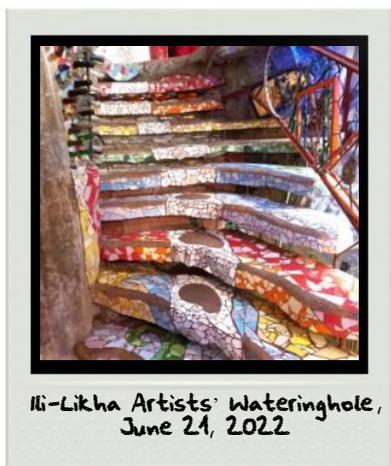
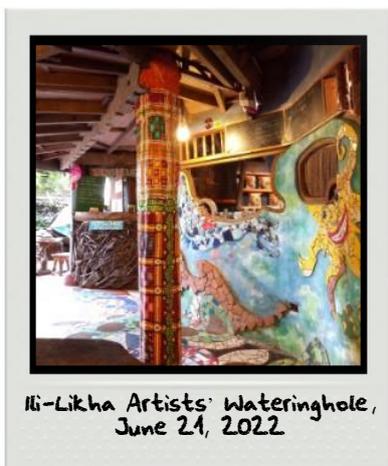
While doing GMF, I also joined a boot camp on Feminist Counseling offered by Lunas Collective, a volunteer-powered helpline in the Philippines, supporting survivors of gender-based violence or violence against women. At the end of the program, we will be enjoined to volunteer as feminist counselors who will provide "a radical creative space" where we actively and intentionally listen and support those who have painful, traumatic narratives and experiences of various gender-based abuse and violence. I believe more radical creative spaces should be put up to give a preferential option to the marginal

voices of women and to allow dangerous memories to disrupt the dominant culture of domination and subjugation to co-create a world of the possible beyond sexual violence, beyond patriarchy.



Quoting the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn, bell hooks sees these spaces as locations for resistance. Thich Nhat Hahn considers resistance at its core as going against being conquered, controlled, and corrupted by the dominant oppressive system. He taught that communities of resistance should be places where people can return to themselves more easily, where the conditions are such that they can heal themselves and recover their wholeness. Baguio City contains so many of these radical creative spaces. And they are regenerative because they bring healing and a sense of peace to the soul. And so I went to Baguio to do what we call in GMF the eco-social-spiritual immersions.

While in Baguio for two weeks, I usually took my lunch at the Ili-Likha Artists' Wateringhole. It is a food and art hub conceptualized by National artist Eric de Guia, also known as "Kidlat Tahimik", a renowned film director and writer. Ili is an Ilocano word for town or village and *likha* is the Filipino word for create. Looking it up in the dictionary, I learned that a watering hole is a place where people gather socially. The establishment showcases creativity, *pagkamalikhain*, in various forms: sculptures, woodcrafts, paintings, artworks, and food. Its eccentric design is such a beautiful disruption and resistance amid commercialization all around.

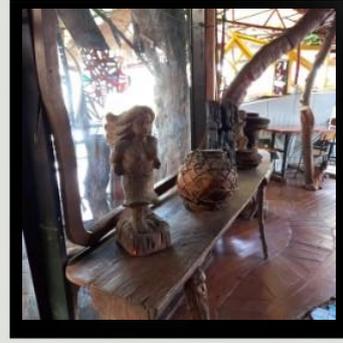




Mi-Likha Artists' Wateringhole,
June 24, 2022



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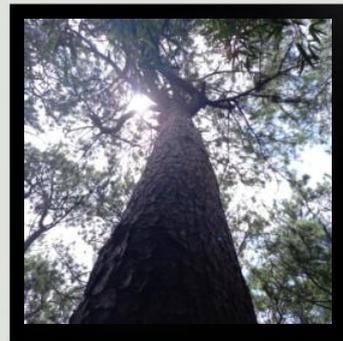
I also visited the Maryknoll Ecological Sanctuary and went through the Cosmic Journey for the third time. In 14 stations, Cosmic Journey tells the story of the Earth and its inhabitants. It seeks to instill in the sojourners the recognition, appreciation, and protection of our interconnection and interdependence with the Earth. The trail begins with a commitment "I pledge allegiance to the flora, fauna, and human life, that it supports one planet, indivisible with safe air, water and soil, economic, justice, and equal rights for all"



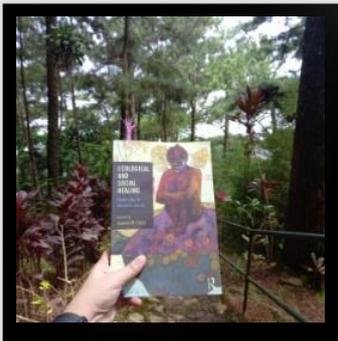
Maryknoll Ecological Sanctuary
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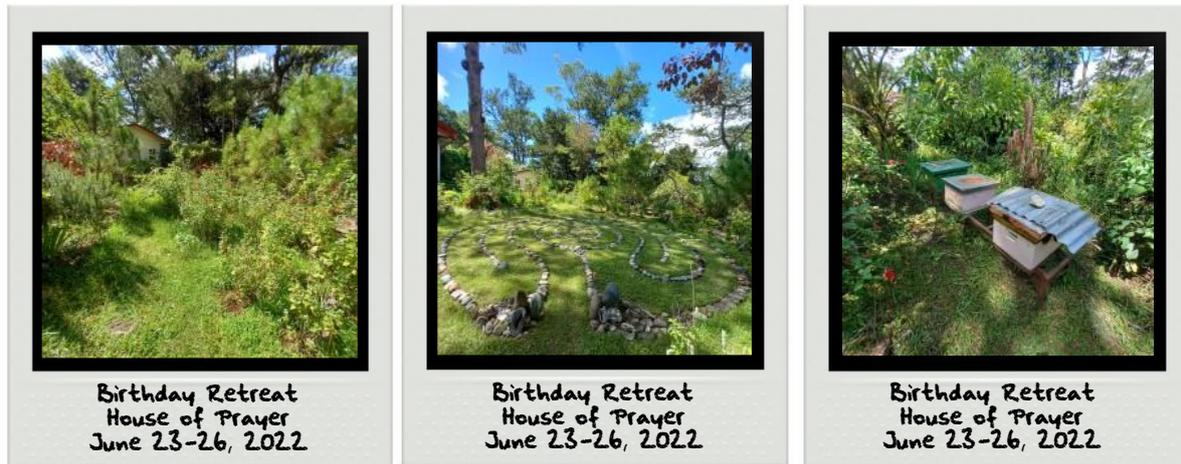
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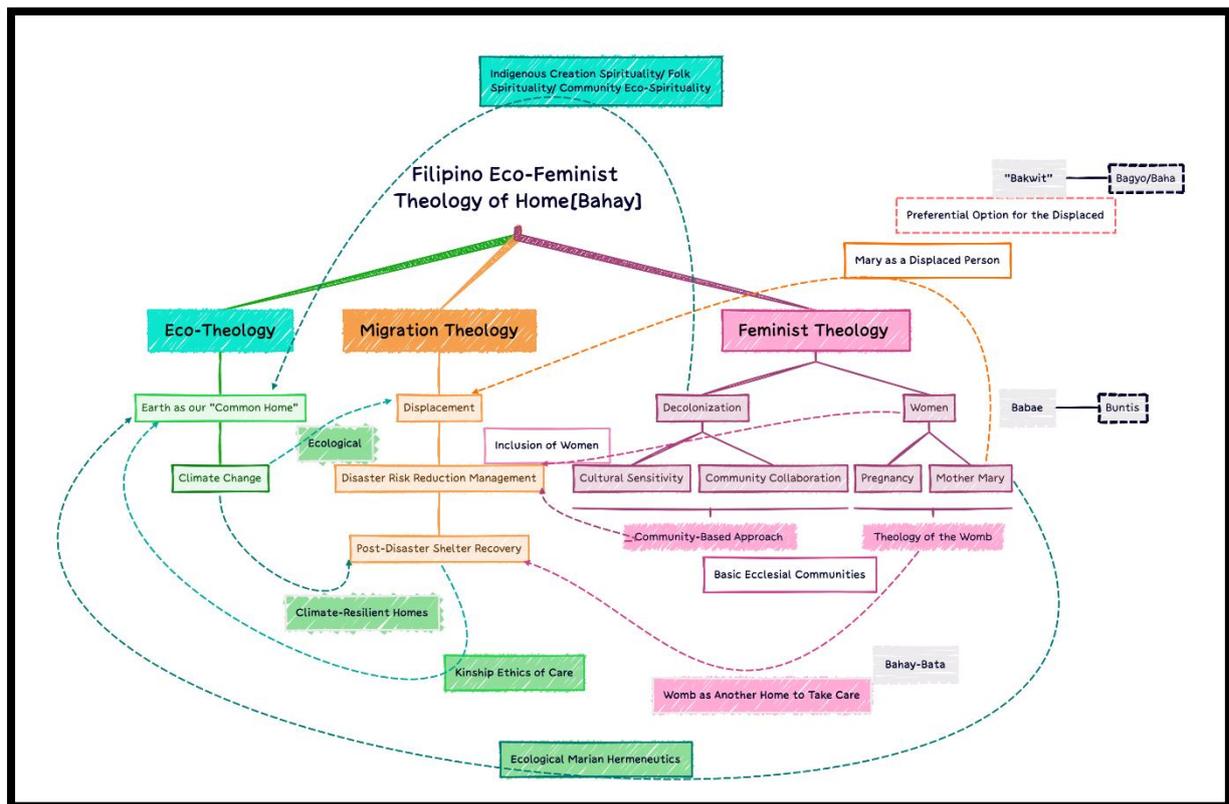
Maryknoll Ecological Sanctuary
June 22, 2022)

I spent four days of my stay in Baguio at the House of Prayer of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. I lived in the compound from 2013-2014 when I had my religious formation with the congregation. But coming back here was different. I looked at the place, the garden, and the people with different sets of eyes. I saw so many spaces of healing and regeneration. Their garden contains various species of flora which invites different species of birds and insects. They have spaces for beekeeping and mushroom farming. The place is teeming with life! One of my favorite spaces in the House of Prayer is the labyrinth. I came here every morning to walk. Every step was like a stride forward to understanding myself more deeply and experiencing the Divine more intimately. It was in this labyrinth where I

committed to being a regenerative and creative resistance to the world, to contribute to engendering more alternative systems to counter structures of domination, subjugation, and exploitation.



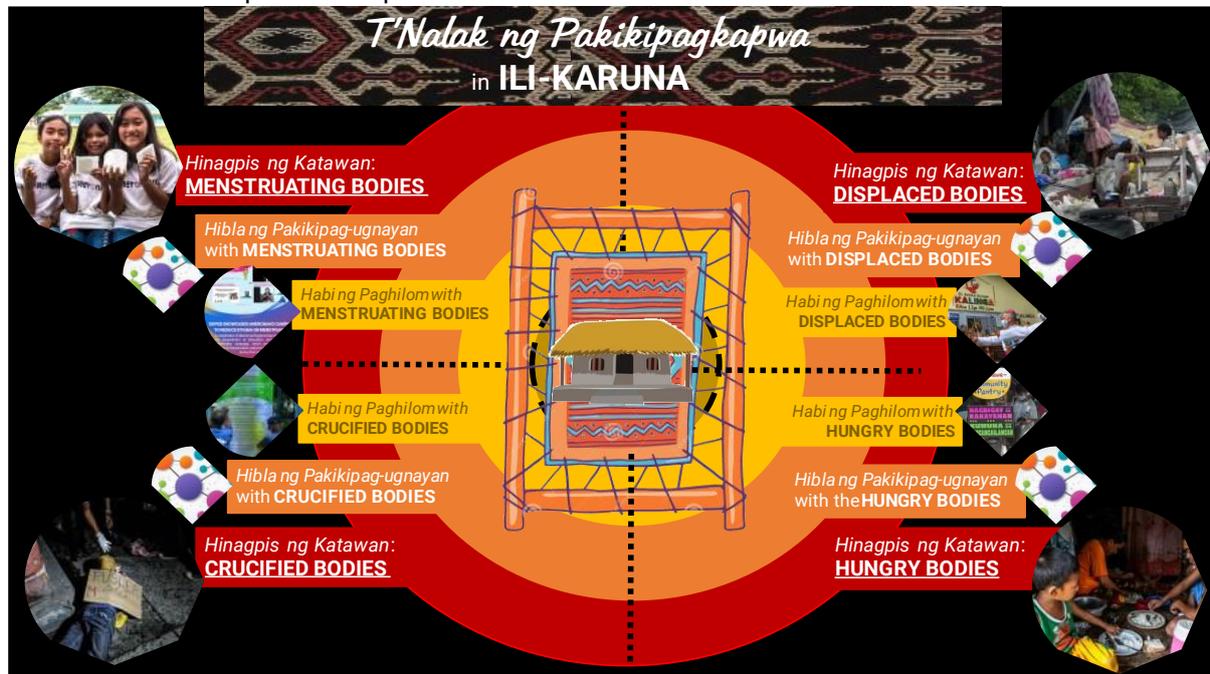
I commit to promoting the cause of gender equality in doing and teaching Theology. I will support the efforts done by reconstructionist feminist theologians in examining and exposing patriarchal influences in Scriptures, Church teachings, and practices and reclaim the liberating structures of our faith tradition. I commit to journeying with victims of gender-based violence through peer support and counseling. In a future research project, I hope to develop with a community of environmentally displaced people a decolonized theology of home. I commit to contributing to building radical, creative, and regenerative spaces of compassion through every day and spectacular forms of activism.



My Theology Classes as Creative Regenerative Spaces. Apart from the adjustments which I need to make to shift from online to physical classes, my perspectives, and experiences, particularly on something to do with compassion, have greatly changed because of what I have been learning in GMF. And this has a huge impact on how I will facilitate the teaching-learning process with my students.

One of the many things I've learned from GMF is discovering, reclaiming, and celebrating the beautiful words we have in the languages of our country. One of the words which I invited my students to use all the time is the word kapwa. According to Virgilio G. Enriquez in his book *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology: The Philippine Experience*, "Kapwa is the unity of the 'self' and 'others'. The English 'others' is used in opposition to the 'self' and implies the recognition of the self as a separate identity. In contrast, kapwa is a recognition of shared identity, an inner self shared with others." Moreover, when

collaboration, and transdisciplinarity in addressing the world's brokenness. It is my prayer that my Theology classes will become what I coined in the program as *Ili-Karuna* (ili is an Ilocano term that means village; in Buddhism, karuna means compassion), a regenerative space where the experiences of the oppressed or the bodies in pain challenge the dominant paradigm, awaken and liberate us from its blinding and enslaving machinery, and move us to non-violently, creatively, and collaboratively counterwork it. Our Theo classes will hopefully become a creative space where we see and heal the world's brokenness not in fragments but in totality- recognizing that we are all kapwa to each other, needing to work together for each other's emancipation, and nurturing and celebrating this network of interconnected compassionate praxis.



My paglalakbay in GMF is one of the highlights of my 2022 and would probably be one of those which greatly transform me for the good. The journey was not easy, and much work was demanded. There were a lot of disruptions which brought turbulence in my life. But I would not have it any other way. Those were necessary. I would always say that GMF is an answered prayer. It was beautifully culminated by being able to travel and visit Kerala, India. *The GMF journey is a prayer of emancipatory disruption and for compassionate regeneration.*

