In the Philippines, the vernacular *kumakalam na sikmura* (literally translated as “gnawing of the stomach”) is used as an image of hunger, a profound experiential event. Hunger as an embodied experience highlights the reciprocity of the body and the world, and the vulnerability of our embodiment is precisely the thread that weaves our embodied experiences together. The body in pain articulated by *kumakalam na sikmura* in turn becomes a foundational moral experience that will help frame an ecofeminist praxis responsive to issues surrounding women and nature.

Who Speaks for the Inarticulate? Redeeming the Vernacular

Contemporary Filipino theologians have been hard at work to provide spaces for those whose voices have been suppressed by colonial hegemonic discourse, rendering them inarticulate. This space-clearing effort closely follows

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what biblical scholar R. S. Sugirtharajah terms *coding* and *decoding*. In this case, it is doing such in one’s own culture, because it has become imperative that culture be the *locus theologicus*, or the starting point of doing theology. Sugirtharajah originally meant these to be applied to the scriptures, using a postcolonial method by “coding” the text so that it is (1) taken in context and within its milieu, (2) understood in light of how a particular place is regarded by its neighbors and vice versa, and (3) read in light of how gender, race, and ethnicity are foregrounded or relegated to the background. “Decoding” texts thus involves awareness of hegemonic discourses: Who is speaking? Who is silent or silenced?

This article explores the vernacular Filipino *kumakalam na sikmura* (literally translated as “gnawing of the stomach”) as an image of hunger. Hunger, as an embodied experience, exposes the human body as sexed and gendered; biological yet also social, political, and cultural; material yet metaphorical and symbolic; and a site of not only varied oppressions but also liberation. Hunger is therefore foremost a bodily experience but also symbolic or metaphorical.

Hunger as a metaphor is consistent with the feminist recognition that language can be liberating for women insofar as it is understood as being deeply metaphorical. A good use of metaphor produces a flash of insight when one is able to grasp the continuum between dissimilar events, objects, things, or situations and to draw similarities in and among them. In *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*, Christian theologian Sallie McFague explores the call for a theology that speaks for our time, especially one that addresses the central insights of the new sensibility: the need for human responsibility in the nuclear age. Older models and metaphors about God (or divinity) tended to be regarded as closed and definite, thereby rendering new models suspicious.

McFague defines *metaphor* as

a word used in an unfamiliar context to give us a new insight; a good metaphor moves us to see our ordinary world in an extraordinary way. What is at issue, of course, is not just metaphor as a useful (or even a necessary) means of communicating something we already know. This would be allegory, not metaphor. Rather, metaphor is a way of *knowing*, and not just a way of communicating. In metaphor, knowledge and its expression are the same; there is no way *around* the metaphor; it is not expendable. One cannot do without any metaphors.

Metaphor also echoes what Sugirtharajah deems as postcolonial work, which is essentially a “style of inquiry, an insight or a perspective, a catalyst,

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a new way of life.” Moreover, this author's use of the phrase “embodied experience” to refer to hunger resists criticism asserting that “embodied experience” is essentialist: It seems to connote that appealing to women's experience is universalizing because it glosses over cultural, political, social, and religious differences in and among women in the world. The phrase “embodied experience” should be deliberate, as it brings into the forefront the reality that hunger affects women more than men.

The body in pain that *kumakalam na sikmura* articulates in turn becomes a foundational moral experience. This metaphor helps frame an ecofeminist praxis that is responsive to the issues surrounding women and nature.

*Ecofeminism: Woman-Nature Connections*

Ecofeminism posits that there is a parallelism between the destruction of nature and the oppression of women. Like other feminist theories, ecofeminism is by no means a homogenous body of thought. However, the thread that connects ecofeminist thoughts is its critique of the patriarchal nature of Western society and dualistic, hierarchical thinking, which justify continuing ecological destruction. For ecofeminist pioneer Ynestra King, hatred of woman and hatred of nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing. Nature is other and therefore essentially different from culture, which defines human evolution. Thus, feminine “closeness” with nature is hardly a compliment. For Mary Mellor, dominant men claim to be above nature (transcendent) and women are seen as steeped in the natural body (immanent). Nature has suffered the same inferior status as women, even as it has also been used as a norm to oppress women. “Naturism,” the domination of nature, is a lifelong partner to sexism: the feminization of nature and the naturalization of women have been crucial to the historically successful subordination of both.

Early ecofeminist scholars claimed that androcentrism or male-centeredness is the primary cause of all messy, tangled, disordered relationships in the world. Androcentrism is reinforced under patriarchy, which refers to the male-dominated system of social relations and values. Janis Birkeland argues

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5 Ecofeminism is best understood as a variety of movements rather than one unified movement. For this section, I chose a broad description of ecofeminism to encompass various movements. It emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as myriad forms of feminist and environmental theories and activists intersected. Francoise d’Eaubonne introduced the term in her book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death) published in 1974. Some theorists, such as Ynestra King, name it as a third wave of feminism, while others place it in the general category of deep ecology.


that in patriarchy, the systemic devaluation of the “feminine principle” has been a fundamental basis of domination. This was evident when, “in Western patriarchal culture, masculine constructs and values were internalized in our minds, embodied in our institutions, and played out in power-based social relations both in our daily lives and upon the world stage.” Flowing from their particular views are their prescriptions to right this relationship. Patriarchy is therefore so entrenched in human society that only through a reordering of the dynamics between male and female can environmental destruction be halted.

For Rosemary Radford Ruether, the ecological crisis resulted from the Western scientific industrial revolution, which was built on the unjust acquisition of agricultural, metal, and mineral wealth through the exploitation of indigenous people’s labor. Colonialism and imperialism, in particular, brought destruction not only to the natural world but also to indigenous peoples’ ecological wisdom.

Dualism pervades Western thought, resulting in the moral neglect of certain human and nonhuman beings. From this perspective, the world is divided into opposing pairs of concepts: mind is split from body, spirit from matter, male from female, and culture from nature. One concept in each pair is deemed superior to the other. This “other” is sometimes demonized and always discriminated against. In such dualism, beings and bodies identified with nonhuman nature, persons of color, women, and the poor are conceived as inferior others in contrast to beings (whites, men, elites) identified with reason and rationality. Hierarchical thinking also generates normative dualisms—views in which the disjunctive terms are seen as exclusive rather than inclusive, and oppositions become conflicting rather than complementary. The identification of females with inferior bodies and nature and the identification of males with superior reason and spirit are social constructs that have reinforced the negative stereotyping of women.

Dualist thinking that pits reason against nature is firmly entrenched in an oppressive conceptual framework. According to Karen Warren, this is because it explains, justifies, and maintains relationships of domination and subordination. Moreover, an oppressive conceptual framework is patriarchal when it explains, justifies, and maintains the subordination of women by men.

**Ecofeminism: Exploring Intersectionalities**

Ecofeminism is complementary to recent trends in feminist theorizing in its recognition of diverse women’s standpoints and positions. Like other fem-

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inisms, it seeks to answer questions involving the problematic woman-nature connection. Moreover, ecofeminism argues that “nature” is also socially constructed and is at play within these intersections. Nature is a web of interrelationships—an essential community rather than an accumulation of separate individuals. Ideas of “nature” are relevant not only to gender but also to class, sexuality, and race. This is because oppressed groups have been devalued by their association with “nature” and the “body.”

In particular, ecofeminism asks: As humans/women/feminists, what should our relationship—material, spiritual, political—to nonhuman nature be? How is this relationship gendered and what are the consequences of that gendering for women and for nature? How do these consequences differ by race, class, nation, age, sexuality, or any of the vital categories in the matrix of feminist analysis? Elizabeth Spelman responds to these questions by calling out some feminists who ignore or accept negative views of the body in prescription for women’s liberation. Such an attitude, she avers, promotes racist and sexist thinking. In seeing the body as negative, these feminists uphold the view that certain kinds or “races” of people are more body-like than others, meaning that they are perceived as being more animal-like and less god-like.

Refusing to acknowledge the intersection of class, race, and gender but at the same espousing freedom and individuality promotes an ideology that screams: “Keep the person, and leave the occasion for oppression behind.” Used in feminist analysis, this ideology becomes: “Keep the woman, but leave her body behind.” Spelman warns that once one attempts to stop thinking about oneself in terms of having a body, then one will stop thinking not only in terms of characteristics such as womb and breast but also in terms of skin and hair. Such feminist theory, based in part on a disembodied view of human identity, would regard blackness of skin as being of temporary and negative importance.

In highlighting the inclusion of nature within its analyses, ecofeminism succeeds in fostering a better understanding of the multiple intersections of class, race, and gender. This provides an important difference between ecofeminism and feminism. Birkeland regards ecofeminism as feminism taken to its logical conclusion because it theorizes the interrelations among self, societies, and nature.

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13 Ibid., 280.
Women-Nature Connection: Liberating or Oppressive?

Ecofeminists argue that women and nature are directly associated—female is to nature and immanence as male is to culture and transcendence. Both women and nature are treated as other—devalued, exploited, and controlled. We cannot solve the social problem of sexism without attacking the manner in which patriarchal society conceives of and treats nature. This association of women and nature has had tragic consequences for humans and the rest of nature. Some feminists have suggested, however, that this association can be converted into a positive thing by affirming so-called feminine values, such as caring, openness, and nurturing.\(^\text{15}\)

However, this creates a dilemma for ecofeminists. Can women celebrate the woman-nature connection that is rooted in oppression? Can women sever the woman-nature connection without assuming the values of domination and oppression? Val Plumwood declares that “the very idea of a feminine connection with nature seems to many to be regressive and insulting, summoning up images of women as earth mothers, as passive, reproductive animals, and contended cows immersed in the body and in the unreflective experiencing of life.”\(^\text{16}\) These images have prompted some feminists to view the traditional connection between women and nature as no more than an instrument of oppression, and a relic of patriarchy that should simply be allowed to wither away now that its roots in an oppressive tradition are exposed. In a way, Plumwood summarizes the fundamental critique of ecofeminism other feminists hurl because it seemingly upholds the woman-nature connection.

Helen Longino highlights the problematic implications of the woman-nature connection by calling attention to how women have been socially constructed as other.\(^\text{17}\) Thus, embracing the woman-nature connection can appear to be traditional, prescriptive, and stereotypical. Instead of rescuing women and nature from domination, it returns women to the home, nature, child rearing, and caretaking. Rather than dissolving Cartesian dualism, the woman-nature connection affirms it and puts women in an essentialist construction. Ecofeminism is essentialist insofar as it allegedly claims that women possess an essential nature—a biological connection or a spiritual affinity with nature—that men

\(^{\text{15}}\) Ibid., 19.


\(^{\text{17}}\) Longino explores a number of recent proposals regarding “feminist science” and rejects a content-based approach in favor of a process-based approach to characterizing feminist science. The philosophy of science can yield models of scientific reasoning that illuminate the interactions among cultural values, ideology, and scientific inquiry. While we can use these models to expose masculine and other forms of bias, we can also use them to defend the introduction of assumptions grounded in feminist political values (“Can There Be a Feminist Science?” Hypatia 2 [1987]: 51–64).
do not. By far the strongest criticism against ecofeminism is that it is guilty of essentializing and universalizing women’s experience because it glosses over cultural, political, social, and religious differences in and among women in the world.

The charge of essentialism is often made against a particular strand of ecofeminism, which has been classified by various ecofeminists as either cultural, affinity, or radical ecofeminism. According to its critics, this ecofeminist strand is identified with such early proponents of ecofeminism as Mary Daly, Charlene Spretnak, and Starhawk. Their understanding of these affinity ecofeminists’ claims is that the woman-nature connection ought to be celebrated because the feminine is a source of power—that which would reverse ecological destruction. Often associated with feminist spirituality, its proponents insist on reclaiming the connection—whether spiritual or biological or social—because it is a sign of women’s greater sensitivity to and capacity to care for nature.

Spretnak is a representative of ecofeminists who emphasize the connection of women with nature through the revival of ancient rituals and worship. Critical to this strand of ecofeminism is the distinction between men and women and their connection to the earth—women are more connected to nature than men. This special connection rests on the fact that women have a procreative capacity in accord with nature’s biological processes.

Affinity or cultural ecofeminists also claim that the earth is a “mother” that sustains us all. Earth, Gaia, is an individual; it is a subject and not just a collection of objects to be used. It proposes that our planet functions as a single organism that maintains conditions necessary for its survival. Earth is understood to possess the organized, self-contained look of a live creature—it is like a single cell. Earth is a body, and all entities in it are dependent on its survival; yet at the same time, they work together in a complex, interrelated way so Earth can continue to exist. In other words, the parts that make up the whole can be seen as a living entity that sustains itself.


19 Mary Daly seemed to anticipate the critics’ view. Reflecting on the “silence” and “general inattentiveness” of male ecologists regarding Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring, Daly clarified that she does not suggest that women have a “mission” to save the world from ecological disaster, nor to perform what she calls “female Self-sacrifice in the male-led cause of ecology.” What she affirmed was the “courage of women to break the silence within our Selves, and creating new Spring.” Because this “Spring of women’s be-ing is powerfully attractive to other women,” it can become the fount of solidarity for women who have heard the “release of the Spring of be-ing” (Gyn/Ecology: The Metatheory of Radical Feminism [Boston: Beacon Press, 1990], 21–22).
Some ecofeminists, however, reject the view that women are closer to nature. Among them, Plumwood criticizes ecofeminists who hold this view by calling them “Trapped Romantics” and “Earth Mothers,” because they uncritically embrace dualism—especially in its pronouncement that women are closer to nature than men are—rather than work toward the reversal of it.\(^{20}\) On goddesses and other deifications of nature, she pointedly asserts: “Such deity is theft,” as it robs “the great plurality of particular beings in nature” of their “own autonomy, agency, and ecological or spiritual meaning.”\(^{21}\)

In *Feminism and Ecological Communities*, Chris Cuomo likewise warns that femininity and other features (embodiment, mystery, and resistance to reason) supposedly shared by oppressed beings and classes are problems to be scrutinized not qualities to be uncritically celebrated.\(^{22}\) Carolyn Merchant has claimed that in its emphasis on the female body and nature components of the dualities of male/female, mind/body, and culture/nature, affinity ecofeminism runs the risk of perpetuating the very hierarchies it seeks to overthrow.\(^{23}\) To assume fixed identities for women is problematic, especially if these fixed identities are constructed in opposition to fixed male identities.

To reiterate: an appeal to reclaim and celebrate the woman-nature connection fails to account for the diversity in and among women and misses the important contribution of sexuality/race/class/ethnicity to deepening and broadening ecofeminist analysis.

**Third-World Ecofeminism: Beyond Essentialism?**

The problem with essentialism is that the idea insists on uniformity or similarity that glosses over race or gender or social location. Moreover, some ecofeminists who have strongly criticized the essentialist tendencies of early ecofeminism were suspicious of any appeal to “experience” that smacks of women’s continuing identification with nature. This is because to appeal to experience, particularly bodily experience, is to appeal to subjectivity that can be interpreted as untrammeled, pure, and unmediated.

Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva attempt to resolve the ecofeminist essentialist dilemma by defining ecofeminism as:

> a perspective, which starts from the fundamental necessities of life—
> we call this the subsistence perspective. Our opinion is that women are nearer to this perspective than men—women in the South working and

\(^{20}\) Plumwood, *Feminism and Mastery of Nature*, 3.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 128.

\(^{22}\) Chris Cuomo, *Feminism and Ecological Communities: An Ethic of Flourishing* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 23.

living, fighting for their immediate survival is nearer to it than urban middleclass women and men in the North. Yet all women and all men have a body, which is directly affected by the destructions of the industrial system. 24

Shiva and Mies offer a view of ecofeminism that is more concerned with the everyday realities of third-world women who struggle under the weight of patriarchal capitalism. Filipino women are no exception. Subsistence perspective takes into account women’s embodied experience. By focusing on the everyday lived experience of women in poorer, third-world nations as caregivers of their families, in particular, and their communities, in general, by tending the earth, Shiva and Mies’s definition of ecofeminism seems to be nonessentialist. Women are the best mediators to halt the continuing ecological crises because they are closer to nature. Mies and Shiva elaborate this argument further by pointing out that:

(a) Women’s interaction with nature, with their own nature as well as the external environment, has been a reciprocal process. They conceive of their own bodies as being productive in the same way that they conceive of external nature as being so.

(b) Although they appropriate nature, their appropriation does not constitute a relationship of dominance or a property relation. Women are not owners of their own bodies or of the earth, but they co-operate with their bodies and with the earth in order to “let grow and to make grow.”

(c) As producers of new life, they have also become the first subsistence producers and the inventors of the first productive economy, implying from the beginning social production and the creation of social relations, i.e., of society and history. 25

What women do in most parts of the world—for example, gardening, fetching water, gathering firewood, and farming—makes them especially attuned to the rhythms of the earth. This very dependence on the latter’s whims and moods makes them experts in its flora and fauna, astute prospectors of its hidden sources of water and crops, and venerable resources on its local weather and intimate features. However, both the earth’s and women’s bodies are rendered vulnerable by the intertwining phenomena of maldevelopment and toxic

25 Ibid., 1993, 43, as cited in Mellor, Feminism and Ecology, 66.
capitalism, which patriarchy upholds. To draw on women’s and indigenous peoples’ knowledge about their land is a way of countering patriarchal capitalist systems.

Ecofeminism in the Philippines

Ecofeminist lawyer Ipat Luna, in conversation with this author, expressed that Filipino women should “look into ourselves at our real power and the feminine manifestations of our powers. If we look down on our own feminine powers, why do we wonder if patriarchy is winning? If we do not enjoy and revel in our femininity and draw strength from the good things, we will be our own enemy.” Similarly, St. Scholastica’s College, an exclusive school for women, and a long-time advocate of women’s rights, publishes on its website its unabashed ecofeminist leaning: “Women have a special stake in preserving the environment because patriarchy treats women and nature mainly as resources rather than beings with their intrinsic value; patriarchy dominates both women and nature; and patriarchy exercises violence on both women and nature.”

Filipino scholars Babette Resurreccion and Edsel Sajor argue that these very responses are however essentialist because:

Contrary to the dominant strand in discourses and women-environment-development that women are always the hardest hit by environmental degradation, the case of the Kalanguya women of Barangay Baracbac in the municipality of Sta. Fe Nueva Vizcaya demonstrates that women and men experience the impact of resource degradation in specific, gender-differentiated ways.

Resurreccion and Sajor further note that essentialism could be dangerous in the long run for those who directly experience the full brunt of environmental degradation, such as “the poor and the indigenous peoples [who] have in the past been constructed as the culprits to blame for environmental degradation; today they are perceived as those most predisposed to sustainable resource practices and as such, in direct opposition with the upper classes who are now regarded as the environment’s enemies.”

Affinity ecofeminism clearly upholds the traditional ecological knowledge of indigenous peoples as a contrast to the antinature activities of colonizers. And yet Resurreccion and Sajor caution about the over-romanticization of in-
digeneous people’s traditional knowledge, as numerous studies have shown that they have kept pace with modernization and are therefore no longer the pristine sanctuaries of biodiversity or the havens of “traditional lifestyles” that popular discourses on indigenous peoples and their habitats often project.

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz acknowledges this tendency to romanticize indigenous peoples’ practices and belief in her article, “Reclaiming Earth-Based Spirituality.” It is included in Rosemary Radford Ruether’s *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*, and draws from her experience as an Igorot woman. As a second-generation Igorot born when Western ideologies were firmly planted in her people’s consciousness, Tauli-Corpuz grew up believing that any indigenous spirituality is akin to paganism, which was everything that her Christian upbringing was opposed to. Her self-reflexive take on her roots (an indigenous woman and child of a first generation Igorot Anglican priest) and her present foothold, rooted in a deep understanding of the injustices her community suffered as a consequence of maldevelopment, makes for a nuanced analysis of the ways in which a particular community struggles to hold on to traditions that are constantly threatened by modernity. The reclaiming is made with full awareness that both women and men are embedded in land that is not only ecological or bio-physical but also largely political—a contested space in which indigenous peoples’ desire for their traditions to continue is undermined and overwhelmed by capitalists’ need for more profit.

**Kumakalam na Sikmura As Ecofeminist Concern**

The ravaging of the earth in various forms of degradation and of women, especially Filipino women, is manifested in malnutrition and hunger. Widespread, debilitating, and persistent poverty in the Philippines adds to the continued vulnerability of its people. Nevertheless, this paper upholds the affinity ecofeminist contention that women more than men bear the brunt of environmental degradation.

In the 2005 documentary film *Buto’t Balat* (literally translated as “Skin and Bones”), Filipino veteran journalist Kara David presents instances of hunger that are wide and deep. The film provides a good look into Filipino mothers’ situations, providing new insights into the problem of hunger. Viewers can begin to see how the idea that women are nothing more than fetal containers is especially dangerous. How can a woman help feed her family when she is burdened by the overwhelming need to care for her numerous children? Similarly, how

29 Ibid., 38.
30 Igorots are indigenous people in the Cordillera Province of Northern Philippines.
can a man be liberated from the day-to-day struggle of trying to preserve his sanity while looking for food to feed his family?  

Malnutrition is not only a problem for children but may also become a fatal threat for their parents because mothers and fathers, to a lesser extent, often forego eating altogether in order for their children to have something to quell their hunger. Hunger makes everyone vulnerable. But as the primary caretakers mothers are especially vulnerable to being severely malnourished. They keep their families together while suppressing their children's tears.

For women, who are normally responsible for providing food for their families, the experience of being unable to feed their children is tantamount to torture (and food deprivation is a form of torture). Hunger, poverty, and desperation are not unique to women. And certainly, men are also victimized by structures of oppression, for example the social expectation that they will be breadwinners. But when times are hard and men cannot find jobs, women are driven to put food on the table. They feel the brunt even more because they have been brought up with a certain consciousness that they are primarily caretakers. This social and political role is rooted in the idea that women have wombs because biology has ordained that they become nurturers.

Issues of hunger can be compelling for a national vision. The 1987 Philippine Constitution explicitly urges the government to promote a just and dynamic social order that ensures the prosperity and independence of the nation. This social order must also free the people from poverty through policies that provide adequate social services, promote full employment and a rising standard of living, and ensure an improved quality of life for all. This quality of life is characterized by the absence of complications such as hunger.

It is unimaginable to some that in a world where food abounds, so many...
individuals continue to go hungry. Traditional explanations on the cause of hunger in the world revolve around inadequacies in food production and the inability of some countries to meet the demands of their populace. Older models of the economic underpinnings of hunger thus tended to focus on food insecurity and how to address it. Food insecurity becomes evident in a country when there is a lack of supply and hunger incidents rise, in contrast to the understanding of food security, which is manifest in the availability, accessibility, and safety of food for all and at all times. A state’s response to food insecurity is typically to grow or produce more food.

Hunger has always been regarded as an economic issue because food touches everything and is the foundation of every economy. In the Philippines, economic indicators are built around the rise and fall of the price of rice, the country’s major food staple. Foods such as rice and fish (and in recent times, noodles) are subject to political strategies of states and households. Food sharing creates solidarity, while food scarcity damages the human community and the human spirit.

Kumakalam na Sikmura as Body in Pain

In everyday life, we are not usually very aware of our bodies. Only in pain does the body intrude into the consciousness, thereby making its presence felt. The experience of hunger as physiological pain—insistent, clawing, and gnawing—demonstrates the interaction of bodies and the environment. Nancy Schep-Hughes captures this occurrence best when she declares that a phenomenology of hunger reveals a “horrible human affliction.”32 It is interesting to note that the Filipino phrase *kumakalam na sikmura*—literally translated as the “gnawing of the stomach”—refers both to the physiological aspect of hunger as well as the state when the stomach “communicates” its needs to the person. When people are chronically hungry, their stomachs are always “crying,” “demanding,” and “insistent.”

*Kumakalam na Sikmura* explicitly draws attention to the relationship between the body, its owner, and the social and cultural worlds it is part of. To grasp the meaning of pain, it is not enough to look at the body’s presence or absence in the individual’s consciousness. Understanding the language of the body in general and the hungry stomach in particular is only possible if the body is positioned firmly within the cultural symbolism and the context of the social groups it is a part of. Due to its insistence and demand, hunger is the best example of a phenomenon that can demonstrate how the body is real and tangible, but lends itself to symbols and meanings.

The body is material and biological—that is, “it is flesh” because hunger

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is a physiological reality. This is an important claim because it simultaneously provides a sense of historicity (due to hunger’s painful insistence on mobilizing all of the body’s organs to pay attention to it) and a sense of continuity with nonhuman bodies. The very materiality of the body means that all bodies share similarities with other bodies (which are made of the same substance) and yet remain distinct (due to each body’s solidity and concreteness).

The body’s materiality grounds the self. The body becomes the locus of the self. The body is embedded in earth—hunger painfully demonstrates this. When severe malnutrition stunts a woman who happens also to be a mother, it stunts the growth of her children as well.

However, this “embeddedness” is not a trap. The biological body is where the sense of the immediately grasped and intuitively “true” experience of the body occurs. Emotions must be included in a discussion of body intelligence because it is one of the means by which our bodies communicate knowledge to conscious awareness.

History has also shown that masses of individual, hungry bodies, when they recognize the roots of their suffering and organize among themselves, have become catalysts of change. Tragically, they are more often aroused in anger and indignation to fight wars of revolution or liberation against other members of economic/political/cultural bodies within smaller geopolitical zones in the world. Furthermore, Philippine history has shown how these events have resulted in the reorganization of political, economic, and cultural bodies, which may identify intermediate solutions to address issues of chronic hunger.

As mentioned earlier, traditional responses to hunger have revolved around resource allocation. However, while structural changes in political and the economic spheres may indeed result in more efficient management systems (political bodies) and economic production systems (economic bodies), they can further cultivate more material consumption, heavily affecting the biogeosphere or environment. These tremendous changes may lead to more competition for scarce resources at the planetary level, as nation-states or regional blocs emerge. Neocolonial forms of domination may likewise rise from these social systems, which fail to address other causes of human hunger at different levels. This cyclic competition for resources to address hunger at different levels of human existence may intensify further, unless a permanent revolution in the cultural body occurs that proposes to cultivate a state of mental satisfaction with basic ecological necessities for human survival.

**The Body in Pain as Foundational Moral Experience**

*Kumakalam na sikmura* also connotes hunger that gnaws like an open, festering wound. It goes beyond the physical—its searing pain cuts through the flesh and into the soul. A locally produced TV documentary on hunger depicted
a young mother pregnant with her ninth child. The stony expression on her face was especially striking. She did not smile at all; neither was she apologetic about the chaos around her. What was she thinking? Perhaps she had retreated far into her being, to a place where the insistent cries of her hungry children could not penetrate.

Very early in their socialization, Filipino women are trained to embody the statement that “it is a woman’s destiny to suffer.” Isn’t it true that a woman’s body is designed to bear the pain and misery of menarche, menstruation, and pregnancy? Of what use is the womb if not to bear children? Aren’t the breasts meant to provide lactation? The image of the Madonna and Child looms heavily and provides a fitting image of a loving mother. The Pietà offers a magnificent impression of a long-suffering mother. Some mothers prefer to trick themselves into thinking that they have no control over the suffering of their children. A long-suffering mother who holds a dying child in her arms keeps all emotions inside. There is no wailing cry for justice; the lowered gaze toward a suffering child manifests a sense of helplessness in repairing the child’s situation.

Denial and numbness (which this author suspects is feigned indifference because feelings are turned inward) are, of course, a classic response to the debilitating effects of violence. And hunger, as has been demonstrated here, is truly an act of violence against women.

The experience of Kumakalam na Sikmura highlights two poles of human experience: the quest for well-being and the experience of suffering. On the one hand, hunger is a basic instinctual drive. It feeds on the senses and demands satisfaction. For the very poor, hunger leads to an almost desperate sense of helplessness, which no amount of crying can assuage. On the other hand, hunger brings to the forefront the reality of suffering and reveals the urgency of finding ways to end it. Because both (well-being and suffering) are experienced, the contrast between the two becomes evident.

It is no surprise that a victim of violence first goes through the process of denial then numbness and eventually passive acceptance of pain. When she encounters other women who are willing to listen because they have been through the same experience, she can begin to trust the journey, to name her experience and the source of her exploitation. Out of the experience of negativity, affirmation thus emerges.

**Embodied Spirituality: Eco-resistance As Power**

In 1990, a peasant woman in Bukidnon, a province on the island of Mindanao, threw herself in front of a logging truck. On October 14, 1991, Fr. Neri Satur, a Catholic priest and a forest protection officer deputized by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and his female aide were ambushed on their way back to Valencia City, then a municipality, after he cele-
brated mass in Barangay Guinoyoran, Bukidnon. He was killed point-blank with a shotgun after falling from his motorcycle. His head was smashed with a rifle butt. He was 29. Fr. Satur and the unnamed peasant woman lost their lives just a few years after the imposition of a logging moratorium in Bukidnon.33

Hunger strikes are a common feature in Filipino protests both by non-indigenous and indigenous peoples. It is unthinkable to resort to hunger as a form of protest because *kumakalam na sikhura* gnaws like an open, festering wound. We have seen how the privileged dismiss with impatience some things the poor would kill for. But people have resorted to hunger strikes on numerous occasions, which reveals the transcendental nature of hunger. Hungering is not exactly the same as desiring. One can sometimes dismiss desire like it’s a nuisance; a mere thing that one can postpone. Hunger is a basic instinctual drive. It painfully intrudes on the senses and demands satisfaction. For the very poor, *kumakalam na sikhura* gives rise to an almost desperate sense of helplessness.

When one is poor, hunger is not just a desire for food. Rather, it is a desire for a better way of life that accords one dignity and honor. This explains why people can and will fast as a religious or political activity, or even for health

purposes, like abstaining from sex. In addition, various sexual practices abound, from the polygamous to the monogamous that serve as examples of how culture has an impact on modulating basic instinctual drives. State regulations in many countries, for example, sanction pornography and prostitution because they serve to legitimize sexual desires.

Primal hunger equates with pain and can be positive because pain is a function of survival. Fasting, however, reveals the transcendent dimensions of hunger. Transcending hunger is actually regulating desire—it gives rise to the realization that although hunger is pain, it is positive because pain is a function of survival. At the cognitive level, humans through self-consciousness become aware of this drive. It provides the impetus for culture and technology to arise; it also makes people aware of the future, and of death. *Kumakalam na sikmura* helps people to develop empathy.

Some ecofeminists who criticize the development of religion as male centered nevertheless claim that spirituality is a very important source of empowerment for women. Religion feeds a deep human need, providing symbols and rituals that enable people to cope with limiting situations in human life (death, evil, suffering) and to pass through life’s important transitions (birth, sexuality, death). A positive view of religion can make way for a reclaiming of women’s bodies and sexuality. Starhawk sees rituals as ways of creating the energy necessary for women to sustain their political actions. Reclaiming the Goddess is a way of understanding the immanence—aliveness—that permeates the natural world because birth is a perfect metaphor for the cosmos: “spirit, sacred, Goddess, God—whatever you want to call it—is not found outside the world somewhere—it is in the world, it is the world, and it is us. Our goal is not to get off the wheel of birth or to be saved from something. Our deepest experiences are experiences of connection with the Earth and with the world.”

In other words, our cultural lives will be much richer when we recognize both the spiritual and material dimensions of our affinity with nature. And here we get the sense of what ecofeminism wants to say: That nature is not a collection of inert, dead, and simple objects. Or that it is an object par excellence—it is nothing but an object. Far from being so, with all of its implications of being, nature is more of a subject—highly complex, differentiated, and detailed. Na-
ture refers to all the bodies that exist in the world; it includes all processes, events, encounters, and creativities. Nature is everything, and bodies, both human and nonhuman, are fully embedded in it. For Tauli-Corpuz, earth-based spirituality is manifested in the everyday life and concerns of Igorot women and men. The struggle to defend the ancestral domain, which is shared by entire communities, is in itself a defense of this earth-based spirituality.37

Inspired by aforementioned ecofeminists, reclaiming follows two steps: invitation and remembering. How a woman is comfortable with her pain is a process of awakening. Every awakening process is thus first marked by invitation—“I would like to experience my body more.” This invitation becomes the call of the self that is integrated and whole. Searching also marks this process. A woman searches for this “to be” with a friend or with a loving community that allows her to be herself. And when she is lovingly supported, she begins to discover and disclose her deepest fears and sense of loneliness.

The period of invitation is the time when women seek the company of other women, especially those who have acquired critical consciousness of how ideologies of patriarchy and unbridled capitalism interlock to create violence against women. If there is light at the end of the tunnel, it comes in the form of women bonding together to raise each other’s consciousness. There is power in solidarity, a power that provides confidence, which escapes a woman when she finds herself alone and has no one to turn to. Power then lies in women’s indignation, which in turn generates the energy for resistance, an act grounded deeply and lastingly in a resounding yes to women’s flourishing.

A woman begins her second act of liberation by remembering. To remember is not a mental act—her body remembers forgotten and rejected past experiences. To remember is not to deny these experiences but to integrate them or come to terms with them so they can be appreciated fully. In remembering, she is led to another awakening. She realizes that her body-image, consequently her self-image, is socialized and constructed by the father figures in her life. This is not an easy realization as it requires that she descend into the dark, to break her self-images so she can own her name.

Recollection is more than a process of contacting and retrieving. It is also a process of developing our bodily awareness and cultivating its capacities. In the case of the body in pain, David Levin argues that the therapeutic response must involve descending even further into the sense of one’s visionary being in order to make contact with its more open dimension. This more “open” dimensional-

ity of our visionary being is always already ours, so that in recollection, we are progressively realizing what we were given to understand all along.38

One of the difficulties of recollecting is the possibility that one has become “numbed” by too much pain. Numbness is not pain or about being in too much pain. To be numb is to deny pain, which is contrary to the nature of pain (insistent, clawing, and might even draw one into madness). Numbness is a strategy to deal with pain, when feelings are turned inward. What the process of recollection suggests is that one does not deny pain; one ought to take note of the pain. So the movement is from numbness to pain; from denial to acceptance. What feminists are saying is that women too often deal with deeply buried anger and dissatisfaction with the world by turning against their own bodies or by regarding their bodies as the source of their general unhappiness.

Kwok Pui Lan recognizes an “Asian feminist theologian” as one who reclaims a contested space and, this author ventures to add, one who has also taken upon herself the task of articulating in the best way she can the poor woman’s heightened critical awareness of her situation.39 The acceptance of such daunting responsibility highlights the transformative and liberatory dimension of theology—that which is revealed in its twofold task: first, to call it by its true name, whatever it is that afflicts the human condition, however painful or however lonely the process of naming is; and second, to advocate a different model of knowing, of doing, and of feeling that is essentially compassionate and tolerant.

**Kumakalam na Sikmura Frames Ecofeminist Praxis**

Praxis refers to both reflecting and acting upon and within the world in order to transform it. Praxis is marked by a community of care ethic that can be enriched by embracing a particular slant—toward the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. Evidently, the challenge is to develop a specific response to a situation in which the poor are both oppressed and subjugated.

Ecofeminism has presented the case that women represent the dilemma of human embodiment in a sexed and gendered society. The deep connections between the oppression of women and the state of the environment reveal its epistemological underpinning. The abstract, mechanical, and disembodied thinking that grounds the development of capitalism objectifies both women and nature.40

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At the same time, the ecofeminist contribution to development discussions calls for increasing the participation of women, especially in the matter of the family’s health and well-being, food production and gathering, and assuring the family’s continued access to food. Capitalism in particular has provided and continues to provide the impetus for a neoliberal economic model, which upholds the view that natural resources are inexhaustible and that industrialization is the real indicator of a community’s development and “progress.” Often employing deceptive language, the proponents of development theories, which emphasize industrialization and technology, disarm their opponents by hiding their real intention, which is to extract wealth from poorer countries, which in turn render these nations’ people hungry and impoverished. Moreover, unabated wealth extraction can leave the natural world unable to any longer sustain life.

Truly responsive praxis desires the ending of the oppression and exploitation of women. The ethics of care sides with poor, third-world women who have become the measure of subjugation and decay. Their increasing poverty and ill health speak of their worsening condition as well as of the devastating state of the environment, living as they do at the moment. Nonetheless, when the body in pain speaks, it can emit real power from two founts: a moist heart watered by tears of compassion and solidarity with the communities of women and men who understand the connection between local and global struggles. This can give rise to an array of voices joined in one world space.
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