***A World Without Blindfolds*: The Fight Against Gender-Biased Domestic Violence**

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**I. Introduction**

**Politics of Motion**

My politics of motion performance relays the emotions behind the lives of many women in the Philippines who experience domestic violence with their abusive partners. Domestic Violence, also known as intimate partner violence are patterns of physical, sexual, and emotional violence inflicted by one partner in intimate relationships to maintain control over the other. In my performance, I use music, lighting and movement to depict a story of the daily life of a housewife living with an abusive partner. The 3-minute performance utilizes the song Love the Way You Lie by Rihanna and Eminem. I find the lyrics of the song fitting to show how the man puts the woman in a cycle of love and hate, but the woman shows a state of blindness and by forgiving his lies and "loving" the man again and again. It narrates the experiences in a woman's life in having an upsurge of emotions: pain, fear, anger, self-pity, resentment, sadness and a suppression of these emotions into a false feeling of "forgiveness and security ". The lyrics of the music suit her emotion best, *"Just gonna stand there and watch me burn, that's alright, because I like the way it hurts. I love the way you lie."*

The beginning of the performance shows how the woman gets up early to do her household chores and attend to the needs of her husband and children. However, it seems that the woman is blindfolded. Despite that, she is so familiar with the spaces of her household. She exhibits the state of deception as though she is made to believe that all her movements seem to be under control, like how a puppeteer dictates the movement of a puppet. Her arms and legs are covered with scars and bruises but she dances through every beat and rhythm of the music. At some point something compels her to remove her blindfold, to her surprise a slight taste of freedom arouses from her. She opens her eyes and sees the truth sees her own strength. She starts to move gracefully on her own. She experiences an upsurge of emotions as she sees the bruises and scars in her arms and legs. She screams and cries for help but she is tossed thrown around and beaten for "misbehaving" by her husband during the time she was granted freedom. The emotional rap part of the song has the perfect beat and rhythm to depict the violence that a woman experiences as she is physically abused, thrown against the wall, and pulled all over the place. She feels the urge to fight back and resist but she is immediately filled with feelings of fear as she looks at their family photo hanging by the wall. She remembers she does not want to destroy her family. She remembers she will not survive the world on her own, without a feeling of "security". The performance ends with a suppression of her emotions. She realizes it is better to feel numb, to believe the myth that she is of the wrong, to not be human, and to feel nothing at all. Her husband apologizes. She takes back the blindfold, puts it back to cover her eyes herself, gets back to her chores and does her daily routine.

The politics of motion is powerful in conveying the emotion and message created through movements of the body which is a site of power. Performances are kinds of political rituals to which, according to Geertz is a form of "sentimental education". My motion performance is an act of public ritual, a public expression of grievance for the long years of affirmation of violent norms that wreak havoc on the private lives of many women that strengthens, up until this day the domination of a patriarchal structure in the many aspects of our society. This performance is emotive, experiential, and relational. Ultimately, it is a call for action and a cry for help. But it is also an eye-opener and that speaks a message: There is always a way out. The woman can always remove her blindfolds.

**Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence does not discriminate. However, evidence shows that DV is more evident among women. This makes this occurrence gender-biased. Despite laws such as Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act of 2004, cases of domestic violence against women prevail. According to the National Demographic and Health Survey in the Philippines 1 out of 4 married women experience DV as of 2017.

According to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against women, gender-biased DV are due to the unequal power statuses between men and women long existing in history. Consequently violence becomes a medium to create structured roles that assign women to subordinate statuses and men to dominant statuses. This phenomenon is analyzed through the feminist lens as a result of a continuing emergence of a patriarchal structure. Private relationships of intimacy now become a site of coercion in cases of domestic violence, where there is little to no avenue for resistance on the part of abused. Some literatures identify domestic violence as "patriarchal terrorism."

The point of this essay is that we are fighting for life. Abused women are in life and death situations everyday of their lives. Politics is about the promotion of life, and violence is the exact opposite of politics. In some cases, women realize their ability to resist by seeking legal action but are obstructed by the weak claws of the criminal justice system which is reflective of how policemen and officials easily dismiss blotters and reports of such cases labeling them as a "*problemang mag-asawa*." Some who are lucky enough make it through such cases and receive legal relief. However, most women think domestic violence is a private issue and would opt not to make a big deal out of it with the risk of destroying their family. Due to the prevalence of domestic violence, some even consider it as part of the risks of getting married. According to the Women's Crisis Center in the Philippines, some choose to stay to keep their families intact and to fulfill their role of keeping peace in the family. Some, who are unemployed or who have relatively low income choose to stay in relationships despite violence to have a sense of security. Some women are made to believe that they deserve violence for not doing their roles well or for doing something to provoke their husbands. As breadwinners, husbands are often expected to come home tired, drunk, or not in the mood. Thus, violence, clearly a violation of human rights are "justified" or are taken lightly and dismissed due to being a "private matter". According to Atty. Emel Quintilan, the Philippine society thinks being feminine should be "passive, submissive, and dependent" towards their husbands.

The root cause of the unequal power relations among spouses is embedded in the rigid roles that the patriarchal society assigns upon women as nurturers, as lower beings and men as the breadwinners, the "punishers" and the ones who hold authority. As Judith Butler comments, she as a woman is herself formed through violent norms. The physical violence that women experience becomes inescapable as a by-product of subordinate thinking inscribed in the norms that affirm patriarchy. In this critical essay, there are three questions we want to address: Why is gender-biased domestic violence still a prevailing issue despite state intervention through laws and policies? Who is the real enemy? What is the best possible solution to end the problem of gender-biased domestic violence?

**II. Body**

**Secure States: Towards a Political Sociology of Emotions**

Before we understand the politics behind the problem of domestic violence, we have to first understand its nature. It is interesting to note that the whole experience of domestic violence, being a private experience revolves around interplay of emotions, which according to Mabel Berezin in her article *Secure States: Towards a Political Sociology of Emotion*, is the non-cognitive core of politics. The home, a secure place, to which family as a basic unit of society takes place, is a place where all sorts of emotions are experienced. To Berezin, emotions are a vital aspect of human beings since it operates as a protective mechanism and a response to threat. A threat may be positive or negative that awaits a response, just as how domestic violence may be responded by certain emotions. The whole experience of DV, and the choice of women to keep their families in tact despite the occurrence of pain and suffering is a vicious cycle of having emotions, and suppressing them for the sake of "better" lives through a false sense of security and survival. Emotions here become political because we do not study the triggering instances of emotions, or emotions as immediately experienced. Rather, we understand that emotions become political when they result to political action and inaction. The emotive responses of people in the private sphere become social in concert with others and by extension political. To Berezin, emotions are also embedded in political institutions. Our emotions, whether consciously or unconsciously are being formed by the practices, norms, and standards of institutions that affect us. Institutions dictate how women should feel about subordination and instigate their fear of losing security or breaking their families apart. The act of suppressing their emotions are embedded in the norms that construe political institutions, so are the acts of confidence and dominance that affirm misogynistic acts.

Berezin, relfective of Weber further tells us that legitimization of emotions are the indicators of whether a successful citizenship has taken place or not. She goes on by differentiating two kinds of states: A secure and insecure state. A truly democratic state circulates a feeling of security. Secure states generate a feeling of confidence and comfort among individuals. Nussbaum affirms this by saying, secure states have emotive indicators such as compassion, empathy, and generosity. A secure state, for instance a modern, truly democratic nation-state is where citizens develop a sense of legitimate bond with the state through emotional affirmation. There is a cultivation of feelings of empathy and generosity.

It is obvious that abused women do not belong to such world. Rather, they might belong to the latter. The "insecure state" filled with feelings of fear and lack of confidence. For years, the emotions of pain, suffering and neglect by women are invalidated and dismissed as something unimportant or as something that should be addressed privately. The insecure state characterizes a range of emotions, from proud mysogynists to anger and fear-driven abused women. There is dissolution of the society, a lack of citizenship. A feeling of insecurity wreaks havoc on family as a basic unit of society.

A secure state is one in attacking or defending their own turf against threats but an insecure state has an internal division on its own. The rising number of abused women prove that there is a great deal of people to which we have not defended yet. These subjects of political injustice are driven with emotions of pain and hate instead of pleasure and love. A state without loyal citizens puts its status to a comparative disadvantage with other states. Institutions should ajudicate risk and create an idea of a future that citizens should expect. However, it is the intra-institutional emotional dynamic itself that is problematic. If the state for example also affirms of violence in the form of weak claws of the criminal justice system and policemen dismissing reports about domestic violence, patriarchy will prevail. Insecurity will prevail.

The next recourse is to resort to various communities of feeling, which according to Berezin creates a feeling of belongingness and incites collective action. Women in our society today should resort to communities of feeling to keep politics alive. However, a mass deception of emotions would hinder the process of creating various communities of feeling. At this point, it is clear to us that many women still choose to keep their blindfolds on. Many women are placing their bets on the future every day as long as they stay in abusive relationships. Behind the masks, the reality is that they live in fear in response to everyday threats that they experience, both symbolically and physically. Women suppress their emotions as a manifestation that institutions govern their behaviors of suppressing their emotions to "control" and "minimize" damage. The point of this critical essay is that, no matter how high women's tolerance to injustice, only time will tell.

**Just Rage**

At some point in time, people will always have a breaking point, and in this case, we have to appreciate many women around the world for bending for too long. But Diane Enns is important for telling us to act now, before the worst happens. If we are talking about the rights grammar, we can only imagine the array of rights deprived of women and the inhumane treatment they experience for many years now. Women in domestic violence are deprived of the right to be free from pain, suffering, and inhumane treatment. Most importantly, they are deprived of the right to speak and act due to fear, lack of confidence, and due to violent norms that constrain them from doing such. Diane Enns' article *Just Rage: Politics Without Consensus* describes the urgency of acting upon unjust political rule. Precisely she says "The longer this right is refused, the greater the victim's righteous indignation and fury". She adds that a healthy dissent may turn into bloodlust the longer we deprive victims of the justice they deserve.

She describes those deprived of rights as "victims" of unjust political rule that craves relief. The problem with this contention is that the use of the term "victim" romanticizes domestic violence, justifies it as if it's okay, takes away the agency of women, and forgets the suffering that she experiences. Even Michel Foucault asserts that without the possibility of resistance there is no politics, there is no power. Without the possibility of resistance, it is no longer power at play but slavery. Victimization takes away your capacity to run the affairs. The more we instill this mindset upon women, the more we affirm that they do not have a choice. The more we agree that they do not have an agency upon themselves. In reality they can always go out of their cages. Women think they have no choice because they feel like their husbands are their sense of security. They do not deserve to be taken of their right to live in the most harmonious, humane conditions. The important mindset to have is that there is always a way out. Just like how my politics of motion performance shows, the woman can always take away her blindfold.

But how exactly do we achieve relief? Has the state not acted in any way to provide relief? At this point, it is important to bring back the first question at the beginning of this essay. Why is domestic violence still a prevailing issue despite state efforts such as the creation of VAWC? Diane Enns creates a remarkable analysis about persuasion. Either we are persuaded by the just rage of people's hesitation to be subordinated or by the state's determination to pacify this rage. The latter is more likely to describe our situation. If numerous cases of domestic violence still prevail despite state efforts to create laws and policies then laws such as VAWC may just be a form of state's pacification. If many women, despite existence of laws choose not to report their husbands or partners in fear of tainting their family's reputation, or numerous officials addressing domestic violence as a private issue then laws may just be another band-aid solution to the systemic problem of patriarchy. We either choose to be convinced not to subordinate to this pacification or to be persuaded knowing that the state has "already done something about it."

It is clear at this point that Enns wants women to let go of the emotions they have suppressed for a long time. But if rage is the appropriate response, then should we bring out our weapons of warfare and avenge ourselves? To Enns, what we want is the articulation of a just rage. At the end of the day, what we want is to preserve the conditions under which politics take place before things get worse, before dissent becomes bloodlust. She takes the stances of both Balibar and Arendt that we must maintain a politics of civility and a care for existence. Politics is about citizenship and the preservation of life. Agreement should precede dissent. Otherwise, if politics is plain dissent, then it is null, empty rage.

The question now is who do we rage against? Do we rage against flesh? At this point, we are to answer the second question at the beginning of this essay: "Who is the real enemy?"

**Fear and Loathing in Democratic Times**

Michael Foela's article *Fear and Loathing in Democratic times: Affect, Citizenship, and Agency* seems to tell us the answer. But first we must understand Foela's direction in political analysis. Like Berezin, Foela also resonates upon the idea that emotiotive responses, sentiments, feelings whether conscious or unconscious, which he terms as "affects" guide political action or inaction. In fact to him, we are experiencing an affective turn, or the turn to affects embedded within our visceral registers in deliberation or weighing of options in a democratic state. People decide on action or inaction based on things that matter to people and not based on rationality. He believes affects are dangerous and self-seeking. But Foela has little faith on the impact of individual sensibility questioning to achieve long-term goals and true political contestation.

At this point Foela tells us a huge reveal that we don’t fight against the flesh or the individual. Rather, it is the bigger social economies of power, the fundamental entities inscribed upon political institutions that dictate people's action and inaction. To Foela the affects or the subconscious inner feelings of individuals are inscribed in institutions they participate in. Therefore, it is the institutions that must be at the receiving end of this fight. It is apparent that institutions such as the media, the church, the workplace, the economy shape the acts of gender-biased domestic violence. In the context of domestic violence, men act in a certain way because that's what the patriarchal system tells them to do. Then they think it's okay to be violent, it's okay to "punish" women and children, it's okay to make vulnerable family members their emotional punching bags because other men in the society do it to, because the system says it is okay to. Political institutions affirm their negative acts and thus the actions prevail in different aspects of the society, whether it be the workplace or the household.

Foela also offers an efficient answer to the question, "What is the best possible solution to end this problem?” A more robust argument to political contestation is on how affects join in concert with others to incite political action. To Foela, the question of sensibility upon a single agency has not much to do with political reformation. He contends that if we are to contest politics, it must be through a collaborative fashion upon associations who join forces and create a bigger capacity to demand a better world. An example of this would be social movements that have the capacity to shape the feelings of people that either incite political action or inaction (Gould, 2009). A more effective account of political contestation should take into account how counter publics can shape the feelings of agents or individuals towards institutions such as the media, the church, the government, the criminal justice system, and in turn open these institutions to renegotiation, contestation, and eventually reformation.

The role of associations such as for example, Feminist groups in the Philippines like Philippine Commission on Women, GABRIELA Women's Party, and Save Our Women to name a few are politically salient in the contestation of what William Connolly terms as Fundamentalist formation of identities such as the prevailing patriarchal structure of the country. In this fundamentalist account, the hegemonic identity of patriarchy both in the private and public sphere maintains its dominant status through dismissing and demonizing other identities. Women in the private entities will never realize their capabilities and the many possibilities that lie ahead of them without the aid of an external force that may reshape their feelings, emotions, esteems, and eventually their political action or inaction. In turn, when these counter-publics influence the affects of women around the globe to fight for the bigger enemy, to remove their blindfolds, to demand their rights, to grapple the system of patriarchy, until then political institutions will not be open to reformation. Until then, people would still be persuaded by the state's pacification. People should never stop believing in the power of collaborative counter-politics. These associations become places of belonging for women who have been silenced for so long. We are not fighting against flesh, but against the bigger powers of the society. A single voice in Acapella might be glorious but it will never compare to the resounding power of a hundred voices in a choir. Women have influence to change institutions, and women have the capacity to shatter the patriarchal system with their voices, they just have to make it a little louder.

**The Paradox of Political Violence**

And so in an ideal world where the real enemy is defeated through collaborative dissent that reforms political institutions, will violence disappear? I do not want to offer a utopian ideal of the feminist victory. In fact, I do not want to contend that the feminist fight might be over after we achieve victory over domestic violence. Mark Muhannad Ayyash would tell us in his article *The Paradox of Political Violence* a reality check of what we should expect. We might be convinced at this point by Hannah Arendt that politics is the opposite of violence. To recall Arendt, she argues that while politics is where power is held by many, violence is the absence of power. While violence may disguise and may even be mistaken sometimes as power, it can never be legitimized and can never take the place of power. On the other hand, to Fanon, man recreates himself through violence. Thus he urges guided violence to grapple the systems of colonization which has instigated violence in the first place. There is no other way to separate two irreconcilable parties, the colonizer and the colonized than through violence guided by an effective leadership. Foucault tells us that politics may be the continuation of violence and violence may be the continuation of politics. However, Ayyash tells us we cannot actually create a neat divide between politics and violence. It is a call to expect violence amidst politics. Rather gender power relations have a temporal nature wherein they can be constantly contested, reformed and negotiated through time because of the paradoxical relationship of violence and power. Although violence and power are polar opposites, they are quite inseparable, thus the paradoxical condition.

Rather, politics and violence lives in a constant flux. Feminism may be seen finally as legitimate which means that politics won over violence, but it may constantly open for reformation, renegotiation, and recontestation. With these possibilities, violence is inevitable. Thus a stable relationship in a society is too idealistic since its temporal nature arises because of the inseparable relationship between politics and violence.

Thus it is important to be vigilant in the fight against patriarchy. It will always be a constant battle but complacency and indifference which signals a break from the battle would mean a fall downhill. In fact, even when we successfully destroy patriarchy, there will still be other forms of gendered violence that would exist that we still have to continue to resist, contest, and reform. As we win present battles, new wars may arise. Politics and Violence will continue to exist in flux. Can we put an end to gender-biased domestic violence? We may offer a long-lasting solution by targeting the core problem and by challenging the structural root cause. However, vigilance is important as new enemies arise through time. The important thing is we grow stronger, and we know our enemy better one battle after another.

**III. Conclusion and Insights**

We end up with three propositions: Gender-biased domestic violence will continue to prevail if we remain persuaded by the state's pacification of feminism. We addressed that the real enemy is not an individual, it is not oneself, Rather, the institutions that creates structures that assign socially constructed roles to genders which make gender-biased violence tolerable. We have addressed that the best possible solution is not facing the problem alone, strength comes in number. Associational counter-politics is important in influencing affectual turn towards grappling the real enemy.

The Patriarchy is possible, but it is a continuous fight. A secure state is possible, but it is a continuous quest. It needs collaborative effort, affectual attunement, and active political action, but it is achievable when women realize their strength and take their power back. A woman is not a slave or a victim. There is always a way out and an avenue for resistance. There is always an opportunity to choose life. What we wish to see at the end of the day are more instances that women publicly articulate their struggles and injustices through feminist movements using different platforms such as public appearance or social media where they engage in different audiences. In concert with others, a long-term reformation of political institutions would be possible. In this way, the nation-state can support women who fight against patriarchy in whatever resources, means and methods possible. It is a constant effort to fight against any threat. The goal is towards a collective emotion of security amongst women. We wish to get rid of mechanisms that trigger an insecurity of the state. We wish to see more people resonate and empathize with their experiences and emotions. We wish not to forget their suffering by glorifying or perdifying it. The end goal is not a utopian world where there is absence of violence, rather a continued fight against gender-biased violence, a secure state with an agonistic culture of respect. It is not a yet a downward spiral of fate for democratic feminism. Defeat is when we stop dissenting, when we stop fighting, when we stop articulating a truly effective rage and when we claim victimhood or hopelessness. Victory is a society that is truly politcal, a world without blindfolds.