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Learning to love at the violent periphery of Philippine society

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This article seeks to contribute to a scholarly conversation about love beyond dominant assumptions of romance, desire, and attraction by exploring what love comes to mean as situated in and governed by violence and marginalization in the shadows of political conflict. Based on ethnographic fieldwork among Muslim women in Palawan, the Philippines, I unpack the empirical notion of *learning to love* as it occurred in their stories of marriage. The article argues that learning to love reflects the women's struggles to survive socially, emotionally, and materially, and to make a life and selves. In this way, love is rooted in patriarchal relationality, the cultivation of moral and religious ideals of womanhood as well as in the social and material dependency in the family revealing love as familial togetherness, attachment, and support. On this basis, the process of learning love captures the women's work of learning to live, reclaiming sociality and social worth within the violent and confining conditions that structure their lives.

Keywords learning, love, the Philippines, women, patriarchal relationality, violence, survival

"I eventually learned to love him." This was Rohanie's conclusion of her marriage story. Rohanie was kidnapped into marriage fifty years ago and had lived her life first in the midst of the Muslim separatist conflict in Mindanao and later in an informal neighborhood in Palawan, the Philippines. I came to know her, alongside a group of women, while conducting fieldwork in 2018 in two *barangays*[1] in the provincial capital of Puerto Princesa. As with Rohanie's story of her life trajectory, these women's stories about their intimate relationships, married lives, and families were braided into stories of war, forced migration, and precarious living circumstances.[2] Taking departure from the women's stories about their lives, this article unpacks what the expression *learning to love* means for Muslim women living in the shadows of political conflict in the majority society of the Philippines.

I argue that while the women have minimal power and opportunities to configure or resist the wider violent context of their lives, learning to love enables a life and sociality in which the women's self-making draws from familial relations and gendered and religious ideals. Learning to love reflects the women's efforts to learn to live with violence and patriarchal rules and practices while insisting on a place and a voice as women. In this way, learning to love rests in three elements: patriarchal forms of relationality, teachings on womanhood, and survival in social and economic terms. Moreover, the process of learning to love entails the making of family stories, which offers

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closeness and mutuality among women and social worth. On this basis, I suggest that love comes to denote familial attachment, commitment, support, and togetherness.

Recent anthropological and feminist scholarship draws attention to how love in postcolonial societies may be experienced, felt, and perceived beyond Western love ideals of romance, mutual attraction, and desire and its association with free choice and the wish for companionate marriage (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; hooks 2001; Maqsood 2021a, 2021b; Venkatesan et al. 2011). As Ammara Maqsood (2021a) shows, for Pakistani women, love carries the potential to make selves and aspire towards financial security and nuclear family. In similar vein, in her ethnography on Filipina migrants who marry Japanese men, Lieba Faier (2007, 2009) argues that love may allow for reclaiming humanity and crafting a life.[3] The empirical notion of love as learned echoes Fenella Cannell's (1999) ethnography on marriage and intimacy in Bicolano culture in the Philippine context. Cannell suggests that learned love in women's marriage stories represents reluctance that women, through submitting to the will of others, are enabled to convert into power in their familial and marital relationships (1999). As these works show, love is not simply emotion in and of itself but takes shape through gendered meanings, norms, and negotiations and is about the possibilities of making a life, sociality, and selves. This article contributes to this conversation of love by reflecting on what love becomes, within the volatile and violent circumstances that mark the lives of the women and their families. How may learning to love reveal the women's work to survive and live with these realities?[4] Hence, I ask how traces of political conflict and structural violence govern the women's lives and are folded into what love comes to mean, but also *is* a means to live and become as women in such setting.

In answering this question, I seek to capture how the processual aspect of love is tied to a learned form of sociality, drawing on Veena Das's (2020) discussion on inheritance of culture. As Das argues, the process of learning one's culture, including its rules, practices, and language, also entails finding one's own voice. This, I propose, also pertains to notions of love, intimacy, and marriage, allowing a question of how learning understood as the process of growing into and passing on knowledge of social relationships, intimacy, and love is simultaneously a process of learning to live and becoming as oneself. In this way, I seek to make visible often-overlooked forms of women's agency in highly constrained contexts through an exploration of what love capacitates. Moreover, by locating love within notions of relationality, the article seeks to make a regional contribution to scholarship on kinship and selfhood in the Philippines (Aguilar 2013; Cruz 2020).

The fieldwork took place over five months, during which I worked with twelve women who accepted me into their homes, families, and day-to-day routines. Moreover, I spent many days at the bus terminal or the markets with some of the women, who spent most of their time there, working as vendors. In this article, I focus on the stories of women belonging to two different families: Rohanie and her daughter Jamila, and Hayati and her sister Sittie. Our conversations about their daily happenings, economic struggles, familial relationships, and pasts were in English. When needed, family members or one of my assistants would translate from the women's local language into English or Tagalog as we went along. Over time, I gained a composite image of the women's life trajectories, including their intimate and relational lives, complemented with recorded interviews with some of them. In addition, I met with various representatives from Muslim associations and public offices, and I frequently went to the mosques in the city and participated in religious celebrations and activities.

The following section offers a conceptualization of learning to love through perspectives on the structuring forces of love and marriage. After introducing the social and political context of

the women and their families in Palawan, I move on to the article's three analytical sections. The first returns to Rohanie's and Hayati's marriage stories, and how love is embedded in patriarchal forms of relationality. Second, I explore the moral and religious precepts of learning to love, which enable the women to cultivate selves and a particular kind of intimacy among themselves. The final analytical section examines the social and material stakes for the women of learning or failing in love. In conclusion, I contemplate how learning to love reflects how life and becoming is made possible within the women's inescapable and confining circumstances.

Conceptualizing Learning to Love

Following the ethnographic impetus of learning to love, this article seeks to engage with love as situated in the social and political realities marking the women's lives and intimate relationships. I propose that learning to love offers a lens on how the women learn to live and become as women within their relational worlds shaped by violent living circumstances, marginalization, and precarity.

Conceptualizing learning to love requires perspectives on love as a site of authority and governance, its intersections with relationality and religion, as well as its embeddedness in material conditions. Exploring love in liberal settler colonies, Elizar Povinelli (2006) argues that power and governance operate in and shape modes of love, intimacy, and sociality through a distributive process of social constraint and individual freedom. This outlook allows me to inquire into how violent forms of governance and domination wrought by colonial history sediment in not only notions of love but also the forms of sociality in which they are produced. Hence, I turn my gaze to the patriarchal structures in the interior of the family that set a normative framework for love. Burgeoning ethnographies on marriage and love in South Asia and the Arab world illustrate how familial and kin obligations are at work in arranged and love marriages and unsettle how these are often conceived as distinct categories (Allouche 2019; Maqsood 2021a, 2021b; Mody 2008). As Perveez Mody (2008) shows in the context of Delhi, "arranged-cum-love marriage" is the ideal because it affirms the norms stemming from religion, kinship, and community, while love marriages are considered a threat to established social hierarchies and authority. These perspectives raise the question of how love is interwoven in notions of social belonging, morality, kinship rules, and norms. Moreover, they raise the question of the extent to which a person's position as marginalized and excluded in the wider society reinforces norms of familial unity. As Suad Joseph aptly observes in the Lebanese context, the family constitutes the primary shield against the state through a "care/control paradigm" (2000, 109).

In many ways, this resembles the sociality in which learning to love is embedded in a Muslim Filipino context. Filipino scholars describe how kinship and the family is the base of authority and protection, and in turn produces its own set of obligations for its members to fulfill (Lara 2014; McCoy 1994; Roces 1998, 2000). The concept of family also includes complex and often close ties across generations, between siblings and kin beyond Western models of the nuclear family (Aguilar 2013; Bentley 1987; Cruz 2020; Jainal, Ruppert, and Spoehr 1971). Within these notions of family, I ask how patriarchal relationality engenders learning to love and the making of selves. Joseph (1999) challenges the Western celebration of individualization and autonomy as the basis of the self in her work on selving in Muslim societies. Joseph stresses how "persons feel part of significant others" and proposes the term "patriarchal connectivity," which denotes how becoming of self is inseparable from familial attachment (1999, 11). This understanding speaks to the discussion of kinship as a cultural product conceived as "mutuality of being" (Sahlins 2013, 28). Drawing on Janet Carsten's

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(2000, 2004) critical work, Marshall Sahlins suggests that "kinfolk are members of one another, intrinsic to each other's identity and existence" (2013, 62).[5]

These perspectives enable inquiry into how notions of love are anchored in the constitution of patriarchal forms of relationality and, thereby, oneself. In particular, I am interested in how expectations and struggles concerning marriage, love, and associated ideals of womanhood produce a certain interconnectedness among women in the family. Returning to Das's (2020) work on the transmission of culture, I suggest that the women's mutuality is central both to their ability to learn the norms of sociality but also to craft their own voice amid a patriarchal familial order. This is where religion and morality also inform the teachings of love, through which women constitute selves. The intersections of love, marriage, religious teachings, and gendered norms have been explored in majority Muslim countries (Elliot 2016; Kreil 2014; Mahmood 2001, 2005; Schielke 2009, 2015). Samuli Schielke (2015) suggests that love is formed by its coexistence with other concerns, such as women's respectability. Moreover, women's fulfillment of religious ideals is reflected in their roles in familial and kinship relationships, as argued by Saba Mahmood (2005). Mahmood stresses that the cultivation and enactment of socially authorized norms, such as virtue, devoutness, and subordination, enable the women to realize moral selves. Thus, we might ask how learning to love is tied to religious self-cultivation.

Finally, socioeconomic conditions and survival are vital aspects of family life and reflected in notions of love. Jennifer Cole and Lynn Thomas (2009) address the entanglements of money, attachment, and love in Africa, arguing that "what love means, how love is expressed, and what constitutes the purpose of marriage" are shaped by class and material circumstances (21). This attention allows us to consider how the material and economic dependency among family and kin is at stake in what love is. In the Philippine context, we see how familial attachment, intimacy, and survival connect and are sustained by and during overseas labor migration (Aguilar 2013; McKay 2007). Deirdre McKay (2007) argues that, commitment and affection toward kin at home is displayed through "sending dollars" as a practical act of love. In this account, migration for economic reasons as well as fleeing the war in Mindanao are central strategies of survival. Yet, what I draw from these perspectives is the co-constitution of intimate and affective relationships and the material and concrete survival of both the family and the self. It allows this study to ask how the women's living circumstances, which are profoundly precarious and characterized by material lack and marginalization, inform what love comes to be about.

At the Violent Periphery of Palawan

In Palawan, 10 percent of the population of one million is Muslim, representing diverse ethnic groups and geographical origins, with approximately 6,000 Muslims residing in Puerto Princesa.[6] Traditionally, the province has been a destination for Muslims originating from the neighboring Mindanao and Sulu regions, who settled in Palawan's southern municipalities and have lived there for generations (Eder 2010). Moreover, one of the ethnic-linguistic groups considered native to Palawan is Muslim.

The women and the families were part of the migration to Palawan from Mindanao, caused by the armed conflict that has played out over the past six decades. In the 1960s, the escalating political unrest, violence against the Muslim population, and continued dispossession of ancestral land triggered the armed insurgency of Muslim separatist groups against the Philippine state in Mindanao. Since then, the region has been characterized by lengthy periods of war combined with

repeated peace negotiations between different national governments and the dominant separatist organizations, while other militant Muslim groups have emerged and engaged the military. In 2019, a peace agreement was reached between the incumbent government and the now leading Muslim organization, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which replaced previous peace deals, but still has to show an impact on the continued high levels of violence in the region.

Besides the continuous instability severely straining the economy and the possibilities for livelihood in Mindanao (Ringuet 2002), the six decades of conflict have reinforced colonial imageries of the Muslim minority within the majority Christian society. The antagonistic portrayals of Muslims, and of Mindanao in general, in mainstream discourse can be traced back to the Spanish and subsequent American colonization, during which the unconquered Muslim South was depicted as uncivilized, unruly, and dangerous (see Abinales 2000; Lacar 1980).

The women stressed that they had moved to Palawan for reasons directly linked to the war in Mindanao. Besides the hazards of war, they emphasized the economic opportunities here and repeatedly explained that, in fact, a peaceful life was possible in Palawan. Despite its significant Muslim population and proximity to Mindanao, separatism has not gained ground in Palawan. Muslim identity was anchored in religious practice in the Islamic institutions and schools rather than the political claim of Muslim nationhood that underlies the armed resistance against the state in Mindanao. In Puerto Princesa, a conservative line of Sunni Islam was practiced, mirroring the orthodox developments in the Philippines over the last four decades that followed the general Islamic revival in the Arab world (Abubakar 2005). The mosques and madrassas in the province were largely funded by Islamic institutions in the Gulf countries, which also offered lengthy stays for religious education for the Muslim youth from Palawan.

Even though the women and their families had left Mindanao behind, the troubled relationship between the Muslim South and the Christian Philippines impinged on their lives in Palawan in particular ways. Hayati and her family lived in a barangay where her father, a merchant from Mindanao, had settled and established the first mosque in Puerto Princesa in the 1970s. As one of my assistants explained, it used to be a predominantly Muslim neighborhood with a small number of Christian inhabitants. However, several rounds of relocations had pushed the Muslims out from municipal lands, so they were now scattered around the city and beyond. The remaining Muslim residents were roughly three clans, including the clan of Hayati and Sittie, who had succeeded in buying the land decades ago from a prominent local landowner. The two women resided in a compound inherited from their father, with their children, mother, and four brothers, of whom three were married and had children. Thus, the original one-family house had been divided into small one-room households over the years, as the family expanded.

Rohanie and the rest of the Hatim family lived in a neighboring barangay, which was comprised of informal housing. Rohanie and her husband's household included their one daughter, Jamila, and Jamila's six children and one granddaughter. The family had lived here since they left Mindanao in 1976 because of the intensification of war in their area, which had already forced them to relocate locally several times. In this barangay, the homes of some 300 Muslim families had burned down during a major fire the previous year. The incident had become an excuse for the municipality to relocate the area's Muslim residents to an unlivable stretch of land outside the city that used to be a landfill. The Hatim family's house also burned down during this fire, but they did not want to move. As they explained, their already-limited opportunities for income would then disappear. Residing far outside the city without access to the sea would prevent them from fishing and working as street vendors. Not knowing when they would be forced to leave and lacking the means to rebuild the house,

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they had built a makeshift home of tarpaulins and planks, in which the kitchen area was the only part sufficiently secured from flooding when it rained.

Whether the fires were accidental or orchestrated, as argued in prior work on unwanted, poor communities in Manila (Ortega 2016), remained unanswered. Officially, the poorest of the neighborhoods' residents were blamed for using unsafe cooking methods. However, one municipal official frankly told me, "We keep trying to make them [Muslim families residing informally in the city] leave, but they continue to come back." Hence, the families were not only confined to the cramped area surrounding the mosque but were also at constant risk of being forced out of the city.

The women also struggled to get by. Even those holding college degrees lived off their day-to-day earnings, often caught in endless cycles of debt from microloan companies and acquaintances, which they used to maintain their livelihood. Most of the families had small businesses at the local markets, from repairing cell phones to selling socks, Chinese plastic toys, homemade food, and everything in between. The women who had managed to get a trade license paid extortionate tariffs for a stall. Simultaneously, they depended on the buying power of mainly Palawan's poor or lower middle-class population, which made their income ever more unstable and placed them at the bottom of the increasingly tourism-based economy of Palawan. Hayati and her sister were in the unusual situation of employment at a souvenir shop owned by a prominent Muslim woman. Rohanie and her entire family worked together to produce pearl jewelry and ready-to-eat food to sell around the city.

After fleeing the war in Mindanao, the everyday struggle for survival continued in Palawan, where violence takes a structural form involving confinement to a highly insecure place in the informal labor market and to unsafe living areas in the city, where fires repeatedly erupt.[7] As Muslim migrants or de facto internally displaced persons, the women's lives are marked by social, economic, and political exclusion, constantly poising the families on the edge of expulsion from the city and implosion in the family. It is within these wider contours of the women's lives that I explore how the notion of learning to love is entangled into the women's survival and making of families and selves.

The Patriarchal Relationality of Love

Among the Hatim women, Rohanie's marriage story seemed to be both a delicate and a thrilling family story. I had noticed Rohanie's obvious discomfort talking about her abduction, whereas Jamila was eager to share the story of her mother. After my visit where Jamila had revealed the circumstances preceding her parents' marriage, I hesitantly brought it up during a subsequent meeting. Following a long conversation about the hazards surrounding their life in Mindanao, which led to their migration to Palawan, I turned to Rohanie: "Also, last time I think, you told me about how you got married to—" Jamila instantly burst out, "Kidnapped!" She waited for her mother to elaborate. While Rohanie recalled the circumstances leading to her marriage some fifty years ago, Jamila and her daughter Yasmin constantly interjected details into what appeared to be a family narrative.

Rohanie's husband, a friend of her brother, had visited her family in Luzon, in the north of the country. After having been "welcomed" to the family's home by Rohanie, he asked her parents for permission to marry her. Rohanie explained, "It was up to me if I wanted to [marry him]. I didn't." The following week, she was supposed to travel to Manila by boat. The husband had "kept an eye on" her, Rohanie continued, before he brought her on board a ship going to Zamboanga, in the southwestern Mindanao, where he lived. Rohanie teared up and recounted that the travel took three days, and that all she did on board the ship was cry. Her husband tried to calm her, saying that "he wouldn't

kill me. He would just make me his wife." Slightly puzzled, I asked if she had feared being killed. Rohanie exclaimed, "Yes. He might kill me and throw me in the sea!" Yasmin looked at me, seemingly trying to figure out why I did not follow the logic in Rohanie's story, after I asked, "Because you had refused him?" Yasmin repeated, "She was scared." Rohanie elaborated, "Of course, he is Muslim!" Upon arrival in Mindanao, Rohanie learned that her husband was already married. Yet, she did not see any other resort but to accept conversion to Islam and marriage: "I didn't have any family. I just agreed and converted." Jamila summed up: "No choice, because no family. That's why she needed to convert." Rohanie noted that she would never be able to return home and see her family again unless she had accepted the marriage. Meanwhile, she added, her parents had blamed her for marrying a Muslim. Nine years passed before she had the opportunity to see her family again. I asked Rohanie how she came to accept her conjugal situation, to which she answered, "Because I became a mother. Because of my children, I eventually learned to love him."

Being taken away from her family, fearing for her life, and being brought to the conflict-ridden south was an experience that Rohanie recalled with sadness and distress, explaining her feelings by saying, "The story is sentimental." She repeatedly coupled the sorrow that she had felt with the separation from and loss of her own family, which also appeared to be what caused her tears fifty years later, as she recounted the story.

Rohanie's story marks the weaving of political conflict and violence into the intimate experiences of marriage, the establishment of family, and the conflicting feelings and experiences that learning to love involves. Rohanie's fear of getting killed because her abductor was Muslim mirrors the dominant depictions of the Muslim minority as dangerous and a threat in majority Philippine society, where she had lived up to this point. While kidnapping in the Philippine context is associated with Muslim banditry and often linked to a history of slave raiding in the region (Mallari 1986; Warren 1981), in this story, as Rohanie notes, it was not political but a marriage practice. In Tausug society—the ethnic-linguistic group of Rohanie's husband—abduction is traditionally recognized as a process leading to marriage, which accommodates the husband's desire (Kiefer 1974). Rohanie's story, I suggest, illustrates how the marriage is established as patriarchal, leaving Rohanie with no other option but to accept. Yet, her story also comes to be a "sentimental" story about how love toward her husband evolved through the family they raised. As Cannell (1999) argues, learning to love is a way of negotiating power in the relationship between wife and husband that is enabled by the woman's submission to the will of others. Moreover, intimacy and affection between the couple may grow out of having children (Cannell 1999). Thus, I argue, love is produced not in the relationship between Rohanie and her husband but in the process of becoming a family, through which Rohanie's social position is configured into motherhood. Furthermore, as Jamila noted, the possibility of choice rests in having a family. While marriage is not a site of choice, we may understand that there is an active process of learning to love her husband, allowing Rohanie to rework her marital relationship and claim a social place within the family.

Similarly, Hayati told a story of struggling with marriage and love, which was experienced through its closeness to violence. Her natal family was a determining force in her marriages, and at the age of thirty-two, she had suffered the disgrace of two divorces, leaving her as a single mother with six children.

Hayati's parents had arranged the first marriage in 2006 with a second cousin who lived in the capital region. Hayati was his third wife; the husband was addicted to alcohol, and after two years, their marriage ended. During a later conversation, Hayati explained that the husband had physically

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abused her "every time he was drunk," noting, "I lived a very hard life." She added that, according to Islam, this was a valid reason for divorce.

A year later, Hayati was married in absentia. At a later occasion, the two sisters were teaching me about the role of a *wali* (a woman's guardian) as the one to negotiate and approve a marriage among the Maranao—their ethnic-linguistic group—when Hayati brought up the circumstances around her second marriage. While she was living with her sister in Mindanao, their parents had set up her marriage with an acquaintance in Manila. Hayati said, "It's like what happened at my last wedding. My last husband came to meet my parents and give the dowry. He brought his family and said, 'I want to get married with your daughter,' while I was not present at that time." After the family held the wedding ceremony, Hayati continued, she received a phone call from her parents. They had bought her a plane ticket and ordered her to fly to Manila on the same day because she was now married. Her husband was waiting for her at the airport. When Hayati arrived, Sittie explained, "That was the time he held her hand; then, they were already husband and wife." Hayati summed up: "That's why it [the marriage] was validated, because my wali was present. Even though I was not."

Narrating the story, the two sisters complemented each other, and Sittie made it clear that they had opposed the decision. She interrupted Hayati and said, "Even though she didn't like to… . She didn't agree yet. Me neither … I told her not to go home." On the other hand, Hayati stated that it would have been pointless to object to her family's decision. As she reflected, "Maybe because of shock or something and no choice already," Hayati did what she was told. Slowly, she adjusted to her new marital situation with a husband who, compared to the first husband, Hayati reckoned, after all was better: "He loved me; if [it was] just love, he really loved me."

Rohanie and Hayati's stories demonstrate how the wider relationality of the family structured by male authority becomes a site of love. As Hayati's marriage experiences illustrate, while she abides by the kinship rules reflected in her parents' decision, her sister articulates and asserts opposition on her behalf by encouraging her "not to go home." In Hayati's words, however, that was not an option, and the marriage became acceptable as she found that her new conjugal life had improved, because her husband "really loved her." Learning here is inscribed in Hayati's process of adjustment, which entails opposition but also acceptance and, ultimately, the potential of love. For Rohanie, love emerges from making family that allows her a socially recognized position within the family. Joseph's (1999) concept of patriarchal connectivity here becomes relevant to capture how patriarchal family structures set the framework for love as a process of learning. Joseph highlights how familial connectivity, under the authority of males and elders, demands "the involvement of others in shaping their emotions, desires, attitudes and identities" (1999, 122). Drawing on this understanding, Hayati's and Rohanie's accounts offer insights into how learning to love is an aspect of the patriarchal relationality of family that enables the women to claim a place and rewrite their marital faiths dictated by kinship rules into family-making. Hence, learning to love comes to be about acceptance and submitting to the family and patriarchal rules but is also a means to familial attachment. While love rests on patriarchal forms of relationality, it is pedagogically inscribed into the relationships between women and forms part of making family narratives, cultivating matrilineal closeness and moral and religious selves, as analyzed below.

Women's Teachings of Love

As presented above, Rohanie's story was co-narrated among the three generations of women in the Hatim family, with Jamila and Yasmin taking an active part in piecing together the emotions

and events that Rohanie had experienced. As Rohanie cried while concluding her story about her marriage, noting that it was "sentimental," Jamila laughed and ironically interjected that "*Ina* [Tagalog for "mother"] is like me, reminiscing about the past." Indeed, Jamila lamented her own marriage, which I will return to in the following section.

Similarly, Sittie's and Hayati's respective experiences of their marriages appeared familiar to the other, allowing them to tell the story of the other as if it were their own. Moreover, the two sisters connected their experiences to that of their mother. Recounting the story of her first marriage, Hayati noted that "our mother knows our feelings" because she too had struggled to learn to love (and succeeded) after being married to their father at a young age without her consent. She exclaimed, "*Alhamdulillah* [Praise Allah], we have her, as her children."

A particular intimacy between the women in the two families emerges around their marriages, echoing Joseph's suggestion that, in close family relationships, persons may have relatively unbounded selves that make them feel part of one another (1999). Jamila observes her and her mother's alikeness by mentioning how they "reminisce about the past," recognizing Rohanie's feelings of grief and fear. As such, Rohanie's story comes to serve as a reference point that merges with Jamila's experiences of marriage and takes shape as a family narrative, one in which the struggle of coming to love is articulated, taught, and passed on among women in the family. This exposes a kind of intertwinement of the women's subjectivity, which resonates with Sahlins's (2013) description of mutuality of being as how kin members participate in each other's existence, suffering, and feelings constituting a relational and composite "I". Amid patriarchal forms of relationality, I suggest, this co-narration of marriage experiences among women family members in which learning to love takes place forms part of creating and nurturing matrilineal ties that provide closeness, solidarity, and support. As exemplified above by how Sittie encouraged Hayati not to go home, it may also be within this matrilineal closeness that the potential of opposition to familial domination exists and can be envisioned. Das (2020) argues that part of growing into one's culture as a self is the ability to craft a voice to speak back to the rules and norms within that culture. Learning to love, I propose, reflects how the women's familial relationships and storytelling are shaped by patriarchal forms of relationality, creating togetherness, which enables a collective agency that carries resistance to familial dominance of males and elders.

Notions of morality and religiosity were also nested in learning to love. As Hayati and Sittie agreed, their marriages had been "tests in faith," a test of how to learn to love their husbands.

The centrality of marriage and love to fulfill religious devotion was particularly apparent during *Taalem*, Quran readings and interpretations exclusively for women. Hayati and Sittie attended Taalem every Friday, often with their mother and other female relatives. They soon invited me to accompany them to the mosque to witness their practice and out of concern, as they repeatedly expressed, for my own contemplation about conversion to Islam. Hayati would often be the one to recite the chosen verses of an English version of the Quran because, as Sittie noted, she was able to translate into Tagalog while reading along. After the recitation, the women interpreted and discussed how the prescriptions should be followed in everyday life. After one of these sessions, the two sisters and I talked about the dilemmas of reconciling faithfulness to Allah with what Hayati and Sittie called worldly affairs, such as desires and pride. To Hayati, this dilemma was particularly prevalent in relation to marriage. Talking about her many admirers and the prospect of remarrying, Hayati was conflicted: "I do not want to be touched again by a man. It is like having a phobia of marriage. I am free now. I can do what I want in an Islamic way, the halal way." Yet, having a husband, Hayati explained, is a divine requisite to secure the afterlife. Echoing a general theme at the Taalem,

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Hayati pointed out that the way to paradise is easy for women, clarifying that it only takes four things: "showing obedience to their husband, doing prayers at the right time, fasting, and guarding chastity and modesty." Speaking on behalf of both sisters, Hayati concluded, "If Allah will give us a man who is very responsible and has strong faith, then maybe we will [remarry]." She added that Sittie's deceased husband was one such "very faithful" man, and she had even had the good fortune to experience a love marriage.

Relating the story about her first husband, Hayati, who otherwise came across as assertive and proud, was clearly ashamed. Hayati suffered "a very hard life" because of not only the husband's abuse and alcohol addiction but also her dishonoring of God by getting a divorce due to her husband's behavior. As she stated, "It is better to be a widow than a divorcee. That would have been Allah's plan." Hayati's reasoning that learning to love her husband is a test of her religious devoutness illustrates how her very relationship with God was at stake by being married to a man whom she had failed to love; although, simultaneously, divorce was justified in the eyes of God because her husband had abused her.

The above shows how teachings on love are folded into the women's intimate sharing of their marital lives, through which they co-create a narrative of who they are as a family and as women. Knowing each other's feelings and struggles within the mother-daughter-sister relationships in the two families provides closeness and a sense of mutuality, as reflected in Hayati's reference to her mother's experiences. Similarly, Jamila comes to understand her marriage through the way she feels and participates in her mother's story. Comparing the inheritance of culture to theft, Das (2020) describes how the child takes parts of her culture, its norms, rules, and language, and uses them to reach different answers than those of her elders. Learning and growing into one's culture, I argue, unfolds in the way the experiences of mothers are taken by their daughters as teachings on what they can expect of marriage and family, allowing them to understand their own marital struggles. Within this process, I suggest, patriarchal forms of relationality are pedagogically inscribed into learning to love, which becomes part of learning how to inhabit their social worlds and is in itself part of the women's work of making these social worlds inhabitable for themselves. Mutuality among the women thus involves "theft" of marriage stories by others but also support and solidarity that allows for contestations of norms and dominance, as Sittie's and Hayati's sisterhood exemplifies. That is the case because the elderly women "know their feelings."

However, this learning is anything but straightforward and brings about conflicting feelings and dilemmas, as reflected in the women's religious aspirations and self-cultivation: marriage and loving husbands are key to the women's aim of living fully in accordance with religious ideals. In this way, the impossibility of loving her husband and "having marriage phobia" come with high moral stakes because, as Hayati asserts, eligibility for paradise requires having a husband to obey. As Mahmood (2005) argues, norms provide the ground for making selves and are lived, inhabited, and aspired to in ways that relations of authority and subordination produce and make possible. While following Mahmood's critique of liberal feminist notions of agency as centered on the potential for emancipation and resistance to patriarchy, I propose that these women's stories show how the capacity to realize selves is nested in the sociality among women and religious self-cultivation, which enables a way of negotiating patriarchal rules. Finding herself free within the boundaries of religious prescriptions as unmarried, Hayati both challenges and obeys norms, allowing her—in Das's words—to be in "agreement with a particular form of life" (2020, 177) but to respond to it in her own fashion. This way of becoming as oneself, I argue, is secured by other women, who pass on the expectations of marriage and love but also make learning to love a way to fulfill a religiously devoted self.

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Against the structures of violence, conflict, and poverty surrounding the women's lives, learning to love—and the patriarchal familial relationality in which it is produced—may also enable togetherness, care, and protection, as the final analytical section argues.

Love as Survival

The women's stories of marriages, and of learning love, are also about surviving the external forms of violence, marginalization, and precarious living circumstances in the context of the political conflict between Muslim minorities and the Philippine state.

To Rohanie and her family, continuous displacements, constant precariousness, and the prospects of income had made them leave Mindanao. After martial law was declared in 1972, they had faced extortion and holdups by armed groups and bombings of their neighborhood. At that time, Jamila and her sister were adolescents, and their parents feared that they would be kidnapped. Rohanie's husband, who worked as a fisherman at the time, started searching for a "peaceful" place where they could settle, which became Palawan. Yet, while leaving the armed conflict behind, the precariousness of everyday life and the struggle to sustain the family traveled along with them.

Particularly to Jamila, the change of scenery did not bring about a peaceful life. Her father arranged her marriage while she was working overseas. The husband turned out to be abusive and unable to care for the family. Jamila was the primary breadwinner in their household, which eventually included their six children. Over the twelve years of their marriage, violence increased, and their economic situation worsened. After a particularly critical incident of violence, Jamila's eldest daughters told her to divorce their father. Subsequently, Jamila moved back in with her parents, where she also contributed to cover their expenses.

When I first started visiting the family, Jamila's oldest daughter, Noraisa, had also recently returned to the family's home. Noraisa's husband had abandoned her for another woman after eight months of marriage and a month before she was to give birth to their first child. As Noraisa was still in mourning (and clearly ashamed) and recovering from giving birth, Rohanie took care of her newborn daughter most of the time. "I am so hurt," Noraisa sorrowfully remarked after her mother had filled me in on her unsuccessful marriage. Now, having to provide for the entire family, Jamila did not see any other option but to take a job as a housemaid for her brother in Manila. She was devastated because she did not want to leave her children.

Rohanie's story illustrates how staying together with and ultimately loving her husband secures a foundation for the survival of the family as a whole—facilitating escape from war, managing material necessities, and later providing a place for her daughter and granddaughter when their marriages failed. Moreover, insisting on love, to Rohanie, provides a basis for realizing a self as a woman whose loyalty to her husband and commitment to the family cannot be doubted. During an earlier conversation, in which Rohanie's daughter and granddaughter had recounted their marital grievances, Rohanie proudly announced how she was the only wife who had managed to stay with her husband. He had also separated from the fourth wife who had followed Rohanie. In this way, Rohanie's suffering in relation to the initial circumstances around her marriage had been transformed into pride about remaining with her husband.

Congruently, for Jamila and Hayati, failing in love added to their precarious living circumstances. To her regret, Hayati's second marriage did not last either. After four years and four children, the second husband suddenly abandoned her. Hayati explained:

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> He just walked away and said to the neighbors, "I leave! I divorce my wife!" That's it! Then, after four months, he wanted to come back… . I said, "Since you went away, it's final. You can't come back here. I won't accept you again. It's your choice!" … If he hadn't left me, maybe until now, he'd be my husband… . I wouldn't ask for divorce, but he did. I accepted, since I didn't like him at first anyway. (Interview, 2018).

After her separation, Hayati returned to Palawan with her six children and lived in the family house with her siblings, their spouses, and their children. As the only one among her siblings who was divorced, Hayati was responsible for her widowed mother and older brother with mental and physical impairment, who were part of her household. Her sister, on the other hand, who enjoyed the more honorable position of a widow—according to Hayati—lived alone in the room next door with only three dependents. The economic deprivation of the family also meant that Hayati and Sittie, as single breadwinners, worked at least twelve hours every day of the week, except for the half day during which they attended Taalem. Working as a salesperson, Hayati earned 200 pesos (approximately four dollars) a day, plus the "incentive" made up of 1 percent of her sales.

Hayati's story demonstrates how not succeeding in marriage and love reinforces material lack, economic struggles, and familial dependency, brought about by the external pressures characterizing life for Muslims in this context. While the family provides an increasingly cramped and inadequate place to reside, the responsibility to care for additional dependents falls on Hayati and further tightens the constraints around her.

Rohanie's story of staying with her husband as well as the accounts of Jamila's, Noraisa's, and Hayati's unsuccessful marriages reflect how learning to love involves surviving in material and social terms under the confining circumstances that characterize the women's lives. Elizabeth Povinelli (2006) points out that colonial traces of domination, exclusion, and discipline are inscribed in the shaping of intimate relationships and how love is figured. The violences and effects of the political conflict follow the women and their families to Palawan and transform into ever-pressing and deteriorating conditions, leaving them with no choice but to subsume into the family to have a social place and to get by. Thus, love is not only braided into concerns about women's religious moral standing, as Samuli Schielke (2015) argues, but also has concrete material repercussions. As Cole and Thomas (2009) suggest, "social inequalities" tie love to material exchange. In this regard, I suggest that familial togetherness, dependency, and protection are nested in what love is about. This is highlighted by Rohanie's pride in sticking with her husband and proving her familial commitment, as well as by Hayati's emphasis that she would have stayed married if it were not for the humiliation that she had suffered when her husband left her. Thus, for Rohanie, succeeding in love secures social and material survival, not only for her but for the entire family. On the other hand, Hayati's divorces intensified the burdens of living on the violent margins.

Conclusion

In this account, my aim has been to illustrate how the notion of learning to love alludes to the work that goes into learning to live for women in a context wrought by political conflict, precarity, and marginalization. Within constraining and violent external forces, which the women have limited power to influence or resist, learning to live is an active process through which the women grow into but also build sociality. Learning to love, I argue, captures the women's agency through which they make male authority, kinship, and gendered norms inhabitable for themselves, allowing them

to craft a life and selves. I propose that love comes to be perceived, felt, and experienced through notions of relationality, familial and religious devotion and ideals, and social and material survival.

This article offers a perspective on how love—as more than emotion—is a capacity that centers on commitment, family-making, and self-cultivation. Adding to Mahmood's (2005) critique of the liberal feminist concept of agency as an individualist and emancipatory project, I suggest that a collective form of agency is revealed in the intersubjectivity or mutuality among women (Sahlins 2013). This kind of agency is not about freeing oneself from patriarchy but about claiming a place and a voice within it. Literature on kinship in the Philippines has illuminated how personhood emerges through complex familial relationships that involve material and affective commitments and tensions as well as learning familial practices, norms, and the signification of kinship ties (Aguilar 2013; Cruz 2020; McKay 2007). This account adds to this scholarship by illustrating how love rests in the wider familial attachments rather than in the relationship with a husband and is intrinsic to the making of relationally embedded selves. In other words, love comes to be about acceptance of patriarchal authority, togetherness, and lasting familial unity. However, the processual aspect of learning to love takes place through the relationships between mothers, sisters, and daughters, whose struggles of marriage constitute teachings on who they are as a family and as women. Knowing and recognizing each other's feelings and experiences of marriage, women find intimacy in these matrilineal ties, in which familial rules and dominance can be challenged without the risk of exclusion. That is, it is through other women that learning to love husbands and succeeding in marriage becomes a means to religious and moral self-cultivation. In the broader context of the women's lives, learning to love is tied to what it takes to survive in social and material terms. The enduring precarity and material shortage requires the women to subsume into family and take care of their elders besides their children, which allows them not only a place to live but also a socially respected place. Failing in love, on the other hand, jeopardizes the women's moral righteousness and material conditions and reinforces both economic deprivation and the mutual dependency of the women and the family.

In the present context, love is not romance based on desire, attraction, and freedom to choose a partner but is cultivated by women amid patriarchal forces, poverty, and violence. As the women's marriage stories illustrate, this learning is filled with tension and conflicting feelings. In this way, I argue, learning to love focuses attention on the efforts, desires, and struggles that the women put into dealing with their living circumstances and marital faiths. Insisting on love allows the women to be agents within their social worlds as moral and committed selves in relation to family and God. This, however, is not to conclude that the Hatim women, Hayati, and Sittie did not picture romantic love, freedom, and choice. Indeed, they did. As Hayati said about her own divorced status, it came with freedom, as long as she lived in a "halal way." She also envied her sister's luck to have experienced marriage born out of love. However, they also knew that love understood through such ideals is unlikely in their lived lives and, more importantly, would be hardly reconcilable with the norms that dominate their familial relationships and their everyday struggles to meet their material needs. Learning to love becomes part the women's reworking of their forceful and violent lived realities, making it possible for them to survive, claim sociality, and make their own selves.

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ENDNOTES

1 The smallest administrative unit under the Philippine state.
2 The women presented in this account have been anonymized.
3 As Margaret Trawick (1990) shows in her classic work on love in a South Indian Tamil family, the concept of love may be a force inscribed into the relationships in the family as a way of life, and as a way of fulfilling one's role in the family, that nonetheless carries ambiguity.
4 Analyzing the marriage stories of middle-class women in Pakistan, Ayesha Khurshid (2020, 5) usefully stresses how the construct of Muslim women "as victims of patriarchal Islam" in Western imaginary is shaped by an overemphasis on the constraints of marriage practices (see also Abu-Lughod 2002, 2013). Meanwhile, the restrictions on women arising from living in contexts of insecurity, poverty, structural inequality, and conflict remain in the background (Khurshid 2020).
5 The kind of intertwined subjectivity we might see reflected in "*mahal kita*," the Tagalog equivalent to "I love you." The pronoun "*kita*" encompasses both subject and object, making a "we" who love one another.
6 Philippine Statistics Authority 2017.
7 At the time of writing, yet another fire had recently destroyed the houses of eighty families.

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