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Caregivers Need Care, Too: Conceptualising Spiritual Care for Migrant Caregivers-Transnational Mothers

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Abstract: Growing research revolving around the plight of (Philippine) migrant domestic workers is noteworthy. However, the focus is largely on their role, capacity and identity as caregivers, meaning as labour migrants and transnational mothers engaged in both paid and unpaid care work. Building on the "care circulation" framework of Baldassar and Merla that conceptualises care as given and received in varying degrees by all family members across time and distance, this paper takes up the task of recognising migrant domestic workers as care receivers. In a particular way, this paper conceptualises care for migrant caregivers-transnational mothers that is based on a qualitative empirical study on the lived realities of Philippine migrant workers, who are also transnational mothers. An analysis of the participants' narratives using the constructivist grounded theory approach reveals that their experience of God's presence is central to how they navigate transnational mothering as labour migrants. This paper then proposes that their faith stories, significant as they are, be taken as a resource in providing them with spiritual care that takes their concerns into account.

Keywords: transnational mothers; spiritual care; spiritual support; faith lives; migrant caregivers; migrant advocates; overseas Filipino workers (OFWs); domestic workers; Christianity; spiritual journey; spirituality; care work

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1. Introduction

On 16 June 2021, human rights advocates celebrated the 10th year since the adoption of an international treaty that seeks to ensure the protection of workers in the domestic sphere. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 189, also known as the Domestic Workers Convention 2011, in its preamble, enumerated the "significant contribution of domestic workers to the global economy", such as allowing women and men with family responsibilities to join the workforce, providing care for ageing populations, children and persons with a disability and stimulating the economy through remittances (International Labour Organization 2011). Despite the important role domestic workers play in families, societies and nations, Convention 189 recognises that their work remains undervalued. Furthermore, elements that lead to injustices and inequalities pervade the kind of work that they perform and the conditions of their employment, namely its invisibility and the fact that it is performed mostly by women and girls, who can be vulnerable because of their status as migrants and their membership of disadvantaged communities. Through this treaty, there is hope that the political engagement of nation-states can improve the plight of domestic workers. Unfortunately, to this day, many countries have not yet ratified the said convention (European Alliance Calls on EU Governments to Implement Convention on Domestic Workers n.d.; Countries That Have Not Ratified This Convention n.d.).

Clearly, much is still required to persuade individuals and states to duly recognise and value domestic work as well as to uphold domestic workers' human rights. The academic community's growing concern for domestic workers is noteworthy. With more research across different disciplines into the complex realities faced by domestic workers, greater awareness of how to support them can be fostered. For example, some recent works include

investigating domestic work from a European perspective (Lutz 2016), treating the subject using a decolonial approach (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2010), creating a global historical account of domestic and caregiving workers (Hoerder et al. 2015), exploring domestic worker capacity development (Loh and Estrellado 2019), validating instruments for detecting common mental disorders among Philippine domestic workers (Garabiles et al. 2020) and understanding how laws and the absence thereof shape domestic workers' experience (Hidalgo 2018; Mullally 2017; Neetha and Palriwala 2011; Dinkelman and Ranchhod 2012; Paul and Neo 2018; Peng 2019; Parreñas and Silvey 2017; Moon 2012; Yeoh et al. 2020).

A valuable and interesting theme taken up by scholars who investigate the experiences of migrant caregivers is family life (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Asis et al. 2004; Parreñas 2005a, 2005b; Baldassar and Merla 2015; Kilkey and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2016; Kontos and Bonifacio 2016) and rightly so, given that most domestic workers are women with families, from whom they are separated in the course of their employment. Mothers who are spatially and temporally separated from their children, due to labour migration, implement arrangements to allow them to mother from afar, resulting in transnational mothering (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Scholars have been researching how women navigate transnational mothering, specifically by investigating their practices. They have identified the role information and communications technologies (ICTs) play in how transnational families maintain their presence and interaction with each other across borders (Francisco-Menchavez 2018; Madianou and Miller 2013; Madianou 2012; Uy-Tioco 2007; Oliveira 2019; Baldassar 2016). Another strategy employed by transnational mothers is to cooperate with their left-behind children's caregivers (Peng and Wong 2016). Particularly among Philippine migrants, a practice performed to manifest intimacy is the sending of boxes filled with gifts and goods to migrant workers' families back at home (Camposano 2012, 2017).

Most of the existing research on domestic workers focuses on their role as caregivers, who, for a confluence of reasons, find themselves in paid care work abroad and therefore perform distant care as transnational mothers. Considering the concept of "care circulation", which defines care as something given to and received from family members throughout their lives and across spaces (Baldassar and Merla 2015; Merla and Baldassar 2016), it is important to shift the lens and simultaneously view migrant workers who are transnational mothers as care receivers as well. In this paper, we look at them as in need of care not at a later point in their lives, when they grow old and retire, but now, as they perform multiple care responsibilities.

An area to explore in conceiving care for migrant care workers and transnational mothers is spirituality. It is constructive to consider migrant care workers' faith as a resource in conceptualising care for them given that the role of faith and religion has already been established in the way in which migrants make sense of their migration experiences and cope with the challenges that come with them (Bastide 2015; Visser et al. 2015; Lusk et al. 2021; Dorais 2007; Cruz 2006; Ballaret and Lanada 2021). Furthermore, previous research reports that spirituality plays a role in fostering resilience among trauma survivors (Peres et al. 2007), adolescents (Kim and Esquivel 2011), post-graduate university students (Gnanaprakash 2013), orphans (Fernando and Ferrari 2011) and women during the COVID-19 crisis (Roberto et al. 2020), to name a few examples. Taking these into account, spiritual care is posited in this paper as an important component to include and develop in discourses concerning care work.

This work is a feminist practical theological (Mercer 2014) project that seeks to respond to the idea of recognising caregivers as care receivers, too. First, it pays attention to the experiences of women caregivers, who are also transnational mothers, in order to acknowledge women's suffering and promote their flourishing. Second, it seeks to contribute to the existing understanding of spirituality by considering the lived realities of transnational mothers. Lastly, this paper explores how the church can be of support to this population, particularly the more vulnerable of them. I shall first present how the participants' accounts of experiencing God's presence show the centrality of faith in their lives as migrant

care workers and transnational mothers, establishing the value of faith narratives. As a second step, I shall report some key concepts that represent the participants' concerns and underpin their spirituality, based on an analysis of data on the kind of support they hope to receive from the church and other migrant groups. Lastly, I shall discuss my proposal for spiritual care grounded in the experience of the participants.

2. Materials and Methods

This article is based on a research project that employs a constructivist grounded theory method, which seeks to construct or generate conceptual frameworks or theories from data inductively by performing levels of coding that involve constant comparative analysis (Creswell 2014; Bryant and Charmaz 2007).

The key participants are Philippine migrant mothers who have been separated from their children who were aged 0–18 when they left the Philippines for a job in another country. They work in Kuwait, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Italy. All have experience in care work, either direct care, indirect care, or both (Addati et al. 2018). Most of them are domestic workers who stay in their employers' residences round the clock. In Italy, there is a possibility for domestic workers to live in their own apartments outside work hours, which is the case for the participants in this study. Participants in Taiwan have all worked in the care sector as caretakers, a job description that refers to performing domestic chores and caregiving duties. At the time of the interview, two participants in Taiwan had lost their jobs and were staying in a shelter for migrants. A few participants in Kuwait, who had been domestic workers before, were now working in other fields, such as sales and marketing, services and education. They are all living in cities in the receiving countries. The participants are aged between 30 and 57. Seven of them are married, and the majority are single mothers, meaning never married, separated, or widowed. They each have between one and eight children, with three being the average. All of them have experienced living away from their children, with almost all being separated from their children and families at the time of the interview. Two participants in Italy had reunited with their families. In the other three countries, family reunification is not possible for the research participants as they do not have the right to sponsor dependents to come to the country of migration (Parreñas 2021; Constable 2017; Lan 2006). Two of the participants in Kuwait have started new families there, but they each have a child from a previous relationship who is left in the Philippines. They have been working overseas for 5 to 27 years, with varied educational backgrounds. One has finished basic education; two have received a year or two of secondary education; six have completed secondary education; eleven are college undergraduates; six are college graduates; and one has attended graduate school but has not completed her programme.

Most of the participants self-identify as Christians, with the majority being Roman Catholics, and a few belonging to other Christian denominations. While all prospective participants were informed that the project explores the role of Christianity in transnational mothering, there were a few non-Christians who participated. They were previously Christians but have become *balik-Islam* or Muslim converts/reverts (Lacar 2001) in Kuwait. A participant in Hong Kong was baptised Catholic but no longer practised any religion at the time of the interview. Although the design of the study targets participants who self-identify as Christians and practise Christianity, it is helpful to have participants who were previously Christians. They reflect the development or evolution of people's experience and understanding of religion and spirituality, which has come about in the context of migration (Constable 2010).

The four countries are selected as they are common destinations for Philippine labour migrants, and personal contacts in these countries have responded to requests to assist in recruitment. A few migrant advocates—people who are working in organisations that support migrants in the aforementioned countries—have also taken part in this project. A total of 27 labour migrants-transnational mothers and five migrant advocates have been recruited. Calls for participants were published on Facebook groups for Philippine migrants

in the four countries, and personal contacts helped spread the word about the project within their networks. In Taiwan, the major gatekeeper was a priest who ran a migrant shelter in the city of Taichung, while another personal contact communicated information about the study to the Philippine women in her group. In Hong Kong, recruiting began with a personal contact's response and progressed through the process of snowballing, in which existing study participants referred the researcher to others. The search for participants in Hong Kong was also assisted by a Christian priest migrant advocate. The first group of participant migrant mothers in Kuwait were churchgoers in a Philippine Catholic church, which announced the call for participants in their Eucharistic celebrations. One participant from this set of churchgoers extended the invitation to her connections. The second group of participants comprised migrant mothers who volunteer with a migrant advocacy group. In Italy, leaders of Philippine migrant organisations assisted in recruitment. All participants received a participant information letter and filled in an online consent form through Qualtrics, a web-based application.

In populations that cannot be easily accessed, snowball sampling is an effective recruitment strategy (Atkinson and Flint 2001). It helps that referrals are made by people whom prospective participants trust. By helping find more people to take part in the study, research participants also serve as research assistants to some extent (Atkinson and Flint 2001). However, one possible outcome of snowball sampling is selection bias, which does not permit generality of findings (Atkinson and Flint 2001). Although this study does not aim to make broad generalisations, selection bias is avoided by contacting various gatekeepers in each of the four nations to target different populations. Recruitment ended upon reaching the point of theoretical saturation in data analysis, which scholars argue to be the right indicator for determining appropriate sample size (Dworkin 2012; Mason 2010). Theoretical saturation is reached when gathering more data about the emerging grounded theory no longer results in new insights or properties of theoretical categories (Bryant and Charmaz 2007).

I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews from October 2020 to October 2021 to gather data from the participants on their personal experience of transnational mothering, particularly with regard to their spirituality and familial relations. This interviewing method suits this project where the intention is "(1) to collect qualitative, open-ended data; (2) to explore participant thoughts, feelings and beliefs about a particular topic; and (3) to delve deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues" (DeJonckheere and Vaughn 2019, pp. 2–3). Interviews were held in Filipino, a language comfortably spoken by all participants. In this article, I have translated all quotations from Filipino to English. Interviews took an hour to an hour and a half and were performed over videoconferencing applications, such as Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp. Ten of the twenty-seven transnational mother participants were interviewed again for 45 min to an hour. Everyone was invited to a second interview, but only 10 made themselves available. A photo elicitation technique (Glaw et al. 2017; Harper 2002) was used in the second session to facilitate participants' sharing of their spiritual experiences. I transcribed the interviews verbatim from the sound recordings and pseudonymised the transcripts. Two main phases of grounded theory coding were performed, namely initial coding and focused coding using NVivo, a piece of qualitative data analysis computer software. An independent researcher conducted a separate initial coding of some interviews to triangulate data (Guion 2002). The codes generated by the independent researcher are all similar to the codes of the primary researcher. Investigator triangulation and member-checking with a group of migrant mothers in Kuwait are conducted to ensure resonance and analytic rigour (Charmaz 2014). The institutional review board of KU Leuven has granted this project approval with reference number G-2020-2238. The results reported in this paper are common themes that represent the data gathered from all four locations.

3. Sensitising Concepts: Spirituality, Care and Transnationalism

In this section, I shall discuss three sensitising concepts which frame my subsequent analysis of data (Bowen 2006), in view of conceptualising spiritual support for migrant

caregivers and transnational mothers; namely, spirituality, care and transnationalism. These three concepts are treated here in their interrelatedness and intersection in the lived realities of migrant caregivers who are transnational mothers.

3.1. Spirituality

Scholars working on spirituality acknowledge the existing diversity in its definition. In this paper, three complementary definitions are taken in view of how they reflect and apply to the experience of the research participants. In contemporary literature on spirituality, religious historian and theologian Philip Sheldrake (2012, pp. 3–7) identifies key concepts characterising spirituality, namely a holistic approach, searching for the sacred, finding meaning and purpose, flourishing and living according to values. Spirituality understood as holistic is adopted in this paper to approach the lives of participant women as a whole—including their physical, social, emotional and spiritual experiences, needs and concerns. It is necessary to implement this approach because, as the women's stories illustrate, their concerns are interrelated. Madianou and Miller (2013, p. 151) make the same observation in their research on Philippine transnational mothers. Particular attention is paid to their recognition and experience of the sacred, their idea of a good life, what they find meaningful and what they understand to be their purpose. These elements, when brought to the conscious attention of the participants, can serve as an important resource for them and for those who seek to accompany them.

To complement this set of significant characteristics of spirituality posited by Sheldrake, I also consider in this paper a definition of spirituality used in healthcare, particularly palliative care: "Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, other, to nature, and to the significant or sacred" (Puchalski et al. 2009, p. 887). This second definition is a necessary addition to Sheldrake's work, for the connectedness dimension it adds to the concept of spirituality, which is specifically significant in the context of migrants, caregivers and transnational mothers. Firstly, connectedness is central to care relationships, since without which, it is difficult to perceive and deliver care. Secondly, because migration can lead to experiences of loss, either physical or symbolic (Casado et al. 2010), connectedness is a point of concern.

The common element between the two definitions is related to meaning and purpose. This is another reason why spirituality is an important consideration in giving care and support to migrant care workers and transnational mothers, as argued in this paper. Although I subscribe to (Baldassar and Merla's (2015), Merla and Baldassar's (2016)) point that the configuration of transnational families should not necessarily be conceived or portrayed as problematic, it remains true that many of them experience great suffering, as the stories of the research participants reveal. It is challenging for them to find meaning and purpose in the difficult things they go through, especially when they become too much to bear, something also experienced by the sick and the dying (Puchalski 2001). Thus, spiritual support is of value to help them manage when in such trying situations.

Lastly, I consider spirituality and biblical scholar Sandra Schneiders's (2005, p. 16) definition of spirituality "as the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward the horizon of ultimate value one perceives". This definition contributes two important ideas to the aforementioned conceptions of spirituality. First is the notion that people who experience spirituality are actually practising it, meaning it involves choosing and doing. Recognising the agency of the migrant care workers, the introduction of spiritual support is conceptualised as a reinforcement of an existing spirituality, a way to nourish or perhaps strengthen their practice of it. The second concept points to the dimension of spirituality that refers to the subject's development and transformation. The practice of spirituality is geared towards that which the subject values, the person's idea of ultimate good. Spiritual support is proposed in order to help the transnational mothers flourish, which means that they grow in their capacity to draw closer to what they perceive as a good life.

This paper contributes to spirituality studies by illustrating the value of taking into account the context of those who experience and practise spirituality. Having considered the lived realities of the research participants, it is necessary to employ multiple definitions of spirituality, both secular and religious. In addition, this paper offers a practical way of extending spiritual care that is mainly grounded in the research participants' experiences of faith and expressions of needs and concerns.

3.2. Care

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), care work refers to both "direct, personal and relational activities" and "indirect care activities" (Addati et al. 2018, p. 6). The former kind of care work involves direct interaction between caregivers and care receivers, for example, a domestic helper feeding her employer's infant. The latter kind does not involve direct interaction but is a prerequisite for direct care activities. Examples of indirect care activities are cleaning the house, preparing food and performing household chores. Care work can either be paid or unpaid, with most paid care work performed by women, many of whom are migrants. With the aforementioned definition of care work, the term caregiver is used in this paper not to refer to a particular profession but to the general role of anyone who provides care for another being, whether paid or unpaid, direct or indirect.

Despite the significance of care work to families, societies and states, and the universality of care as a need and an experience, care work is not duly recognised for its worth nor sufficiently remunerated when paid, compared to other kinds of work (King-Dejardin 2019; Razavi and Staab 2010; Williams 2012; England et al. 2002; Daly 2001). For example, domestic workers experience lack of recognition for the value of their care work through low wages, absence of social security, unjust working hours, discrimination and verbal and physical abuse, among others (International Labour Organization 2018). In light of this, it is imperative to heed sociologist Evelyn Nakano Glenn's (2010) vision of a caring society where care work is considered as "real work", just as with other services, and therefore care workers receive acknowledgement and benefits for what they do. The lack of recognition for the value of care and those who perform it is a significant consideration in this paper and something to which I seek to respond.

In the case of migrant care workers, who are also mothers, they face multiple care responsibilities to several care receivers in different locations as they continue to perform mother-care work for their children. Philosopher Sara Ruddick (1995) refers to mothering as a practice performed in order to ensure the preservation, growth and social acceptability of children. One of the strategies transnational mothers employ in mothering from afar is the transfer of direct and indirect care activities to other members of the family, relatives, or paid help, forming a "global care chain" (Hochschild 2000). A complementing perspective to "care chains" is the more recent and broader notion of "care circulation", which seeks to provide a framework for understanding the experience of care in the transnational familial sphere (Baldassar and Merla 2015; Merla and Baldassar 2016). The idea is that care is central to maintaining a family and is given and received by all members at different times and changing degrees throughout the course of their lives and across distance, thereby demonstrating their interdependence (Merla and Baldassar 2016).

In positing the idea of care as circulating within the family, Merla and Baldassar (2016) identify fundamental aspects of care that are worth noting, such as understanding it as a social capital, taking into account its political dimensions—that is, the inherent asymmetry in its circulation—and not neglecting its embodied character (Baldassar 2016). While they specifically emphasise the agency of family members in their care circulation framework (Baldassar and Merla 2015), they point out "the general lack of political recognition of transnational families and of their specific needs" (Merla and Baldassar 2016, p. 278). To this end, this paper makes a contribution by introducing the spiritual dimension both as a need and a resource for transnational families.

3.3. Transnationalism

Similar to spirituality, the concept of transnationalism can also mean many things, making it difficult to arrive at one "universal definition"(Tedeschi et al. 2020, p. 13). Broadly defined, it refers to "the circulation of goods and ideas between two or more countries that create new identities, communities, and cultures distinct from both sending countries and receiving countries" (Cohen 2010, p. 1214). A specific way of studying transnationalism, which applies to this paper, is described as "transnationalism from below" or from the perspective of individuals and civil society (Tedeschi et al. 2020, p. 13). The intention here is to investigate how labour migrant transnational mothers make meaning of their cross-border realities on a daily basis in order to identify how they can be supported.

Given the scope of this paper, it is productive to approach the concept of transnationalism by focusing on how it applies to the family lives of transnationals. American sociologists Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) coined the term "transnational motherhood" to refer to how Latina immigrant women in the United States perform mothering while their children continue to live in their countries of origin. The two scholars acknowledge the emergence of this common transnational space, which fosters transnational cultures and identities as posited by proponents of transnationalism (Basch et al. 1995). This is the space where they perform transnational mothering, an activity which challenges the normative view that biological mothers should exclusively raise their children (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). I echo Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila's (1997, p. 567) contention against "the celebratory impulses of transnational perspectives of immigration" that while there is "relative permeability of borders" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997, p. 568) allowing family ties to endure, it cannot be disregarded that nation-state borders remain impermeable, particularly so for migrant domestic workers and their young children with whom they desire to be reunited. This paper aims to acknowledge women's "alienation and anxiety" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997, p. 567) brought about by the transnational configuration of mothering.

In connection to the fact that transnational mothers experience a sense of longing for their estranged loved ones, an area of interest in transnational studies explores the strategies transnational families employ to maintain presence, such as the use of ICTs. Transnational ties are shaped by communication technologies and vice versa (Madianou and Miller 2013). For one, the mother–child relationship becomes concretised or "objectif[ied]" through the internet (Madianou and Miller 2013, p. 150). Another reason is that the distance maintained and made possible by the use of media, especially polymedia, supports what Madianou and Miller (2013, p. 150) note as "the ideal distance for the development of pure relationships", thereby influencing decisions of women to remain migrants instead of going back to their home country. On the other hand, ICTs are formed by transnational relationships through the choices made by the users, in terms of what to use and for what purposes.

As introduced in the previous section on care, a theme tackled in transnationalism studies intersects with the concept of care. Baldassar et al. (2007, p. 14) define transnational caregiving as "the exchange of care and support across distance and national borders". Their model is based on Finch's (1989) idea of caregiving as mutually practised by kin members and is not mono-directional. These three scholars argue that caregiving and receiving practices in a transnational context, underpinned by the family members' "capacities, obligations and negotiated commitments" are affected by the presence of national borders (Baldassar et al. 2007). Philippine-American sociologist Valerie Francisco-Menchavez (2018, p. 148), in her study on Philippine transnational families, confirms this multidirectional care exchange among family members who make a "commitment to care work for the upkeep of familial operations".

All the aforementioned studies focus on certain activities, namely mothering, communication and caregiving and receiving, as they are shared and performed by people across borders. This paper introduces the spiritual domain as a significant factor that can affect how the said transnational activities are experienced and understood.

4. Results and Analysis

The results presented here are from a research project which investigates the role of Christianity in the phenomenon of transnational mothering. In this paper, I shall not be focusing on the overall grounded theory constructed from the analysis of data. Rather, I shall mainly report my findings on the category *experiencing God's presence* and my analysis of the initial code *identifying needed support*, which inform the concept of spiritual support proposed by this paper.

To situate the category and the code that are discussed in this section, I shall first give a concise description of the constructed grounded theory. The research participants are strategizing to gain access to a better life which explains their experience of labour migration and transnational mothering. This means that upon identifying their (limited) resources, participant mothers are embracing the obligation to secure their families' welfare which then entails investing in people and possibilities. These processes are recurring as they continue to engage in labour migration and transnational mothering.

The strategy of investing in people and possibilities implies that the participant women manage their resources and spend them on what they believe is important in order to gain and maintain access to a better life. There are four known investment objects in this category: migration, relationships with others, oneself and faith. In focusing on the concept investing in faith, it becomes apparent that the participant women are experiencing God's presence in their lives, prioritising their faith through practices and beliefs, negotiating with God through prayers and daily choices and perceiving transformation in themselves, others and circumstances.

Having identified the need to conceptualise spiritual care for migrant care workers who are also transnational mothers, I went back to review and analyse the code *identifying needed support*, which contains expressions of the kind of help migrant mothers expect from the church and other groups for and/or of migrants.

4.1. Experiencing God's Presence

As participant transnational mothers speak about their faith, they identify experiences of God's presence in their lives. They describe such experiences in terms of the manner in which they take place. For example, mothers describe encountering God's presence through dreams, visions, hearing a voice, answered prayers and receiving help or guidance from other people. They also speak about the role God plays in their lives, such as being a *sandalan* or a *sandigan*, which means someone to lean on and depend on, or a friend, a companion and a confidante, to name a few. Others identify their experience of God by characterising God as the one who brings blessings, provides for their needs, grants their wishes, treats them with mercy, grants peace, delivers them through their trials, makes a way for their dreams and desires to come true and/or brings them (unexpected) healing.

It is interesting to note that experiencing God has become more vivid for some because of the challenges that they have experienced. This is closely tied to the belief of some participants that it is God who brings trials in their lives; for example, Jessa articulates, "I will embrace the pain, whatever pain that is. If [God] gives it, I can manage it." Connected to this belief is a certain sense of confidence that they can withstand or overcome difficulties, because the same God will provide for them and see them through their hardships. Rica recalls experiencing God's presence through her most difficult times as a newly arrived domestic worker in Kuwait and is grateful for it:

> The hardest part of my life as a migrant here was when I arrived. I was maltreated. It was as if I wasn't human. My only rest would be 20-min naps, then I'd work again. My employer would shout at me. At one point, I was already thinking about taking my own life. But, I thought about my reason for coming here, my family and my son. My son is my inspiration. I also do not forget God. Whenever I find myself unable to bear the hardships, I pray. I go to the third floor of the house and cry. I scream, knowing no one will hear me. God is my only friend. God is the only one whom I can lean on. Whether I am happy because of a

> blessing or I am going through difficulties, I see God as my saviour. My faith is always there. I never let go of that faith in God. I am grateful for all that I have experienced, including the trials that God has sent my way.

Others experience God on a more positive note, which is tied to their acknowledgement of the many blessings they have received. As Esther shares, "All of my needs are provided for by God. All. If not for God's providence, I would have gone astray. That's the truth. That's the truth." Considering the phenomenon of transnational mothering, it is significant to point out that such experiences of God are significantly linked to the good and the welfare of their children and loved ones. Participant mothers account for the good things in their children's lives, such as proper nourishment, decent shelter, access to education, academic or professional achievements and moral character by identifying God's mercy and generosity. In Vilma's words:

> Through God's grace, my children all went to school. They have completed their studies. Two are in the police force, and two are teachers. My fourth child finished two degrees, accounting and education, and passed the board exam. This is what I thank the Lord for. The Lord has given me this gift. From when I was in the Philippines, I have always served in the church. All my kids are professionals. All have passed the licensure exams.

Overall, they claim that God's presence in their lives is one significant source of support from which they draw strength and motivation; for instance, Teresa describes how she withstands life's challenges as a migrant:

> I survived because of my faith, my faith in the Lord. When you are far from your family, when you are abroad and you are by yourself, without any relatives, although I have one, but she is far from me, this is when we realise that in times like this, the Lord is the only one on whom you can call. You have someone who you know will not let you down. This is the reason. This is what has made me strong, my faith in the Lord.

In the variety of expressions of how the participants experience God's presence, it is clear that they recognise God as a figure who plays a significant, prominent and positive role in their lives as migrants and mothers. This is in line with migration scholar Maruja M.B. Asis's (2002) finding that migrant women returning to the Philippines identify growth in closeness to God as one of the positive consequences of migration for their families. Furthermore, although they recall experiencing sadness or anger when they were facing challenges, none of them expressed negative thoughts about their experience of God's presence. It can then be established that their faith narratives can serve as a helpful resource from which women can draw inspiration and on which they can continue to reflect.

Taking into consideration the different notions attributed to the concept of spirituality (Sheldrake 2012; Puchalski and Ferrell 2010; Schneiders 2005), the narratives of the participants show a connection between finding the sacred and experiencing flourishing. The participants usually term this conjunction as blessings or grace. There are also those who find meaning and purpose in their suffering because of their claim that they experience God through it and their belief and observation that things improve, also by the grace of God. Lastly, the faith narratives indeed show that the participant women display an awareness of their connectedness to themselves, their environment, others and God. It is by acknowledging and describing these ties that they find meaning in their experiences.

4.2. Identifying Needed Support

With the purpose of conceptualising spiritual support for migrant caregivers, who are also transnational mothers, I revisited a particular initial code in my data, *identifying needed support*, and analysed it again using the concepts of spirituality, care and transnationalism as a heuristic device or "background ideas" that serve "as points of departure from which to study the data"(Charmaz 2003, p. 259). What emerged are two main categories that tie

the participants' concerns together according to the locus of agency, namely internal factors and external factors.

Affirming previous research on transnational families, participant transnational mothers continue to deal with family members in the country of origin on a regular basis (Baldassar and Merla 2015; Baldassar et al. 2007; Francisco-Menchavez 2018; Madianou and Miller 2013; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). This being the case, the concerns of the participants are not only centred on their current location, where they work, but are also reflective of their connections to their home country. Shine's testimony is an example, where she expresses her concerns about maintaining a good relationship with her spouse, becoming transparent about problems encountered where she lives and being informed of the ones back at home, correcting a baseless assumption or judgment about female migrant workers and making others understand that domestic work abroad can be tough:

> For me, there should be good communication between spouses, that they are open to each other and have time for each other. They have to be open to each other about problems that they face abroad or in the Philippines. I hope they (family in the Philippines) don't judge us and accuse us of being busy flirting with men just because we are far away. I hope they realise how difficult it is to be a domestic worker abroad.

Baldassar et al. (2007, p. 204) have observed that factors on the macro-, meso- and micro-levels affect transnational caregiving. In relation to this, I have also noted that concerns expressed by the participant mothers and migrant advocates can be classified according to such levels, with most of them falling into the category of meso-level, such as "community factors, including the availability of local support and associations as well as welfare service and infrastructure" and micro-levels or "personal factors" (Baldassar et al. 2007, p. 205). The support they need can be classified as an interaction between internal and external elements. Internal elements, such as identity, values, rights and (in)capacities are called internal because they are primarily centred on the participants' understanding of themselves. Internal elements are, nonetheless, certainly influenced by external realities, such as events, ideas, people, or circumstances beyond the participant transnational mothers' control. Support that is classified as external is related to the participation of other people, both in the home country and in the country of work, meaning their family in the Philippines and the community to which they belong in the receiving country.

4.2.1. Internal Factors

The four internal factors, namely identity, values, rights and (in)capacities, are interrelated concepts which underpin how transnational mothers conceive of their needs, what they deem important and how they relate to others in the home country and in the receiving country.

Concerns that fall under identity mainly revolve around managing life as a migrant, which a number of the participants describe as a "gamble" or a "risky adventure", while understanding their changing identity as a transnational mother. For the participant mothers who left when their children when they were still very young, negotiating motherhood can be unsettling. Michelle expresses this:

> I think it is the emotional bond as mother and child. I have been here in Hong Kong for nine years, and my child is now twelve years old. I think I only had the chance to take care of my child for a year. My child, am I being a good mother to you? I think I have to define first what it means to be a good mother before I justify. I cannot define what a good mother is because I am only a financier, because I have to provide things for the family. When I have provided, I feel contented . . . A lot of migrants end up with a broken family, spouses separating or mother and child growing apart, which is not an issue for me and my child, so far . . . or, I don't know. I am unsure if it is an issue or not because I am afraid to accept it if it is. I don't know how to face it.

Transnational mothering for the participant women now includes providing financial support to their families back at home. For many of them, this was something they could not achieve in the past when they were still in the Philippines. Aside from sending money to their families, they also send gifts, communicate regularly with them using ICT and make short stay visits to the Philippines. Many participant mothers, such as Beth, acknowledge that their children have grown apart from them and try to do something about it.

> It is hard that my children are not close to me. They are kind of detached. But I have accepted it. And now, we always talk. My girl is aloof, but my youngest, my son, is close to me. When I go home to visit, our bonding is exceptional. It's not just the money or through material things. You should show, through actions, how much you love them. When I go home, I serve them.

Other concerns which are formative for their identity and closely tied with the concepts of values and (in)capacities are finding assurance that they have what it takes to succeed, being motivated and achieving peace of mind.

In terms of values, the most prominent elements that shape their value system are their (Catholic) Christian background and the Philippine culture. There are specific values that emerged in their narratives. One is compassion for others or *malasakit sa kapwa* in Filipino. Marissa exemplifies this when she says, "Perhaps, for me, as a migrant, [I'd like] for us all to be united. Let us set aside our differences in religion, our (political) leanings or whatever group you belong to. Let us focus on how we can help". Another value recurring in their narratives is respect for all, which may be influenced by their experience of living with people of other nationalities and religions. Julie relates respect with compassion in asserting "that we are all equal. Let us respect each other. And it is not based on religion, state of life, or race that we help others. Let us be humane." The third one is "family-oriented-ness", a trait with which Philippine nationals identify (Asis et al. 2004, pp. 202–3). This love for family goes beyond one's present nuclear family to include family of origin and other relatives. For example, Gina, who has five elementary school-aged children whom she calls each day, is also thinking about her family of origin, "I need help in dealing with my family (of origin) because we haven't been in touch. We've had contact when they were asking for financial help. I couldn't help, so now there's a bit of a gap between us."

In order to survive, it is crucial that mothers are aware of their rights as migrant workers. With knowledge of what they deserve, transnational mothers can learn to protect and defend themselves when necessary, something that also falls under (in)capacities. Migrant advocates and transnational mothers who volunteer in migrant advocacy work think this is a paramount consideration. In the words of Rev. Mario and Sheryl:

> Basically, addressing the rights and welfare of migrants is one of the most beneficial in terms of providing them with services. That includes education—raising their awareness, what their rights are as foreign migrant workers here in HK. We have what we call K.Y.R., Know Your Rights, because it leads to the empowerment of migrants so that they do not think that they are helpless. There is a way for them to assert their rights as domestic helpers here in Hong Kong (Rev Mario).

> The most important is empowerment. In a country where you do not know the laws, you can easily be abused. If we are knowledgeable about the law, we can use that to protect ourselves, especially from employers who take advantage of the novice migrants. If you terminate the[ir contract], they are unaware that they should be given one month's notice. Newbies do not know this (Sheryl).

They can then develop the skills and courage to speak up to their employers, workmates and relatives in the Philippines, who may impinge upon the exercise of their rights. Another integral right and need which the participant women express, and the migrant advocates affirm, is the right to be heard. Their desire to be listened to is connected to their value for respect and their capacity to express themselves, as both an ability and an opportunity. By knowing their rights, they can develop their capacities and recognise their

limitations. The confluence of these four aspects forms how transnational mothers accept and handle difficulties and is key to their survival and wellbeing.

Although this study mainly focuses on the perspective of transnational mothers who are migrant caregivers, the findings are comparable to the Baldassar et al. (2007) transnational caregiving model, which represents the broader population of transnational families. They identify capacity, obligation and negotiated family commitments as a "complex mix of motivations" that affect the giving and receiving of care within transnational families (2007, p. 204). They similarly define capacity as both opportunities and abilities. Their understanding of obligation as a "cultural sense of duty" and "perceptions about need" is parallel to the interplay of the categories of identities and values (2007, p. 208). Lastly, their concept of negotiated family commitments brings to light the more varied aspect of family dynamics hinged on kin relationships that develop over time. This concept can shed light on the link between internal and external factors and how they affect each other. As exemplified above, each of the four categories classified as internal factors, namely identity, values, rights and (in)capacities, manifests in the relationships of the participants with people in their home country and in the receiving country. At the same time, their relationships with others can have an impact on how they perceive themselves, what they deem important, what they recognise as their rights and what they can and cannot do.

4.2.2. External Factors

Central to the labour migrants-transnational mothers' identities and values are the relationships they have, particularly with their children, families and relatives in the Philippines and their employers, workmates, friends and fellow migrants in the receiving country. They need to find or establish a safe space where they can seek refuge for themselves and give refuge to others. Such a place of refuge refers to a physical space and/or a community of people that can give them a semblance of home and family. To some, this place of refuge can be the church. For example, Melanie thinks the church, not necessarily of her religious affiliation, can help give people a sense of family and remind them of what truly matters to them:

> When we go to church, not everyone is Catholic. You just want to feel that you have a family who will accept you and not judge you . . . For example, some OFWs cheat on their partners (who are in the Philippines). Perhaps they forget to value their families. If they did, they would not cheat . . . I think you lose your way when you feel you are not loved by your family. If you are closer (to the church) or your faith is stronger, you will be reminded by the church of the values of love, of understanding. For me, you won't be doing those things. How do I explain it? Just by being there, you will feel that you have enough.

It serves as a reference point for the many things they must learn as they navigate their new identities as transnational mothers and migrant (care) workers. Migrant advocates Nida and Sheila, who are part of two different migrant advocate groups, describe what this place of refuge is, which they seek to provide for migrants in Italy:

> Dissemination of information about services and their rights [is necessary]. Here in Italy, a lot of them do not understand the language. Plus the bureaucratic process, it is hard for them to go through the process, which offices to go to. They come to us, also for simple legal advice, what to do, where to go, we provide those (Nida).

> I think it is very important for them to have a reference point. It starts from there. [Once] they know that they have someone to lean on, they come to you with whatever problem they have . . . The biggest impact on them is to know that there is an association that will not let them down, will listen to them and will try to respond to their needs (Sheila).

Alongside work, employment and employer concerns, there are transnational mothers who also need help in maintaining good communication with loved ones in the Philippines

in order to sustain good relationships with them. They recognise that effective communication demands time, skills and resources. As Madianou and Miller (2013) assert in their study, access to and affordability of media in today's time do not entirely account for the choices made by mothers and children in their use of media. Hence, beyond structural considerations, there are underlying factors that affect the participant mothers' capacity to communicate well, which also include the willingness and capacity of non-migrant kin to respond to their communication. In this regard, it can be helpful to review how this concern is related to the internal factors discussed above.

Internal and external factors are classified separately in theory but operate together and in an interrelated manner. For example, participant mothers speak about the need to feel accepted by others. This desire for acceptance and support from a community also manifests itself in the desire to take part in gatherings and common celebrations. They want to be prayed for by the church and to celebrate and pray with their children/families in the Philippines and with other believers and/or fellow Philippine nationals in the receiving country. They want to be part of a community where they can receive guidance in their endeavours as a mother, a Christian, a migrant and a caregiver, to name but a few. These concerns expressed by transnational mothers reflect Doris Peschke's (2009) claim that religion affects the migrant in several ways, such as the formation of one's personal identity, daily living and community life. Another valuable aspect in view of the spiritual support conceptualised in the next section is her assertion that it is a necessity for migrants to both express and live out their religious creed as these help them find grounding in the receiving country.

5. Implications for Practice: Conceptualising Spiritual Care

In this section, I discuss how the faith lives of transnational mothers or narratives of experiencing God's presence are taken as a resource in extending spiritual care to them, particularly in dealing with factors with which they need support.

In the case of the participant transnational mothers, they need support not so much in searching for the sacred whom they report to be present in their lives but in allowing that experience of God to continue to bring meaning to their endeavours and to support their flourishing.

In the previous section, it has been established that their personal concerns or the internal factors affect the external ones, or how they relate with significant people in both countries of work and of origin, and vice versa. By taking these into account and the concept of spirituality as integrating the different domains of a person (Sheldrake 2012, p. 3), the next step is to explore how reflecting on their faith lives or experience of the sacred can be applied in efforts to respond to their concerns, both the internal ones and those that involve the participation of others.

Christian spirituality scholar Sandra Schneiders (2005, pp. 16–17) defines spirituality as "the actualization of the basic human capacity for transcendence", meaning it applies to all regardless of religion. She further explains that spirituality is a conscious endeavour where one is motivated to grow towards "the ultimate good" acknowledged by the person, which could be God or something else. In order to enrich one's spirituality, spiritual practices are performed. Given that all the transnational mothers who took part in the research identify themselves as Christians, either at present, or, for a few of them, at some previous point in their lives, ideas on spirituality from a Christian perspective can be useful. Another Christian spirituality scholar, David Perrin (2007, p. 266), defines spiritual practices as those that "express in action the values and beliefs of Christians; they help Christians grow in those values and beliefs as they are practiced." Schneider's and Perrin's input here supports the proposal to take faith experience as a resource in spiritual care for labour migrant transnational mothers in order to usher in actions that can promote their wellbeing. The idea is to stimulate awareness of how God's presence in their lives—as their narratives reflect—motivate values, beliefs and practices that are meaningful and life

giving for them and the people to whom they relate and how these reflections can translate into actions.

Spiritual care is presented in Figure 1 as a cycle where the spiritual caregiver supports the receiver in fostering awareness of her own experience of God and of how that can motivate and influence growth in her life. This can only be possible if the spiritual caregiver can establish a safe space for the care receiver to express herself. While this proposal focuses on providing ideas for accompanying migrants in order for them to realise their spiritual journeys, it has to be communicated that creating a physical place of refuge, which can literally and/or symbolically be a home away from home for migrants, is of equal importance.

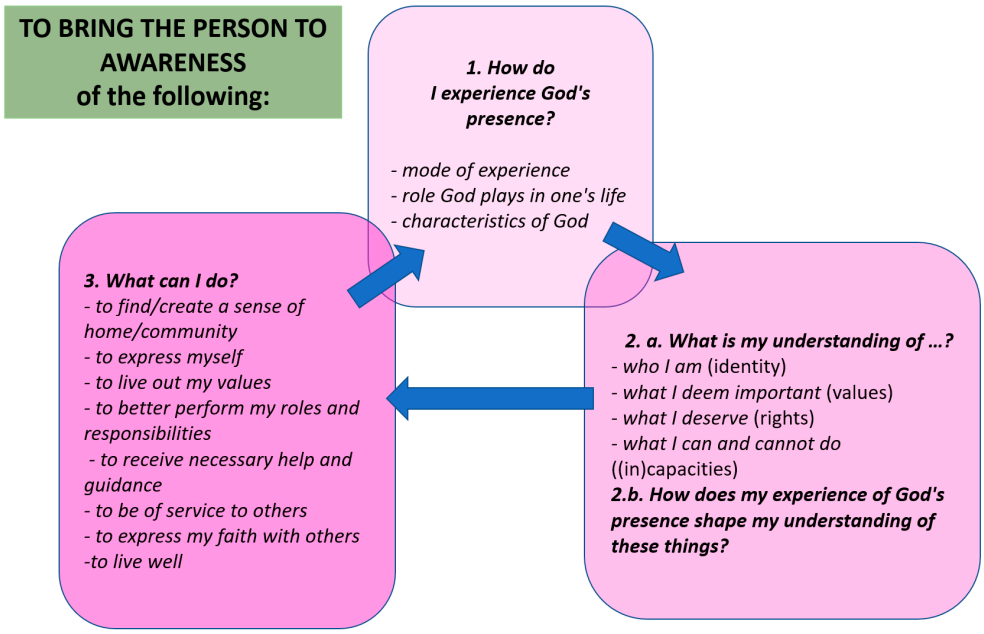

Figure 1. Spiritual care is about creating a conducive space and giving support in order for the receiver to realise her spiritual journey. Source: This diagram is created by the author based on the analysis of empirical data informed by complementing definitions of spirituality (Sheldrake 2012; Puchalski and Ferrell 2010; Schneiders 2005; Perrin 2007).

The first step is to lead the spiritual care receiver to recognise and reflect on her own experience of God's presence. Based on the narratives of the participants and the work of several scholars who research migration and faith/religion (for example, Bastide 2015; Visser et al. 2015; Lusk et al. 2021; Dorais 2007; Cruz 2006), God's presence, something acknowledged through the lens of faith, is a significant element in migration stories. The participant mothers identified God's presence in their lives by speaking about the manner in which they experience God, the role God plays in their lives and the characteristics of God. Bastide (2015) notes in his study of Indonesian Islam migrants that their very choice to leave, despite the risks entailed, is an act of faithful surrender to God, and that their persistence in facing obstacles courageously stems from a desire to follow God's will and to live according to one's destiny. Similarly, in a study on the experience of the cumulative trauma of migrants from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico, participants report that faith brought about perseverance and hope in them and that religion is a positive influence that directs them towards what they value—future and children—amidst the challenges (Lusk et al. 2021). These findings attest to the significance of faith, particularly their experience of God, in how migrants navigate their lives. For this reason, it is of great value to explore faith as a resource in supporting migrants in their efforts to achieve holistic wellbeing and better connectedness to themselves, to the people around them, to the realities they encounter and to what they consider sacred.

The second step in this conception of spiritual care involves supporting the spiritual care receiver in order that she may attain a greater understanding of her identity, values, rights, capacities and incapacities. After this, such reflections on one's personhood can be connected to the previous step of identifying one's experience of God's presence. The aim here is to take one's faith narrative as material that can inform, clarify and expand one's understanding of oneself. One's faith narrative and all the other personal internal elements are connected. What spiritual care does is to help the receiver realise such connections, which can consequently support acceptance, wellbeing, and transformation, where necessary.

The third step is for the spiritual caregiver to assist the receiver in identifying what she is willing to do and capable of doing in response to present struggles and opportunities. The receiver reflects on what she can do at present, with her faith experience as a background and informed by her reflections on her identity, values, rights and (in)capacities. In the case of the participant transnational mothers, their concerns include finding a sense of home with one's family in the Philippines, despite the spatial distance and temporal difference, and a sense of home in the receiving country; being able to express themselves, to be understood and to be respected; performing their roles and responsibilities effectively; living out their values; receiving necessary help and guidance; being of service to others, particularly those in need; celebrating meaningful rituals and faith practices with others; and living well while supporting their loved ones.

Spiritual care continues until such time as the receiver develops the skills, discipline, and habit of realising her spiritual journey. It is about recalling her history of experiencing God's presence, understanding how this faith history shapes her, and identifying her possibilities as she envisions a better future for herself and for others. A limitation of this proposal is its applicability in contexts where a receiver is a non-believer. In such circumstances, it can be proposed that narratives of faith in God be replaced by narratives of faith in oneself and/or faith in the ultimate good, whatever or whoever this may be for the person. What matters in this concept of spiritual care is to use a person's experience of transcendence, whether it be God or something else, to energise a person's process of understanding herself in connection to other people and to the multiple realities she faces. The role of the spiritual caregiver is to help cultivate an existing resource in order to support the transnational migrant care receiver in proactively dealing with her daily struggles towards the better future she envisions, particularly for herself and her loved ones.

6. Conclusions

In most cases, concern and interest in the plight of women migrant care workers, particularly domestic workers, has revolved around their caregiving duties as mothers and as paid care workers. Recognising that caregivers need care, too, this paper discusses how they can be cared for in a manner that acknowledges and encourages their agency. A form of spiritual care is proposed for accompanying the receiver as she goes through a recurring three-step cycle of reflection. This proposal is primarily based on an analysis of empirical data informed by complementary definitions of spirituality. Narratives of transnational mothers-migrant caregivers reveal the centrality of their experiences of God's presence in how they understand their own flourishing, as well as that of their loved ones; find meaning in their hardships; and realise their connectedness to themselves, to their environment and to others. This existing spirituality is to be further nourished and encouraged, so they can become more cognisant of their identities, values, rights, capacities and incapacities (internal factors) in relation to their overall faith journey or experience of God. The idea is to help them understand how these elements affect their relationships with others and their experiences (external factors), and vice versa. The resulting reflections are used to assist them in discerning the specific things they can do in response to their self-identified struggles and concerns, still in the context of journeying in faith. Equally important, although beyond the scope of this paper, is the proposition that the provision of spiritual care includes creating a place of refuge for migrants. A safe space, which can

become a migrant's home away from home, both literally and figuratively, can bolster their morale and contribute to their spiritual health and overall wellbeing.

The kind of spiritual care discussed in this paper can be considered by pastoral care workers, churches, and migrant advocate groups who strive to accompany migrants. Based on this particular contribution to research on migrant domestic workers and their spirituality, a topic that can be studied further is how other transnational family members practise and experience spirituality given their context. Drawing from the care circulation framework, another related topic to explore is how spiritual care is exchanged among transnational family members.

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