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How are We Supposed to Respond to This?: Me Too as a Social Transformation Movement*

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This paper attempts to demonstrate how the Me Too movement is crucial in social transformation precisely because it demands a rethinking of current normativities, such as those surrounding gender and sexual norms, power relations, and culture. Through Nikolas Kompridis's "reflective disclosure," this paper argues that the Me Too movement as a critique employs a stance of receptivity to reinvigorate its critical perspectives and fuel its political commitments to freedom and transformation. This paper aims to accomplish two things: (1) to tackle the "burden" of hearers/listeners of "me too" to respond; (2) to introduce the possibilities of receptivity in social transformation in the Global South. To achieve these two aims, this paper shall have four discussions: In section 2, this paper situates the Me Too movement in the Global South, presenting it as a persistent challenge in the region that demands response. Section 3 discusses Kompridis's notion of receptivity and introduces it as a new approach to social transformation, one that is better suited to help navigate the textures and tensions embedded in social relations. Section 4 discusses the value of receptivity in social transformations, unpacking recognition and freedom in receptivity—both of which are often the objectives of any social movement. Section 5 discusses the Me Too movement and presents it as an example of a critique that employs receptivity to fuel its commitments to social transformation.

KEYWORDS: critique; feminist critique; Me Too; Nikolas Kompridis; receptivity; social transformation

1. INTRODUCTION

The Me Too movement is often considered a crucial moment in feminism but rarely valued as a critical movement in social and political transformation. With women at the frontlines, it is often reduced to being just a women's issue, a fight that can only be fought by women. The violence involved, however, is an almost universal experience that is shared by other gender identities across geographical locations and not just exclusive to the Global North. The experiences shared by speakers of Me Too are the same: sexual violence at home, at work, on the streets, in academia, in church. Although the movement is of global significance, it has been less pronounced in the Global South—survivors not only receive backlash for speaking their truth, but their silencing can be in the form of punishments, from harsh criticisms and threats to actual physical harm. This case is seen in the recent testimonies of the survivors of Apollo C. Quiboloy.¹

Contrary to popular notions of Me Too, the movement did not start as a hashtag (#MeToo) that went viral on Twitter in October 2017 when several women came forward to accuse show business mogul Harvey Weinstein of sexual harassment and assault. Although it was popularized through social media and initially by White Hollywood female celebrities, the movement began in 2006 with Tarana Burke, a Black grassroots activist who was working with survivors of sexual violence in marginalized communities. A survivor herself, Burke had experienced how there was no language to fully express what had happened to her. The words “me too” helped in her healing journey, finding her voice through survivors who empathized with her. Thus, the work of the movement is anchored on what she calls empowerment through empathy, wherein survivors provide support to fellow survivors by lending an ear to one another as well as assuring another survivor that she is not alone and that she is not at fault for the violence to which she has been subjected (Adetiba and Burke 2017). From 2006 to today, the main idea of Me Too is survivors finding their voice and reclaiming their agency.

While Burke has expressed concerns that the Me Too *moment* (perhaps, Me Too's Hollywood or hashtag moment) might cause the movement to move in different directions (i.e., from marginalized communities to individual men, from talking about new ways to approach healing and justice to just “coming out” and “calling out”²), she is glad that at least the hashtag has shown the world how widespread and pervasive sexual violence is—*that this happens*, that finally we can have a wider conversation about it, that it is an

important matter (Adetiba and Burke 2017). Since its Hollywood moment, the movement has opened not just conversations but also mobilized survivors across the globe. It is not a mere hashtag or a social media phenomenon but a movement happening in schools, workplaces, and the streets. The rise of survivor collectives and safe spaces is a direct result of the work of survivors and allies in ensuring no one utters “me too” again.

This paper argues that the Me Too movement is a good example of a response that employs a stance of receptivity to fuel its critical energies and commitments to social transformation. It thereby demonstrates that the Me Too movement is a crucial social transformation movement because it demands a rethinking of current normativities. It analyzes this social movement as a critique that employs a stance of receptivity that is more open and responsive to new possibilities in order to reinvigorate its critical perspectives and fuel its political commitments to freedom and social transformation, thereby providing an example of what critical theorist Nikolas Kompridis (2006a) calls “reflective disclosure.” Additionally, this paper acknowledges that men and people who identify as belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community also experience sexual violence. But in this paper, the focus is narrowed toward women and girls for the simple reason that the Me Too movement was initially a movement started for and by women.

The paper aims to accomplish two things: (1) to tackle the burden of hearers/listeners of “me too” to respond; (2) to introduce the possibilities of receptivity in social transformation in the Global South. To achieve these two aims, this paper shall have four discussions: In section 2, this paper situates the Me Too movement in the Global South, presenting it as a persistent challenge in the region that demands response. Section 3 discusses Kompridis’s notion of receptivity and introduces it as a new approach to social transformation, one that is better suited to help navigate the textures and tensions embedded in social relations. Section 4 discusses the value of receptivity in social transformations through Kompridis’s analyses of the play *A Doll’s House* (1879), the novella *The Lives of Animals* (1999), and the movie *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004). These contexts unpack recognition and freedom in receptivity, both of which are often the objectives of any social movement. Section 5 discusses the Me Too movement and presents it as an example of a critique that employs receptivity to fuel its commitments to social transformation. The last section concludes the paper.

2. BEYOND THE HASHTAG: SITUATING THE ME TOO MOVEMENT IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

In different parts of the world, there have been different ways of responding to Me Too. In many countries in the Global North, calls have led to the arrest and trial of many powerful men (North 2019). In the Global South, accountability and justice have been more out of reach as survivors have faced worse consequences than their perpetrators.

In Asia, the traction gained by the movement on social media was greatly exceeded by the ensuing backlash. For example, in Pakistan, it has been considered a failure not so much because of the lack of voices but because of a *lack of hearers* resulting from “deep-rooted patriarchy.” Women are labeled as “troublemakers” for vocally asserting their rights, are “viewed as slogan mongers,” and “no heed is paid to their suffering and struggles.” Furthermore, they are “labeled as ‘Feminists’ pejoratively and thus are ignored for whatever they ask regarding their rights” (Bakht, Irshad, and Samad 2021, 156).

In Kashmir, the women’s group called the Kashmir Women’s Collective (KWC) released a document that listed “political analysts, media personalities, editors, journalists and bureaucrats, [and] political workers” who were guilty of sexually inappropriate behavior, such as “forced kissing, repeated and systematic harassment, molestation, inappropriate touching, messaging and sustained requests to meet in private” and “targeted women junior to them in age, employment status and social power.” Intended to call out sexual harassers and challenge their “protection of anonymity” in the hope of changing the status quo, this action resulted in a smear campaign against KWC. Members of the group were vilified individually and collectively by friends of those named in the “Kashmir List.” They were labeled as “pro-statist, and by extension anti-Kashmiri, and as members of RAW [Research and Analysis Wing]” and “portrayed as sexually promiscuous.” This violent backlash against survivor speech “is a repetition of the most underhand[ed] and historically overused method—attacking the messenger, so no one listens to the message” (Magill 2018).

Similarly, the “strong patriarchal culture” in Africa is a roadblock to the movement gaining larger traction in the region as in other parts of the world. The women are “silenced by ‘cultures of respectability,’” fearing stigmatization from speaking out and fearing their families

finding out about the abuse. As such, “the very visibility of this kind of action makes them more vulnerable” (Gouws 2019). Moreover, even when Me Too resonates with a lot of African women, “many have been dissuaded from filing complaints by a justice system that is indifferent to their plight” (AfricaNews and AFP 2018).

In the Philippines, the Me Too movement had different iterations during the Duterte administration—and perhaps even before Alyssa Milano’s catalytic tweet on October 2017. In 2016, in response to Duterte’s “joke” that he should have raped a dead woman first before she was gang raped and murdered, women took to social media to call him out (Khan 2016). Filipino women were at the forefront of resisting Duterte because it was women who he attacked first (see Regencia 2018). During the entire presidency of Duterte, women’s call-outs against sexual and gender-based violence had various iterations: #BabaeAko (“I am a woman”), #RespetoNaman (“Respect please”), #Enough (Rappler 2018; Ham 2019; Lagrimas and Malig 2019).

As in anywhere around the world, the response to speaking up has always been hostile: from survivors receiving backlash, to men and society fearing that “me too” will be abused for character assassination, to having “trigger warnings” in safe spaces because of paranoia.

It is worth pointing out that the view that movements against sexual violence did not exist in the Global South prior to Me Too is problematic. As Ajayi (2018) writes, “In the case of #MeToo, tagging it as the vanguard in the global fight against sexual harassment implies that the problem didn’t come into sight until ‘the West’ named it.” In Latin America, Medina (2019) reports, some women have criticized the view that the #NiUnaMenos (“No one [woman] less”) movement that began in Argentina in 2015 is the Latin American “version” of Me Too as “a new assertion of colonialism intended to claim Latin American and Caribbean resistance as an outcome of the North American experience, ignoring it as a result of a long tradition of struggle in the Global South.” In fact, the phrase “me too” has many iterations across the globe.

Me Too demands a rethinking of our understanding of power, sexual relations, agency, and freedom. It is, thus, about time that we learn how to appropriately and justly respond to Me Too’s call, one that we cannot brush off like a cultural habit that needs to be accepted as fact. For as long as there are calls, we will be burdened to respond. How then are we supposed to respond to “me too”? “Receptivity,” as a

concept in critical theory, offers a means through which we can tackle the burden of responding to a call as well as explore an alternative approach to social transformation.

3. THE STRUGGLE OF VOICES SPEAKING SIMULTANEOUSLY AND WANTING TO BE HEARD

A persistent challenge in social transformations, which rest on the struggle of recognition, is the issue of voices. Contemporary theories on sociopolitical transformations have proposed various critical methods aimed at recognition and inclusivity, among others, to address this struggle. In his major work *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future*, Kompridis (2006a) embarks on a project of renewing critical theory at a time when multiple voices are speaking at the same time and wanting to be heard. According to him, critique has exhausted our utopian energies. We have lost confidence in it, leading us to become skeptical of transformations, possibilities, or a better future. For Kompridis, critique must be reconceived in such a way that it becomes more open and responsive to new possibilities, that is, as a possibility-disclosing practice—in contrast to immanent critique, which is a truth-unmasking practice. It is in this way (possibility-disclosing) that critique inspires hope.

In constructing such a model of critique, Kompridis turns to Heidegger's concept of world disclosure. Following Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, Kompridis says that we are always already receptive to a pre-reflective world of meaning as a condition of our being thrown into the world. Thus, the world discloses itself to us in a particular space and time, in our particular "thrownness"; and hence, meaning is not only bound to a preexisting background but also is disclosed from a particular lifeworld. While critics of Heideggerian ontology castigate the "being-in-the-world" as irrational in that the subject is a mere receptor to whom the world is disclosed, Kompridis (2006a, 65) interprets this being as a "being-with which understands" because this subject is intersubjective and capable of listening. It is precisely through this capacity to listen that the world is disclosed anew; through receptivity, that is, entering into a relationship with an Other—human or nonhuman—the subject allows herself to be marked or impressed by an Other and to make room for its call, rendering intelligible what may have been previously held unintelligible and thereby making actual what was possible.

A requirement for such a possibility-disclosing critique that Kompridis talks about is intimacy, by which Kompridis means a kind of immersion, a stance of receptivity. Self-decentering is not even adequate here. The key is not only in making room for the voice of an Other and listening to it, but also in facilitating the speech of the second speaker because “it is the normative standpoint of the second person that is crucial to intimate critique” (Kompridis 2006a, 262). The possibility, the new, the not-yet could be disclosed from the said standpoint. This is more than a sense of taking the second person seriously or treating the other as equal or as a wholly different source of possibilities to which one will never have access if one fails to be receptive of the Other. Receptivity for Kompridis (2011) is entering into a relationship with an Other in an attitude of answerability; it is allowing to be voiced by the other. The result of such intimacy is “a change in the normative self-understanding of the participants, a change in how they ‘go on’ *together*.” It is “a practice of critical dialogue that aims to preserve and renew trust, and to facilitate commitment to ongoing processes of cooperative problem solving” (Kompridis 2006a, 262).

Kompridis (2014, 6) warns that receptivity should not be treated as being synonymous to “openness or passivity” because to do this is “to identify it with mindless submission to anyone or anything that comes along (the usual suspects: Nazis, fascists, etc.).” In fact, he conceives of receptivity as “a form of normative responsiveness that is both spontaneous and reflective” (Kompridis 2013, 20) and that “entails a particular way of responding to normative challenges to our current self-understanding, to our current way of going on with things” (Kompridis 2011, 264). It is an engagement with the world that is critical but mindful, one that suspends analysis or judgment to make room for reflection. It is a pause followed by a careful listening to murmurs, a receptivity to the strangeness of the sound. It is an attitude of active listening, of clarifying to oneself one’s cares and commitments, of holding oneself answerable to the other’s voice, of speaking or voicing out but only when one is called to respond. For Kompridis, then, receptivity as a form of critique must disclose possibilities. For that to happen, we must be receptive to the new, to what is not currently intelligible according to our pre-reflective views of the world, our current normative frameworks. If we are open to the new, then we are able to go on differently than before—we are able to transform the world.

When we hear the Other’s voice, our ears pick up the melody they sing amidst other melodies—probably because they are singing

out of tune, breaking the harmony. We make out their song from a polyphony. Thus, we are never actually listening monophonically, to one voice at a time. We are always hearing voices “*amidst the plurality of voices*” (Kompridis 2003; emphases mine). To say that being receptive is being open to anything, including evil forms of life such as Nazism, is to misinterpret receptivity as listening to only one voice at a time. The reason we worry about being open to Nazism is because we already heard the cries of the millions of Others who perished as a result of that ideology. We still hear the echoes of their cries. We know that if we uncloset ourselves to Nazism, all the more must we uncloset ourselves to the voices of the millions of suffering Others. This is why, for Kompridis (2006a), receptivity precedes critique. Our ability to be receptive fuels our critical perspectives. Likewise, our inability to be receptive may cause our critique to be shortsighted. Moreover, the voices speaking at the same time are not always black or white. In many ways, the forms of life that we think oppose one another have some aspects that are interdependent (Kompridis 2011). In addition, to fear receptivity as being open to anything actually implies that receptivity has a political element in it. It implies that the world we listen to is rife with power structures that result in unequal, even oppressive, relations.

Practicing receptivity as a way of engaging with others requires an effort to try to listen and understand what the other is saying, and even a willingness to entertain the possibility that we might be wrong (and of course, the possibility that the other might be right). It calls for the recognition of others as real, actual people whose histories and cultures are intertwined with ours. Kompridis (2011, 267) writes, “Hence what this involves is a semantic and not just a cognitive struggle over one’s own voice, which struggle is also continuous with a political struggle over the conditions under which it can be voiced.” If we understand the call of the other as making a claim, as a sociopolitical struggle, then we must understand reflective receptivity as an active and political action. Reflective receptivity as an attitude of answerability must be discriminate amidst the plurality of voices. To mindlessly listen to all voices is to deny that these voices are making a call, are *calling out*, are trying to articulate something, and, in the process, are struggling to be intelligible. Moreover, this is not saying that being critically receptive merely means being able to distinguish the oppressors versus the oppressed; rather, it is more about enlarging our political horizons, more about acknowledging the textures that layer the sounds we hear.

4. RECEPTIVITY AS A CRITICAL STANCE IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

How then does receptivity make critique possible? What precisely makes this critique as receptivity and reflective disclosure more critical? To illustrate better what this practice of receptivity is like, it is important to understand what the call for receptivity to the new is like. In other words, if we deem recognition as the antidote to the struggle of voices, what kind of misrecognition or suffering are we talking about when we talk about being in need of receptivity?

To illustrate this, Kompridis (2006a) uses Stanley Cavell's analysis of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), a three-act play written and set in nineteenth century Norway. It tells the story of Nora and her husband Torvald. Cavell interprets the play as a story about the treatment of a wife by her husband (and by men in general) as a child and not as an adult. In the story, Nora Helmer is a faithful wife to her husband Torvald Helmer. For Torvald, Nora is the source of joy: she is both wife and child to him. Years prior to the current setting of the play, Nora committed a crime to save her ill husband: she borrowed money by forging her father's name.

In nineteenth-century Europe, married women were not allowed to make loans without their husband's approval. Nora did not then tell Torvald about her loan because she did not want him to worry about anything as he was then already very ill. Krogstad, an employee at Torvald's bank who processed Nora's loan, knows about her crime and blackmails her. He threatens her that he will tell Torvald about the still unpaid loan if she will not help him secure a job position at the bank where Torvald works. Nora tries her best to convince Torvald to hire Krogstad, but Torvald believes Krogstad is not worthy of the position.

The plot of the play may seem like a simple conflict that can be easily solved but in all three acts Nora is restless. As a criminal, her status as a faithful wife and a mother worthy of being a moral example to her children is at stake. If she loses her status as wife and mother, what is left of her? But then, did she really commit such a grave crime so as to risk her and her husband's honorable reputation? Can the fact that she forged a name to save her ill husband's life not be given any consideration at all? And, most importantly, why is no one taking her seriously as a mature adult? Alas, Torvald finds out about Nora's crime and denounces her. He tells her that she is an embarrassment and could never be trusted with their children. But

a little later, Torvald receives Krogstad's letter saying he is returning Nora's promissory note. Thrilled, Torvald immediately forgives Nora and tells her to forget about what happened.

At the play's climactic scene, Nora voices her anxiety and pain. She has seen their marriage in a new light and no longer wants to remain in the marriage. She realizes she had been a doll, a plaything—first of her father and now of Torvald. No one regarded her as an adult capable of making decisions by herself and for her family. Her husband Torvald is confused with her; Nora is singing in a different voice/tune. He wants Nora to be back to her “normal self” so he forgives her and assures her that they can now forget what happened and move on—or rather, go on with their normal lives exactly as before. But Nora cannot go on exactly as before. She has changed and wants to go on differently. For her, it is a different matter now. The concern is no longer about her committing a crime but that she had been treated like a child. The circumstances concerning *why she committed a crime* was never given importance; the gravity of her theft was never taken as seriously as she had taken it. Now, Nora wants to be free, especially from societal expectations of women.

Nora's case is a prime example of “the personal is political.”³ However, many fail to see the political relevance of Nora's case. This is curious considering Ibsen's play opened up discussions regarding women's domestication and lack of political rights since it premiered at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, Denmark on December 21, 1879. Nonetheless, this is not the first time that the political in Nora was shoved aside and rendered irrelevant, even comedic, if not inexistent. As Templeton (1989, 28–31) reports, Ibsen's—or rather, Nora's—critics belabored to analyze *A Doll's House* as completely “indifferent to” or “unsullied by the ‘woman question’.” In other words, Nora's woes were too universal to be political.⁴

Even Ibsen (1964, 337 in Templeton 1989, 28) himself made a disclaimer that *A Doll's House* was not about women's experience, saying that when he wrote the play his “task has been the description of humanity.”⁵ Ibsen was not entirely wrong about how he was making a description. In fact, he did capture the pain or suffering of many women in his time, among them his friend Laura Kieler who inspired Nora and who was also a writer. He articulated a certain pain that was political because it was personal and particular. That Ibsen himself and his critics became uncomfortable with the backlash sparked by Nora says a great deal about our politics with

the new. That Nora's detractors came rushing to defend Torvald—the poor husband—reveals something about our fear of being confronted by and engaging with the new, of losing everything that we know, including ourselves.

It is thus not surprising, albeit frustrating, to ask why Torvald cannot be accorded the same listening that must be accorded to Nora (Schoolman 2011). Surely Torvald's fears of committing a crime and risking their reputation come from a valid source, as valid as Nora's pain. But Kompridis explains that while Torvald is indeed pained and has his own background that conditions his way of thinking and living, he wants to go on exactly as before—forgive, forget, and then move on as if nothing happened. On the other hand, Nora, seeing the state of their marriage (and her being) in a new light, could not and would not go on as before. She has changed and wants to continue with that change.

Thus, in cases of voices speaking at the same time, Kompridis is saying that we need to distinguish between voices that speak out for ways to go on differently and voices that do not. In addition, to demand receptivity from someone suffering is to miss the call addressed specifically to oneself. It is to deflect the call to respond. What Kompridis is trying to show in Nora's case is a kind of misrecognition. Torvald's "recognition" of Nora's pain falls short of acknowledging what truly bothers Nora. As Kompridis (2013, 7) writes about another character in Coetzee's (1999) fable, *The Lives of Animals*, suffering a similar form of misrecognition as Nora:

Elizabeth Costello does not meet the criteria for failures of recognition as political theories of recognition construe them. And yet . . . there is something *like* a failure of recognition here, for the life of a particular human being has been rendered invisible, and, indeed, voiceless, in the very struggle to make it visible, to find the words in which to voice it.

The failure of recognition here is the failure to recognize that Nora is saying something that does not match Torvald's own understanding. Torvald definitely hears Nora. He is even pained that their marriage is on the brink of falling apart. But Nora's new "song" becomes too unbearable to listen to and he makes no attempt to ask why this is so in order to put his views of Nora into question.

Through the analysis of *A Doll's House*, we see that receptivity aims at a kind of recognition that differs from Honneth's and Fraser's notions of recognition (Fraser and Honneth 2003 in Kompridis 2007). For Honneth, recognition is a matter of nurturing the needs of the subject in three spheres. For Fraser, it is a matter of public justification. For Kompridis, recognition is a matter of freedom that can be attained through a sense of mattering or rather struggling over the norms that govern what should or should not matter. According to Kompridis, neither Honneth's account of recognition as a matter of identity nor Fraser's account of it as a matter of justice captures the meaning of recognition. Following James Tully (2006 in Kompridis 2007, 287), Kompridis thinks that recognition is a matter of freedom which entails "a struggle *over the norms of recognition*."

Nora, then, is not misrecognized in a Honnethian or Fraserian sense. Nora seemed to have been loved and to have been cared for as a child by her father and as a wife by her husband. She did not seem to have experienced disrespect at all in all three spheres. As such, she fails to meet the criteria of misrecognition as "a case of withheld respect, esteem, or care." Her misrecognition is not "a case of status subordination" (Kompridis 2013, 7) as she had a respectable public status and an honorable reputation as a happy and dutiful wife. How then shall one respond to such a kind of misrecognition, "a condition in which 'words are called for' but 'there are no words,' which drives [Nora and Elizabeth] to extremes of expression" (10)?

We see from Kompridis's analysis of Nora's situation an emancipatory element in receptivity. When Nora voiced her suffering, she was not only asking to be recognized; she was seeking emancipation. Nora left Torvald to be free from her cage. The play's closing scene shows Nora slamming the door of her home with Torvald and, thereby, her previous life. We can think that even by doing this she can never be completely or truly emancipated because women during her time depended on their husbands. If she leaves Torvald, she will most likely end up like her friend Kristine Linde, a miserable widow. But she risks it anyway. She leaves Torvald to free herself, at least from her own estrangement to herself. Certainly, Nora is a suffering individual. But she refuses Torvald's forgiveness, which will not free her. So, what kind of freedom does she want then? What shall emancipate her from her misery? She cannot go on as before. But what does it mean to want to go on a different way? And what of us, like Torvald, who are called to respond? What is at

stake if we give the call a listen and we hear it demand from us a different response? We are being asked to go on differently. But can we do that? Our discomfort to change our ways implies that there is something at stake, something we are afraid of losing.

If we heed the call of another voice, it is as if we are risking ourselves to be *called out* every day. The voice does not just make a call; it calls us out. And we will be in a position where we will always be answerable, will be invited to respond (just like the characters and commenters of *A Doll's House*). To be invited to respond is a difficult task: For one, we have our traditions and *personal matters* to attend to. The call-out is always an attack on our personal matters. If I have personal matters to take care of, why should I bother with other matters? Or: If I bother with other matters, what happens to me now? When we realize that the call does matter, we will be in a position to rethink, perhaps even relinquish, everything that we thought *only* mattered. Receptivity then is political because it is about making sense of something and at the same time about risking something.

It is easy to imagine the event of the new as stemming from a suffering that had become too unbearable as to demand, all of a sudden, a kind of mattering. If we will hold on to possibilities—and we must, according to Kompridis—what do we want to matter? “Possibilities” seem abstract, as if anything goes, or anything could matter. But if we adhere to that rationale, then it all loses sense. Perhaps we want the possibility not only of suffering voices being heard but also of wounds being healed. After all, something breaks down or becomes undone when a demand is made. Perhaps underlying Kompridis’s concept of receptivity is this sense of freedom that comes from what can be called *healing*. Kompridis (2011, 264) writes, “We become aware of new normative demands, new claims laid upon us by something or someone, calling us to respond, not just with any kind of response, but, rather, with one that requires, manifests, a freer relation to ourselves.”

In his contribution to *Philosophical Romanticism*, Kompridis (2006b, 35) talks about freedom as “a new self-determining beginning.” To illustrate this self-determining beginning, Kompridis cites as one of his examples the 2004 movie *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, which stars Jim Carrey as Joel and Kate Winslet as Clementine. After two years of being together, the romantic relationship between Joel and Clementine breaks apart. Heartbroken and wanting to move on, they both erase each other from their memories using advanced

technology that can delete unwanted memories in the brain. Prior to the deletion process, however, they both used an audio recording to archive their reasons for wanting to delete memories of each other. Nonetheless, after the memory deletion, Fate has them meet again and they fall in love with each other all over again. It is easy to begin anew when one starts from zero but the challenge of beginning anew becomes a problem for Joel and Clementine upon discovering they had already been lovers who had erased each other from their memories. With the audio recordings on their reasons for ending their relationship in hand, they hear the terrible things that they have said about each other. Joel and Clementine now face the dilemma of pursuing their relationship and risk breaking up all over again. Can they still move forward with their rekindled relationship after re-learning about their painful past?

In Kompridis's analysis of *Eternal Sunshine*, healing plays a role in beginning anew. How do we treat the (painful) past when we talk about beginning anew, about going on differently? Kompridis (2006b, 51) writes, "All this can be frighteningly comic because it entails a commitment to one's own possible self-transformation." Furthermore, "in risking failure, we also risk entering the domain of the comedy, where the joke's on us." This newfound freedom is daunting. Healing entails that one, having learned from the past, has to move forward. But can one deliver? This question is daunting because it makes new beginnings frightening; while new beginnings are enticing and while we see them as a must, it is too frightening to commit to them. But perhaps we also enter the domain of tragedy when we fail—if we can call failed revolutions tragedies—or perhaps a heartbreaking drama, a sad breakup, where two lovers resign to the fact that they cannot begin anew together because they know full well that they cannot commit to being accountable or answerable to the future. Nora once again comes to mind: She breaks up with Torvald and he lets her go—there's no stopping Nora. For while Nora is committed to the new, whatever it may entail, Torvald is frightened. In the end, they both know they cannot go on together as before. Nora walks out the door; Torvald does not stop her.

5. "ME TOO" AS REFLECTIVE DISCLOSURE

Critique as receptivity and reflective disclosure aims at recognition and freedom.⁶ Receptivity, however, has been regarded as lacking critical relevance (Bivens 2009; Glass 2010; Schoolman 2011),⁷ and

the developing literature on the value of receptivity in politics have been, so far, slow and little.⁸ Matereke (2012, 163) has introduced “how receptivity may help the postcolonial world to transform its own self-understanding and to re-envision alternative possibilities.” In the article, Matereke problematizes the postcolonial condition in Africa and introduces postcolonial receptivity, an alternative “form of understanding that enhances not only the conditions of possibility of transforming social and political conditions of life in [the African] postcolonial setting, but also the conditions of intelligibility of life therein” (166).

In presenting the Me Too movement as a suitable example of a critical response that employs a stance of receptivity to fuel its critical energies and commitments to social transformation, this paper hopes that more theorists explore and appreciate receptivity as a critical attitude.

There are two angles from which to look at the Me Too movement: first is as a call and the second is as a response. Me Too as a call is much like the call that Nora made. It articulates a pain. For many survivors, psychological violence hurts more than physical violation. There is the pain of being lost to oneself, of losing one’s voice because of shame and guilt. There is the pain of not having the words to articulate such pain, the pain of being forced to hide and keep silent. The pain of doubting your reality or your lucidity (“Did it really happen?”). The call-out challenges not only existing patriarchal views of women as objects to whose bodies men are entitled, but also—through the voicing of trauma—unsettles the current state of things where men can sexually harass or assault women with impunity. It calls for a new norm: to not let perpetrators get away with it and to hold them accountable. It invites us to rethink masculinity as one that is not characteristic of entitlement and power. It invites us to rethink and recognize women’s sexual agency.

But Me Too is also a response, one that empowers survivors to voice their pain, which has been silenced and rendered unintelligible not only to the world, but also to the survivors themselves. As a response, Me Too aims to acknowledge survivors’ pain and trauma. The process of mutual recognition inherent in the utterance “me too” makes visible the epistemic injustice suffered by survivors of sexual violence, helping survivors feel seen or heard and thereby overcome epistemic injustice (Jackson 2018). By being receptive to the call, we are able to let “it become a voice that we did not allow to hear before” and respond “to it in a way that demands something of us that we

could not have recognized before” (Kompridis 2011, 264). From such a stance of receptivity it becomes necessary to entertain the possibility that the ways of going on as before have to be discontinued. Through receptivity, we allow ourselves to be unclosed to possibilities for change, change to which we shall feel obligated because, as Kompridis (2013, 21) writes, “it is here, in this gap between who we have been and who we might become, that we see our own freedom is at stake, and where we may ‘find’ it manifested.”

Me Too as a response allows not only for survivors’ voices to be heard but more importantly makes these voices matter. Thus, the hashtag #WhyIdidnotreport⁹ added to the conversation of Me Too, shedding light on how our present methods and systems of pursuing justice are so broken that they silence victims’ voices. As many survivors share, they wrestle with reporting their assaulters because of fear of causing harm to another person or family, fear that sending their assaulters to jail will not fix what has been broken, fear of being uncertain whether it was their actions or clothes that invited the violence.

For example, in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the #DontTellMeHowToDress exhibit was launched on November 25, 2018 at a mall in Manila, Philippines. The exhibit displayed clothing and personal testimonies from survivors of sexual assault. It was the main part of the #DontTellMeHowToDress campaign sparked by Cindy Sirinya Bishop, a Thai supermodel, after Thai local authorities warned women “not to dress sexily” to avoid sexual harassment. According to Bishop, “By displaying the clothes, ranging from sweat pants to a toddler’s playsuit, the exhibition aims to challenge the misconception that it is what a woman wears that is the main cause of rape and sexual assault.” The exhibition in Manila was part of the nationwide campaign #RespetoNaman in the Philippines. Inspired by the global #MeToo and Time’s Up movements,¹⁰ #RespetoNaman aimed to challenge the culture of victim-blaming in the country and empower women to stand up against gender-based violence, particularly rape and sexual harassment (Ham 2019).

Me Too as a call has made many of us feel uncomfortable, overwhelmed, or threatened, just like what Ibsen’s Nora did to Torvald and her real-life critics. It is challenging our current codes around sexual tensions and current understandings about violence, power, and even desire. It is quite expected that there are now fears around policing our sexual bodies or, perhaps equally worse, random

accusations that could spell the end of someone's career. Sure, these fears are valid, like how Torvald's fears are valid. But Kompridis (2011, 264) reminds that "it is the task of our reflective stance of receptivity to attune ourselves to the selectivity of our reception, and to understand how this came to be so." Further, we do not live in "a world unencumbered by normative expectations that arise from sharing a life with diverse human and non-human others." We are always already at stake. Demands for change, demands to listen and respond will therefore be unavoidable. Of course, like Torvald, we can choose to attune our hearing to our own paranoid voice rather than to the Other's pained voice. But the failure to be receptive, the refusal to risk who we are and what matters to us, not only "renders voiceless someone with whom we claim to share a life, a common fate" (265) but also renders us incapable of contesting our prereflective understanding of people and things—in this case, our prereflective understanding of consent, sex, desire, power, violence—and therefore risks being stuck in that space, risks the failure of having a freer relation to ourselves, risks being caged in this view of the world that we know or feel renders someone miserable.

In one of the chapters of her book *Down Girl*, Kate Manne (2017, 221) talks about how a culture of blaming or suspecting those who claim victimhood are justified or supported by "purely descriptive sociology." Thus, she mentions sociologists Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning (2014), who thinks that publicizing microaggressions is a form of social control, and Haidt (2015), who thinks "the culture of victimhood" explains "the rise" or rather the "scourge" of "trigger warnings, safe spaces, as well as the deployment of the microaggressions framework on college campuses" (Manne 2017, 222).

These examples mentioned by Manne attest to what Kompridis describes as our tendency to not attune, if not failure to attune, our hearing to the new. When victims come forward, it is also the case that they find a need to voice something out. It is not just to garner sympathy or what victim-blamers would phrase as "playing victim" all for sympathy and attention. As Manne (2017) presents, one places so much at stake when one comes forward. It is not as if victims gain much—especially when it comes to sympathy—when they come forward to voice their story. If anything, what they garner is hate, hostility, a lot of bashing (and here again, Nora comes to mind).

The phrase "me too," lest we forget, is not directed at the perpetrator; it is made to reassure a fellow survivor. It has become a

powerful call-out nonetheless because it has been echoed by so many women, so now it is loud enough for perpetrators and third parties to hear. What makes survivors' speech powerful, and sometimes scary, is that they challenge our current normative understandings. In addition to dismantling our current understandings of consent, agency, power, violence, and entitlement, survivors' speech also calls into the spotlight our unchecked biases, even our internalized misogyny.

Manne (2017, 231) has also mentioned repeatedly that misogynists hate women who are threatening because they seem to withhold from dominant men the goods that they believe they are entitled to, such as care, listening, sympathy, and soothing. In addition, part of those goods are also understanding and forgiveness. When women come forward, something in the status quo is shaken. For men, they are worried about their cherished entitlements; for some of us feminists or friends of survivors, we become worried about the backlash or vendettas. We might find ourselves telling victims not to cause trouble because it is just way too frightening. And then we might, as Manne (2017) shows in one chapter, be more attuned to hearing exonerating narratives. And then we might find ourselves also failing to attune ourselves to what we are hearing, such that we diagnose instead the dangers that the so-called victimhood culture brings to the table (social control, trigger warnings, safe spaces), instead of the dangers that victims have survived.

Meanwhile, if we take on the normative challenge of the call, if we are unclosed to the new, "we become more aware of how our languages and social practices establish conditions of intelligibility and possibility, and so more aware not just of what can be intelligibly said and done, but also of the ineliminable presence of something that *cannot* be intelligibly said or done" (Kompridis 2011, 267). Through such receptivity, we may appreciate that change and possibilities are directly tied to our agency. Possibilities, when they are disclosed, make a call or demand on us. That we can experience them as demands "tells us something about the specific normativity of critique" and that is "to initiate some kind of change, in our world, in our relations with one another, in ourselves" (269–70).

The Me Too movement—by facilitating intimate conversations among survivors to disrupt sexual violence, thereby empowering survivors to reclaim their agency—works from such a stance of being unclosed to possibilities. This receptivity is what allows Me Too to acknowledge our "interdependencies and interconnections" (Kompridis 2011, 270), which further motivates the movement to commit to a practice of radical healing that works at addressing *the*

shared pain between survivors and perpetrators. It is from this radical healing that the hope of a new world lies. As Burke notes, part of the work of Me Too is finding “a clearer understanding of what justice is and what people need to feel whole” because “many perpetrators are themselves survivors of sexual violence” (Adetiba and Burke 2017). In addressing this shared pain (or shared fate, if you will), Me Too moves toward a different way of going on, toward (in the words of a survivor) “a world beyond an abuser/survivor binary” (Pham 2018). Me Too ventures into these uncharted paths because it is here where wounds could be healed, where healing/freedom is possible. It might sound unfair that survivors even have to acknowledge their violator’s pain in order to heal, but perhaps there is no other way, perhaps this is how to move forward and in a different way.

In Me Too, feminist politics becomes not just a struggle for recognition or justice but one of “building receptivity” by which he means acknowledging a “world of ‘strange multiplicity,’” where “formerly handy dualisms such as ‘distance and periphery,’ ‘us and them,’ no longer perform a useful function, no longer make sense” (Kompridis 2011, 270). We can imagine this building receptivity as an active, constant, healthy, and careful *hearing each other out*, where not only parties are given the chance to speak but there is sensitivity to why the other party cannot sometimes speak, sensitivity to the limits of our current normative understandings.

What kind of change shall we work toward then, particularly regarding the call of “me too”? Like Nora’s, the kind of pain that survivors of sexual violence try to articulate is not something which justice can mend. In the Philippines alone, many rape survivors do not report about the abuse and do not pursue justice because the rapist is someone they know, someone with whom they have a relationship—their lover, their father or uncle, a neighbor, a friend (Gutierrez 2017; Virtudes 2020). These survivors want to be free; they want to heal.

The question “How are we supposed to respond to this?” is difficult to answer. But we miss the chance at a better world with less suffering voices (a world with less abusers and predators, if you will, just to shift the attention) if we do not heed the call to at least listen. Without a stance of receptivity, we might miss the chance of a possibility-disclosing critique. Perhaps the proper response is to not say anything right away, to hold space, to speak only to reassure that one hears, that one acknowledges the pain. There is still something to pick up, to wager from there, that is, from acknowledging: Of course, it doesn’t have to be this way.

6. EPILOGUE

This article belabored to show that Me Too is a movement that is committed to social transformation. The analysis of the phenomenon introduced receptivity as a critical stance that can help us navigate the textured and tensioned relations we have with Others. The struggle of multiple voices speaking all at once is an issue that is not exclusive to the Global North. In fact, it often deals with multiculturalism because of the migration of diverse peoples to the Global North. The Global South is no different. Critical analyses on the region, which is overburdened by deep demarcations along identities that nonetheless culturally intertwine, can benefit from employing receptivity as a critical tool. All the more it is necessary to attune our listening to long-marginalized, long-suffering voices who are risking familiarity and safety to open possibilities of social transformation.

Back in 2017, when the phrase “me too” exploded on Twitter and other social media networks globally, the phrase resonated with me despite never having had the experience to have to utter “me too” (thankfully). It struck me with such a force that it demanded from me—a listener—a response, one I never really knew how to make. For years I have heard family, relatives, and friends say to me “this happened to me,” and I never thought there were possibilities outside disgust, anger, and frustration over something so commonplace. For years I thought that the only right thing to do was to take care of yourself so that it does not happen to you or, when worse comes to worst, just file a case against your perpetrator—something, I have learned, many survivors do not consider doing. The choice to focus on the Me Too movement was intentional because it is painfully necessary. I felt it a responsibility to try to give the normative challenges posed by voices uttering “me too” the consideration they deserve and demand. The call of Me Too is not going away. We will always be burdened to respond.

NOTES

- * The first part of the title, “How are we supposed to respond to this?”, is somewhat an appropriation of Peter Singer’s question in his reflection on J.M. Coetzee’s fiction-lectures: “All I want to know is: how am I supposed to reply to this?” The same quoted line was used by Kompridis as the title of a section in one of his articles. See Peter Singer’s reflection in Coetzee’s 1999 novella *The Lives of Animals* and Nikolas Kompridis (2013).
- 1 Apollo C. Quiboloy is a Filipino pastor who heads the megachurch Kingdom of Jesus Christ (KOJC) based in Davao City. A self-proclaimed “appointed son of God,” the influential evangelist has a following of seven million. In 2023, ex-KOJC members and victims of Quiboloy began coming forward to accuse him of rape, child abuse, and sex trafficking, prompting Senator Risa Hontiveros the following year to initiate a senate inquiry into the allegations (see Chappell 2024; Lim 2024). Teresita Valdehueza, one of the victims who testified against Quiboloy, narrated at the October 23, 2024 senate hearing the abuses she endured from the church leader, including being physically punished when she told the church ministers about his abuses and eventually her silencing through fear (see Magsambol 2024).
- 2 “Coming out” is when survivors come forward and speak about their Me Too experience. “Calling out” is when survivors and/or supporters name the perpetrators and seek accountability. In the case of Me Too, the calling out is done publicly through social media.
- 3 This is the so-called slogan of second-wave feminism in the 1960s. The slogan meant that women’s everyday lives are shaped by power relations (see Lee 2007).
- 4 Some of the criticisms quoted by Templeton (1989, 28) are as follows: “*A Doll’s House* represents a woman imbued with the idea of becoming a person, but it proposes nothing categorical about women becoming people; in fact, its real theme has nothing to do with the sexes” (Adams 1957, 416); “Ibsen’s Nora is not just a woman arguing for female liberation; she is much more. She embodies the comedy as well as the tragedy of modern life”; “[The play is] pitched beyond sexual difference” (Haugen 1979, vii); “[Ibsen] was completely indifferent to [the woman question] except as a metaphor for individual freedom” (Brustein 1962, 105); “Little by little the topical controversy died away; what remained was the work of art, with its demand for truth in every human relation” (Koht 1971, 323).
- 5 The exact words of Ibsen (1964) as quoted in Templeton (1989, 28; italics added): “I thank you for the toast, but must disclaim the honor of having consciously worked for the women’s rights movement. . . . True enough, it is desirable enough to solve the *woman problem, along with all the others*; but that has not been the whole purpose. My task has been the description of humanity.”

- 6 This is the main argument in the author's master's thesis, which identified recognition and freedom as the underlying objectives of receptivity (see De Castro 2023).
- 7 A common observation by reviewers of Nikolas Kompridis (2006a).
- 8 See the articles by Coles, Kompridis, Nedelsky, and Norval in the 2011 special issue of *Ethics & Global Politics* ("A Politics of Receptivity"). See also Norval (2009), Matereke (2012), and Beausoleil (2014).
- 9 The hashtag came as a response after Dr. Christine Blasey Ford testified in the US Senate against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh some thirty years after he sexually harassed her (Taylor 2018).
- 10 Time's Up was a non-profit organization founded in 2018 by over 300 women in Hollywood as a response to the Me Too movement. It aimed to connect survivors to "legal and public relations assistance" and end "the systemic inequities that underlie sexual violence" by "framing sexual violence not merely as a problem of pathological individuals but of pathological systems" (Hostler and O'Neil 2018). It "ceased operations in January 2023" following problems in its leadership, but it helped launch industry-specific groups like Time's Up Tech and Time's Up Healthcare (Kosmidis 2024). Like "me too," the phrase "time's up" was a call that demanded urgency, inspiring independent initiatives like call-outs in academia in India and the Philippines (see Saxena 2018; Tan et al. 2021). In the Philippines, Time's Up Ateneo has taken up the phrase in its name although independent from the Hollywood-formed organization. Since 2019, it "has been engaging the Ateneo de Manila University administration in its efforts to transform the institution's responses to sexual violence in the university" (Time's Up Ateneo n.d.).

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