THE FILIPINO WOMAN: A Gendered History

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Abstract

This paper explores the historical, religious and philosophical underpinnings of how women have been relegated into the background in recent years by tracing the history of women in the Philippines.

The respected status Filipino women enjoyed during the pre-Spanish Philippines were predicated on the notion of equality and partnership dictated by the social roles played by both men and women. Spanish conquest of the Philippines altered the hitherto existing social order. The Spanish imposed religion in the colony which had so much misogynistic ideas that demeaned women.

Centuries of Spanish colonialism had disfigured the social landscape for women in the Philippines. Womanhood was bestowed with new meanings to the disadvantage of women. And yet the women of the Philippines themselves had been vindicated and they have restored the social status of respect they once enjoyed.

Currently, the entire legal system of the Philippines had already taken cognizance of the important role of women in nation building. What remains is whether or not such policy pronouncements get implemented.

Keywords: gender, genderlect, misogyny, patriarchy, sexism.

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Introduction

The biblical account of creation in the Book of Genesis tells us that the Creator made man in His own image. Man and woman He created them (Genesis 1:27). The chronology of creation, however, gave primacy to man. After the created man has settled in the Garden of Eden (2:15), the Creator said: "it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him" (2:18). The Creator thus formed out of the ground various wild animals and various birds of the air and brought it to man...but none proved to be a suitable partner for the man (2:20). Consequently, the Creator caused man to sleep and out of his rib He created a new being called 'woman' for out of her man, this one has been taken (2:21-23). It thus appeared that as man's companion, the woman was not even the first choice.

Taking the story of creation a bit further, the woman succumbed to temptation. She ate the forbidden fruit which she also gave to the man (3:6-7). When the Creator confronted them on what they did, the man placed all the blame on the woman (3:12). As a consequence, to the woman the Creator said: "I will intensify the pangs of your childbearing; in pain shall you bring forth children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall be your master" (3:16). And to the man He said: "Cursed be the ground because of you! In toil shall you eat its yield all the days of your life" (3:17). And then, they were banished from the Garden of Eden (3:23). Pain and suffering has entered the world through the woman.

The Church and Misogyny

From the early church came misogyny — hatred of the female sex. Drawing ideas from the 'temptation of Eve', the male dominated church had been most unfair and truly unkind to women. The letters of Saint Paul, and the writings of the church fathers such as Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, St. Jerome and later those of St. Thomas Aquinas are replete with typical anti-feminine ideas (Mananzan, 1991). The enduring bias against women by churchmen is

shown by the Latin word 'femina', from where the word female is taken. 'Femina' literally means 'less in faith' (Peczon, 1996). One of the church fathers, Tertullian, was even blunter and less forgiving when referring to woman. He said:

> Women, you ought to dress yourselves in mourning and rags...You are the door of hell; you corrupt him whom the devil dare not approach; you finally are the cause why Jesus Christ had to die (Ander-Egg, 1880).

St. Augustine too, shared a very low regard for the feminine counterpart by declaring them as 'unstable animals'. Thus as cited in Mananzan (1991):

> When women bore the marks of marital conflict, he [St. Augustine] would tell them it was their fault. He cites three arguments with which faithless husbands seek to silence their wives: We are men, you are women, we are head, you are the members, we are masters, and you are slaves (Kelly, 1991).

For his part, St. Thomas Aquinas, despite his genius and his being a giant of the faith, considers women as 'frustrated males'. So much was the hatred against woman that even men, who in marriage had been 'contaminated' by women, are deemed unworthy to serve the church. After the 4th century, married men could no longer become priests; neither could priests marry, because of the fear of contamination in marriage (Mananzan, 1991).

The church-inspired anti-feminist ideas defined the unequal and at times contemptuous relationship that has for long characterized man's relationship with woman. Gracian (1975) aptly described the resultant relationship thus:

> Different kinds of temptations make war on man in his various ages, some when he is young, and others when he is old; *but woman threatens him perpetually*. Neither the

youth, nor the adult, nor the old man, nor the wise, nor the brave, nor even the saint is ever safe from a woman (*mine*).

Church misogyny sanctions in every way the necessity and propriety of male dominance in affairs both spiritual and secular. The generated mindset of male superiority is reinforced by men's structural capacity for forcible entry into women's structural vulnerability. This physiological factor brings about a psychological awareness in man which renders his ability of forcible entry as a vehicle of his victorious conquest of her, being the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood (Brownmiller, 1975).

Recalling the Church's deceitful and violent history, the novelist Dan Brown notes the brutal crusade against free thinking women for a span of three centuries, employing methods as inspired as they were horrific (Brown, 2003: 134). He notes:

> The Catholic Inquisition published the book that arguably could be called the most blood-soaked publication in human history. *Malleus Maleficarum* – or *The Witches' Hammer* – indoctrinated the world to 'the dangers of free thinking women' and instructed the clergy how to locate, torture and destroy them. Those deemed 'witches' by the Church included all female scholars, priestesses, gypsies, mystics, nature lovers, herb gatherers, and any women 'suspiciously attuned to the natural world'. Midwives also were killed for their heretical practice of using medical knowledge to ease the pain of childbirth – a suffering, the Church claimed, that was God's rightful punishment for Eve's original sin. During three hundred years of witch hunts, the Church burned at stake an astounding five million women.

Men at the expense of women have shaped male-centered and male-dominated bureaucracies with their concomitant structures, cultures, authority relations management styles and division of labor. As such, they represent the interest of men (Goetz 1992). Women are thus

made ineligible for political roles (Richter, 1990). Practices and beliefs in tradition, politics, and religion, perpetuated throughout most of history are unfavorable to women (UNCHR, 2006). Men on the contrary have all the opportunities and privileges as a whole in terms of power and control (Women Watch, 2006).

Gender and Gendered Institutions, Identities and Roles

Since the dawn of history throughout the world, human activities, practices, and institutions are organized along the social distinction people make between men and women or, by gender. By definition, gender refers to the socio-cultural distinction between males and females. It is a socially constructed framework to make sense of and deal with sex difference. The consequent gender identities are the conceptions that a person has on being male or female and becomes part of one's self-concept reinforced by social interaction. Gender identity emerges as people enact gender roles and are reacted to by others as being either male or female (Hughes & Kroehler, 2002).

Gender roles are sets of cultural expectations that define ways of behavior for either sex. They constitute master statutes that carry primary weight in people's interactions and relationships with others. In doing so, they place men and women in the social structure, establishing where and what they are in social terms. Gender roles are a major source of social inequality (Anderson & Gibson, 2002). The resultant inequality is due to the fact that for the most part, social institutions have historically been developed by men, are currently dominated by men, and are symbolically interpreted from the standpoint of men. As such, they are gendered institutions. The only major institution in which women have had a central, defining role, although, a subordinate one, has been the family (Hughes & Kroehler, 2002).

The Underlying Ideology and Gender Inequality

The notion of gender as part of our cultural heritage is a defensive masculine model emphasized by the dominant group (men) who has access to power and meanings. Its purpose is to prevent recognition of

inequality thereby preventing the challenge posed against gender hierarchy and leave the system intact (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994).

Patriarchal ideology functions to make existing social inequalities acceptable. It provides a rationale that would make current state of affairs seem just or fair by systematically distorting social reality either by an exaggeration or under representation (Berger, 1972).

Ideology not only justifies the existing reality. It also constrains behavior and aspiration for social change. Also, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy that contributes to the behavior and social differences that they purport to explain (Lowe & Hubbard, 1983). It creates the perception that:

> Women are weaker and needs male protection; that women are and should remain wives, mothers, and homemakers and in looking for jobs, women themselves saw high occupational aspirations and steady commitment to a career as competing with their family role (Gatlin, 1987).

As the ongoing relations of men and women, gender is a socially prescribed relationship (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994). It is shaped over time by the changing social and political environment designed to set in place the dominance of one over the other. The inequality thus established is perpetuated by a set of complex process known as sexism.

> Sexism is the unconscious, taken for granted, assumed, unquestioned, unexamined, unchallenged acceptance of the belief that the world as it looks to men is the only world, that the way of dealing with it which men have created is the only way, that the values which men have evolved are the only ones, that the way sex looks to men is the only way it can look to anyone, that what men think about women are like is the only way to think what women are like (Horton, 1976).

Sexism involves the belief that one sex is superior to the other. At the institutional level, sexism involves policies, procedures, and practices that produce unequal outcomes for men and women. For instance, in some Middle Eastern countries today, women are not even allowed to drive cars.

The most pervasive form of institutional sexism is **patriarchy** — a system of social organizations in which men have a disproportionate share of power.

> Patriarchy is rooted in cultural and legal systems that historically gave fathers authority in family and clan matters, made wives and children dependent in husbands and fathers, and organized descent and inheritance through the male line (Hughes and Kroehler, 2002).

Consequently, most of the disparities between the feminine and masculine gender roles come about because of the greater power and status accorded to males than to females in patriarchal societies (Lips, 2001).

Sexism in Language

The human language is not a neutral instrument of communication. It reflects the power arrangement that is embedded in society itself. Along this vein, George Orwell (1949) was perhaps among the pioneers in pointing out the potency of language in the perpetuation of a desired social order. He coined and popularized words like *newspeak*[1], *doublethink, big brother, thoughtcrime* and many others in his novel 'Nineteen Eighty-Four'. Likewise, Norman Fairclough (1989), as one of the founders of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as applied to

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[1] George Orwell devoted an entire appendix in his book to discuss and explain the principles of Newspeak. The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide expression for the world view and mental habits proper to the desired social order, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought – that is, a thought diverging from the declared principles of society - should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words.

Sociolinguistics looked at how power is exercised through language. In this context, the reality of inequality in gender relations is likewise reflected in language use. Along this line, the Muted Group Theory argues that " women are not as free or as able as men are to say what they wish, when and where they wish, because the words and the norms for their use have been formulated by the dominant group, men" (Kramarae, 1981).

It becomes manifest that man-made language aids in defining, depreciating and excluding women. As women cease to be muted, men will no longer maintain their position of dominance (*ibid.*). Consequently, women and men use language differently so much so that Tannen (1990) proposed the idea men and women are actually speaking different dialects or genderlects. Among the basic tenets of genderlect are the following:

> **Why we communicate**: Women seek connection, men seek status. Women engage in communication to build and maintain relationships with others. By contrast, men are more likely to engage in talk only when it makes them look good, strong, competitive, or independent.

> **Style of Communicating**: Women use rapport talk, men use report talk. Women express emotions, share personal feelings, relate stories and listen emphatically (rapport talk). Men engage in competitive joking and assertive speech that wins control of the conversation (report talk).

> **Language**: We speak the same language but each gender has its own dialect. Each gender has its own set of vocabulary and preferred topics, and they use spoken language differently: Men talk to get things done (instrumental approach); women talk to interact with others (relational approach).

While genderlect theory simply identifies the differences in language use by men and women and refrains from pointing to the power

undercurrents underlying such differences, the reality remains that sexism as a pervading ideology is embedded in the language structure which subtly perpetuates the notion of gender inequality.

Taking cognizance of sexist tendencies in language use, the **Civil Service Commission** of the Philippines has taken the task of promoting gender fair language. To this effect, it has passed 'Memorandum Circular No. 12, S. 2005 on the Use of Non-Sexist Language in All Official Documents, Communications and Issuances.' Consequently beginning June 2000, Gender and Development (GAD) perspective have been integrated in the conduct of Civil Service Examinations partly through the use of non-sexist language in test items and in preparation of letters, memoranda, and issuances.

Taking a cue from the Civil Service Commission's Memorandum Circular, the Supreme Court of the Philippines subsequently issued in 2006 the **Supreme Court Administrative Circular**, S. 2006. It was addressed to all Justices, Judges, and Employees of the Judiciary in the matter of 'The   Use of Non-Sexist Language in All Official Documents, Communications and Issuances.' Below are some of the ways by which non-sexist language may be promoted in the communication process.[2]

1. Eliminate the generic use of *he, his*, or *him* unless the antecedent is obviously male by:

    a.   using plural nouns

        TRADITIONAL   :   The lawyer uses his brief to guide him.
        SUGGESTED   :   The lawyers use their brief to guide them.

    b.   deleting *he*, *his*, and *him* altogether, rewording if necessary

        TRADITIONAL   :   The architect uses his blueprint to guide him.

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[2] [SC Administrative Circular issued by MA. LUISA D. VILLARAMA, Clerk of Court]

SUGGESTED   :   The architect uses a blueprint as a guide.

c.   articles (*a, an, the*) for *his;* using *who* instead of *he*

TRADITIONAL   :   The writer should know his readers well.

SUGGESTED   :   The writer should know the readers well.

d.   using *one, we,* or *you*

TRADITIONAL   :   As one grows older, he becomes more reflective.

SUGGESTED   :   As one grows older, one becomes more reflective.

e.   using the passive voice

TRADITIONAL   :   The manager must submit his proposal today.

SUGGESTED   :   The proposal must be submitted by the manager today.

2. Eliminate the generic use of MAN. Instead, use *people, person(s), human(s), human being(s), humankind, humanity, the human race.*

TRADITIONAL   :   ordinary man, mankind, the brotherhood of man

SUGGESTED   :   ordinary people, humanity, the human family

3. Eliminate sexism in symbolic representations of gender in words, sentences, and texts by:

a.   taking the context of the word, analyzing its meaning, and eliminating sexism in the concept

| TRADITIONAL | : | feelings of brotherhood, feelings of fraternity |
| SUGGESTED | : | feelings of kinship, solidarity |

| TRADITIONAL | : | the founding fathers |
| SUGGESTED | : | the founders, the founding leaders |

| TRADITIONAL | : | the father of relativity theory |
| SUGGESTED | : | the founder/initiator of relativity theory |

b. finding precise words to delineate the thing itself from supposedly sex-linked characteristics

TRADITIONAL	:	Titanic was a great ship, but <u>she</u> now rests at the bottom of the sea
SUGGESTED	:	Titanic was a great ship, but <u>it</u> now rests at the bottom of the sea
TRADITIONAL	:	"Don't let <u>Mother Nature</u> rip you off! <u>She's</u> out to kill your car's new finish.... Stop <u>her</u>..."
SUGGESTED	:	"Don't let <u>Nature</u> rip you off" <u>It's</u> out to kill your car's finish... Stop <u>it</u>..."

4. Eliminate sexual stereotyping of roles by:

a. using the same term for both genders when it comes to profession or employment

| TRADITIONAL | : | salesman, stewardess |
| SUGGESTED | : | sales agent, flight attendant |

b.   using gender fair terms in lexical terms

> TRADITIONAL   :   sportsmanship
> SUGGESTED   :   highest ideals of fair play

c.   treating men and women in a parallel manner

> TRADITIONAL   :   I now pronounce you man and
>   wife.
> SUGGESTED   :   I now pronounce you husband and
>   wife.

d.   avoiding language that reinforces stereotyping images

> TRADITIONAL   :   a man's job, the director's girl
>   Friday
> SUGGESTED   :   a big job, the director's assistant

5.   Eliminate sexism when addressing persons formally by:

a.   using Ms. Instead of Mrs.

> TRADITIONAL   :   Mrs. dela Cruz
> SUGGESTED   :   Ms. dela Cruz

b.   using a married woman's first name instead of her husband's

> TRADITIONAL   :   Mrs. Juan dela Cruz
> SUGGESTED   :   Ms. Maria Santos-dela Cruz

c.   using the corresponding titles for females

> TRADITIONAL   :   Dra. Concepcion Reyes
> SUGGESTED   :   Dr. Concepcion Reyes

d.   using the title of the job or group in letters to unknown persons

TRADITIONAL	:	Dear Sir
SUGGESTED	:	Dear Editor, Dear Colleague

Women in Pre-colonial Philippines

The pre-colonial Philippine societies were composed of scattered family-based dwellings called the *barangay* (village). The settlers were never a people of great cultural or material advancement. Basic membership was in the family, and this, fulfilling the needs of a simple life, obviated the need for a public administrative class (Corpuz, 1957).

In the social context of the simple family-based way of life, there was equality between the sexes. A woman could become a chief of the *barangay*, could perform the role of the *babaylan* (priestess), and had rights to own property and obtain divorce. In case of separation, women were entitled to a share of conjugal earnings and to a share of children (Feliciano, 1996). Explaining the apparent equality of the sexes, Paterno (1887) noted that the concept of god among the ancient *Tagalogs* was more closely linked with women, and when linked with both the concepts of man and woman, there is a nuance of union, of mutuality and not of subordination. The equality of men and women in Philippine society is even reflected in their version of the account of creation. Both man and woman (*Si Malakas at si Maganda*) were created at the same time, coming out together as they were, from a bamboo that was split.[3]

Among the primitive communities in Asia, men and women tended to be viewed as equals since both had vital economic roles to play in supporting their families and communities. The advent of foreign religions i.e., Catholicism, brought about female inferiority. Masculine partiality excused Adam from the fall and laid the blame to Eve, the temptress (Editorial, Balai Asian Journal, 1985).

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[3] The Filipino account of the process of creation with its rich implications for the equality of the sexes was brought to the author's attention by Dr. Christine Godinez-Ortega of the English Department of the College of Arts and Social Sciences, MSU-IIT.

The women in pre-colonial Philippine society not only occupy a highly esteemed position in society. They enjoy a higher regard compared to men. Working on extant Spanish accounts of the Philippines and its inhabitants, Mananzan (1991) took a glimpse of the pre-colonial Philippine society and the status of women in it through the prism of the misogynistic eye of the colonizers themselves. Relying extensively on the works of early Spanish historians, she quotes Martin (1886) thus:

> The Spaniards were very vocal about their disdain of the Indio. He is described as indolent, taciturn, boastful, capricious, and hard headed, cowardly, and fond of gambling, lascivious, and indifferent... *Yet everyone recognizes the greater intellectual superiority of the Indian woman to the Indian man*, of whatever class or social condition. She is more serious and formal partner in making contracts (Italics mine).

While the native male (*indio*) is berated and given a low regard in such accounts, the woman is held with respect and admiration. The work of Retana (1888) is very instructive in this regard:

> In general the woman does not share the apathy shown by the man; industrious by nature and a devotee from childhood...*her development surpasses that of the man in no little way*...She has a talent for business, is indefatigable, industrious, well-prepared for the eventualities and is full of initiative. She possesses such endurance that she does the hardest work in the field instead of men (Italics mine).

Summing up the over all status of women during the pre-Spanish Philippines, a quote from the work of Valdez (1891) drives home the point:

> ...the law does not give her any special right or any official representation but by her own superiority the power of custom have made her, the woman, the principal instrument of nature, culture and power, more or less hidden which moves and directs the man in his public life and is the one who really controls domestic society.

It is clear that the Filipino woman enjoyed an elevated status prior to the coming of Spain. This status, however, was not to last for long as colonialism knocked on Philippine shores, ruining and adulterating everything in its wake.

Spanish Conquest and the Subordination of Women in the Philippines

The Philippines was colonized by Spain. It was a clash of cultures. In time, the indigenous culture was *hispanized*. Within the colonial context, the social being of women was invested with new meanings. Santos (1991) notes:

> The new Filipina was now her father's meek daughter, the husband's faithful subject, the church's obedient servant, and before marriage, a chaste virgin who would yield only to her husband, (and occasionally to the friar).

With the new meanings on womanhood comes the alteration of social roles that has hitherto been practiced in the native culture:

> The woman of the Spanish period was a woman tied to the house, whose main function was to bear children...Marriage was seen as their final fate, either to escape the state of servitude from the *among* or landlord, or from strict abusive parents...They did not participate in political discussions or undertakings, such activity being deemed as the exclusive arena for men... *Religion then became the women's overwhelming concern and sole refuge,* inspiring their lives with the martyrdom of male and female saints, cultivating in them an infinite capacity for forbearance, suffering and forgiveness of all venial mortal and male sins, obscuring in the process their capacity for greater involvement in things other than the hearth, home and heaven (Santos, 1991, Italics mine).

Even in the supposedly hallowed ground of the church within which women supposedly found refuge, anti-feminine ideas abound. Fr. Casimiro Dias, an Augustinian missionary of note in the Philippines thought it wise to give warnings about women to the priests assigned in the Philippines. He warns:

> Woman is the most monstrous animal in the whole of nature, bad tempered and worse spoken. To have this animal in the house is asking for trouble...for wherever a woman is, it would seem impossible to have peace and quiet...Not only should parish priests of Indians abstain from employing any woman in his home, but he should not allow any of them to enter, even if they are only paying a call (Boxer, 1975).

Held in low regard by the Church, the women suffered the same fate from the hands of the State. Spanish Laws were oppressive to women (Feliciano, 1996).

Spanish impositions, however, did not go unopposed. Jose Rizal pointedly admonished the women of his day. He sternly reminded them to always remember that a good mother does not resemble the mother that the friar has created (Quirino, 1940).

Women's Movement in the Philippines

In spite of the Spanish education designed to domesticate the Filipino woman, there were those who broke through the glass ceiling to exert their influences in history. Many women of the *Katipunan* as well as the women of Malolos, Bulacan contributed to the eventual consciousness-raising among women (Santos, 1991).

In the face of the colonial efforts to subjugate the Filipino woman into a submissive being, the women of the Philippines proved to be resilient, even stubborn in holding on to the native values which accorded them respect. The movement to reassert themselves easily found a groundswell of support for it simply reaffirmed Filipino womanhood in its pristine and unadulterated form. Santos (1991) catalogues the various

efforts in women organizing since 1893. She only observed a slowing down in women's organizing in the 1950s up to the early 1960s. She provided an explanation thus:

> Since the post war years (1950s-1960s) were relative years of peace for Filipinos who saw the electoral process as manifestation of democracy, there seemed to be no need for women to agitate for new reforms, much less structural change in society.

This explanation offers the plausible idea that women's involvement is triggered when there is social turmoil that would necessitate the participation of women in restoring order. The Philippine experience with former President Corazon Aquino's coming into power in the midst of the tumultuous years of the Marcos dictatorship and that of former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, following into the footsteps of a beleaguered president Joseph Estrada seem to corroborate this idea.

By the late 1960s and early 70s, the resurgence of women's movements again became apparent. Santos (1991), still following the same stream of arguments, notes:

> ... in the late 1960s another social upheaval ominously formed in our midst. The Vietnam War, the arms race, widening gap between the rich and the poor, political instability bred by the country's dependence on foreign capital and unbridled graft and corruption, all signaled another era in the long history of people's movement. Various nationalist movements/organizations were established precisely to rally around these causes. The call was for genuine sovereignty and democracy.

Tumultuous times, indeed it was. The social order of the 1970s spiraled into chaos and confusion as various threats (some real, some orchestrated, and some imagined) tended to tear apart the very fabric of society itself. President Marcos declared martial law in 1972. The

resulting demise of many social movements brought to naught the gains in the discourse on patriarchy as a cause in the oppression of women.

The very dictates of the economic development plans of the Marcos regime spelled out policies that would be nightmarish to every decent woman's movement. For one, the tourist industry has as its main attraction and commodity the Filipino women i.e., mail order brides and hospitality girls. The very recent statement of US ambassador to the Philippines Harry K. Thomas Jr. about the 'fact' that 40 percent of American tourists come to the country for purposes of sex is an indication that such policies have really taken hold. Although the good ambassador retracted his statement and apologized later, the fact remains that he struck a very sensitive nerve wired to a painful social cancer.

The Marcos years of dictatorship (1972-1986) closed down all avenues for democratic participation. The 1986 people power revolution which catapulted Corazon Aquino to the presidency restored the lost democratic space. With the restored political freedoms women's movements came back with a vengeance.

In 1974, the United Nations declared 1975-1985 as the UN Decade of Women. Gender issues entered the agenda of the international community and was concretized with the passage in 1979 of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The CEDAW provides the basis for realizing equality between men and women through ensuring women's equal access, and equal opportunities in political and public life. Not only did it establish an International Bill of Rights for Women, it also crafted an agenda for action by state parties to guarantee the enjoyment of those rights. As of 2006, the CEDAW has been ratified by over 160 states parties including the Philippines (UDHR 2006). So strong was the clamor for women's rights that gender concerns is included as one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) set by the United Nations which is targeted to be attained by 2015.

While the women's decade (1975-1985) focused the world's attention on the plight of women, it was relegated to the backburners of policy concerns in the Philippines. The country then was at the height of martial rule and President Marcos was desperately holding on to power. While the rest of the world responded favorably to the UN Declaration, the Philippines was really busied by other concerns, causing so many policy bottlenecks in as far as women's rights realization were concerned.

Consequently, it was only towards the end of the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985) which coincided with the end of the Marcos dictatorship (1984-1986) that women's groups reasserted themselves in response to the social turmoil and the weakening powerbase of the Marcos regime. All the events leading to the Marcos downfall and consequently the opening up of some democratic space was triggered by the assassination of Senator Benigno Aquino Jr. That fatal event spawned numerous women groups and rekindled among women a fighting spirit to join forces and be visible and heard (Lanot, 1991).

The set of social forces triggered and unleashed by the assassination of former Senator Benigno Aquino Jr. became known worldwide as the people power revolution. It catapulted out of power one of the longest staying dictators in Asia and ushered in the installation of the very first woman president of the Philippines — Corazon Cojuangco Aquino.

Issues concerning Corazon Aquino's legitimacy as president necessitated the drafting of a new Constitution for the country — the 1987 Constitution. Perhaps because of the UN Declaration of the International Decade of women; perhaps because of her leadership as the first ever woman president; or perhaps simply because of the democratic space which ushered in the proliferation of women's movements, the Constitution of 1987 was the very first Constitution in Philippine history that clearly addressed the concerns of women. As a matter of state policy:

The state recognizes the role of women in nation-building, and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men' (Article 11, Section 14).

Likewise, to ensure women's guaranteed participation in policy making, the women sector is, among the so-called marginalized sectors, given a seat in the House of Representatives through the party list system (Article VI, section 5, paragraph 2). Cascading down to the local government units consisting of the provinces, cities, municipalities and *barangays* (Article X, section1), there is a legal mandate to have women sectoral representatives among others in their local legislative bodies (Article X, section 9).

Moreover, the Local Government Code (LGC, 1991) specified the inclusion of women in the *Sangguniang Bayan* (the legislative body of the municipality, LGC, section 446.b); in the *Sangguniang Panlunsod* (the legislative body of the city, LGC, section 457.b); and the *Sangguniang Panlalawigan* (the legislative body of the province, LGC, section 467.b).

The government's commitment to empower women is concretized in the enactment of laws and plans to mainstream their concerns in the general body politic. To this end, the Philippine Development Plan for Women (1987-1992) was passed. Thereafter, Republic Act 7192 known as "An Act Promoting the Integration of Women as Full and Equal Partners of Men in Development and Nation Building and For Other Purposes" was passed in February 12, 1992. Section 2 of this Act provides for the earmarking of foreign sourced assistance for GAD purposes.

Moreover and further on, since 1995, the allocation of the GAD budget of five percent (5%) of the total government budget has been institutionalized through the annual General Appropriations Act. Also, the mandate was given to local government units to organize local councils of women as avenues for women to have access to these funds. On top of these, various specific memorandum circulars and development plans were passed related to Gender and Development.

Clearly the struggle of women for equality has come a long way. The laws of the country, as far as women issues are concerned are already in place.

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