

## The Woman Question: Exploring Feminist Epistemology in the Philippines\*

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*"Before we can act to change a situation, we must know how it has arisen and evolved, and through what institutions it now operates ... We must also examine the historic flow of knowledge in order to discover in the social dynamics thus created, the means of transforming the contradictions." [1]*

### **Understanding women's discourse calls for grounding our epistemology in terms of naming women's experience.**

*Feminist epistemology, along with feminist ontology and feminist methodology, offer a distinct epistemic advantage in re-conceptualizing knowledge on women's issues and the general order of things wherein women's experience and voices have been rendered "muted" by mainstream knowledge.*

For the last four decades or so, the *sociology of knowledge* has been changing replete with varying paradigms like a seascape in which the scene is constantly shifting. *In this process of historical change, women's studies made a significant contribution in knowledge-building. It has successfully put forward the agenda that women's experiences are important sources of knowledge and that gender as an important aspect of social relations influence social realities in relation to class, race and other sub-cultural discourse.*

We have to acknowledge that the dynamics of knowledge production, dissemination and replication is also a function of power-relations in society. Society is an abstraction of a complex set of relationships --- woman and man, classes and sub-groups among men and women, inter-states (as seen among nations).

Hence, our knowledge about ourselves and of the world could best be understood along this light. And so, is our knowledge on women - women in the Philippines in this particular context.

Perhaps, the most important development in the generation of knowledge in the Philippines for the past two decades is on women and women's issues.

As Leela Dube puts it:

There has been a spate of studies on women in recent years in the Philippines, and a considerable volume of research is now available... Several institutions engaged in research and action programs are functioning in the Philippines. Concern for the integration of women in development is bringing forth many kinds of studies on various aspects of women's lives. (2)

### *Why this upsurge of interest in women?*

From an institutional point of view, this concern for women was a consequence of the blueprint made by the United Nations (UN) to integrate women in "development," in response to the articulations of the women's movements that women have been marginalized in the development process especially after the first decade of development in the 1960s. The emphasis of the first development decade was colored by a highly political issue, population. And women, especially in Third World countries belonging to low-income groups were and still are the target of population activities towards reducing fertility growth. The assumption is that social problems (i.e. poverty) are caused by "too many people." (3)

\*This paper is based on the writer's master's thesis entitled "Tapestry of Knowledge on Women in the Philippines, 1975-1990."

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Along this line, studies on women in the Philippines during the 1970s were geared towards knowledge on fertility concerns as basis for population activities.

While the declaration of 1975 as an International Year of Women by the UN and the consequent Decade for Women (1976-1985) recognize the role of women throughout the world, what transpired during the period was simply a "lip-service" amidst the problems and issues struggled by women, across classes and cultures.

*The culture of poverty* exemplified by the burdens women carried for family survival, their poor health and increase of maternal mortality due to birth-related causes, remains. The *Decade for Women* came. It has gone unnoticed by the same beings who could have benefited the period. The development scheme designed for them did not answer their needs.

However, the succeeding development approaches on women (i.e. women and development, gender and development, gender in development) especially in the '90s have made considerable progress on women's situation with the institutional and related commitments of governments, international agencies and NGOs, especially after the Beijing Women's Conference.

On the other hand, the interest in women was borne-out of the advocacy and articulation by women regarding social inequities throughout the world even before the decade for women. These are well-documented in the United States and other Western countries, as well as in Third World countries. In the Philippines, there were also women who brought to the fore inequalities that discriminated against women, since the 1930s up to the present.

The genuine concern for the improvement of women's lives articulated by these women was appropriated by the institutional forces dominated by men with policy-powers via the women-in-development (WID) approach of development.

*Other forces came into fore that further pushed women's concerns into a nodal point where the woman question could no longer be ignored.*

In the Philippines, the socio-economic hardships experienced by both men and women as well as the growing consciousness on socio-political issues that breed people's marginalization led to a more organized people's movement. **While there were women advocates on women's issues before the 1970s, the more pronounced women's movement was felt in the 1980s, in conjunction with the growing nationalist movement in the country.**

The birth of several cause-oriented women's organizations in the first half of 1980 generated new concerns for women other than the interest on quantitative data and behavioral descriptions done by local and international agencies. This was eventually followed by the germination of women's studies program in the academe (i.e. St. Scholastica's College, University of the Philippines, Silliman University, Philippine Women's University, Miriam College, De La Salle University, Ateneo de Manila University).

*The woman question was and still is the concern of both the women's movement in the Philippines as well as its academic component: **women's studies.*** Knowledge on the problem as to why women have occupied a subordinate position in Philippine society has been problematized. (4) This general concern has led to generation of information that negates imbedded myths on Filipino women propagated by earlier writings.

One thing is clear though. That women in the Philippines is not a homogeneous group. They are comprised of different occupational sectors cut across socio-economic classes. Information regarding Filipino women can mirror experiential reality if and only if the heterogeneity is recognized and taken into account.

## Knowledge on Filipino Women

Knowledge generated on Filipino women have varying hues. Image-wise, Filipino women are portrayed in a spectrum of contradictions. Castillo (1976) mirrored it: "the Filipino woman is seen as exalted, subservient, emancipated and romantically feminine." They are seen as dominant figures in the household, as caretakers and family budget managers (NCRFW, 1976; Sevilla, 1989).

Quito (1978) argues that "in the Philippines, there is no quarrel between the sexes. If a woman is accorded an exalted position, the men do not resent it; they even encourage it." A view which reflects a patriarchal perspective.

inhibited women ... this has kept them in occupations like nursing, education, and nutrition which are related to household socialization and nurturance tasks" (Eviota, 1978). Hence, it is no wonder that "the most significant activity of women is housekeeping" (Castillo, 1979). Sevilla (1989) further stressed this point. **"The household is the Filipino woman's primary world with marriage as their ultimate destiny."**

*The foregoing ideas are preliminary information on women in the Philippines. As we move on to the information written about the different sectors, the parameters of our understanding are greatly enhanced.*

# the woman ??? in the philippines

Such stipulation runs parallel to the observation that "authority patterns and decision-making processes are generally shared between husband and wife" (Rojas-Aleta, 1977). In the same way that Filipino women are said to be "generally satisfied with their marriage even if they are subordinate to their husbands" (Social Research Laboratory, U.P., 1977).

*Yet, behind these positive images are more concrete conditions that jolt us to balance our perspective.*

"Filipino women have low status and limited access to social options because of traditional sex roles and structures" (Eviota, 1978). Such low status are shown in different aspects. "Women's jobs are less prestigious than men's jobs; women earn less than men even within the same occupational group" (SLR, U.P., 1977). "There are very few women in political positions, especially at higher levels" (Castillo, 1976). "Sex role socialization has

### Rural women

They compose two-thirds of the total women population and are mostly categorized as housekeepers (Rojas-Aleta, 1977). Pineda-Ofreneo in her work "Women of the Soil" (1985) aptly describes them. "Rural women are the landless rural poor, who work for others with land, or the wage workers in rural factories engaged in processing of agricultural products, or employed in domestic work, or retail trade ... They are not a homogeneous lot." Sixty percent (60%) of them are in agriculture (Castillo, 1976).

Yet, it is ironic that the National Statistics Office (NSO) classified them as unproductive, being housekeepers. An indication that there is an inadequacy of measurement as to the economic activities of rural women in a Third World setting like the Philippines.

*Their sorry state is described by Castillo (1976) as follows: "they are preoccupied with food and subsistence, living in a one or two-room house made of makeshift materials built on house lots they do not own ... Electricity, running water, toilets, chairs, beds, living room sets are not part of their lifestyle."*

Because of such hapless condition, "they do production work, whether income-generating or substituting to ensure their family's survival (Rojas-Aleta, 1977; Pineda-Ofreneo, 1985).

Problems and needs of rural women are poverty, employment, sanitation, basic utilities such as water, electricity (Rojas-Aleta, 1977). These problems are also echoed in Pineda-Ofreneo's work (1985): "problems of rural women are inadequate family income, lack of social services, inequality in the home."

#### Peasant women

They comprise the largest part of rural women. They are also part of the peasant sector which commands 70% of the bulk of Philippine population (AMIHAN, 1990). Peasantry in this context refers to rural communities engaged in agricultural production under various forms of production relations and working arrangements, as well as level of productivity from subsistence farming to commercial crops. (5)

To understand, peasant women, there is a need to situate their roles -- as housekeepers and family caretakers as well as workers earning for their families' survival.

"Women contribute much to household income because they are involved in income generating activities especially when children take over a large part of domestic activities ... On the average, women contributed about as much time as their husbands to direct productive, income-earning activities' (Res, 1983).

Moreover, "among poor peasant families, women play a full and central role in production" (CWR, 1988). Many women are forced to become farm hands or seasonal workers, or engage in other income-generating activities, that pay little. They spent more or less 15-19 hours a day working especially during the harvest season. *Yet, their contribution to agricultural production is subsumed and lumped with family labor which is invisible work* (Rio, 1987).

From the ranks of organized women, they recognize that peasant women are regarded as rendering support to farm production, not as peasants. This non-recognition of women as peasants despite their contribution to farm work, is an issue being raised by this organized group. They also question the dominant role of male peasants in decision-making without eliciting women's contribution in this area. In a related study, it was found out that the men are the ones who analyze the conditions of peasant women, mainly because peasant leaders are in the main, mostly dominated by men (Pagaduan, 1990).

*In general, gender oppression manifests itself in the sexist classification of tasks in farming and related activities (Rio, 1987). Weeding, seed preparation, transplanting are assigned to women, while plowing the field and other machine-operations are assigned to men.*

#### Women industrial workers

They are mainly composed of workers in manufacturing -- electronics and garments (CWR, 1985). They dominate the service sector and the export-oriented multinational industries which provide low wages (Francisco, 1990). They live in squatter areas in harsh conditions because of their low wages (del Rosario, 1985).

There are hundreds of thousands of Filipinas in the global assembly line (electronics, garments, handicraft, footwear, food processing) located in factories and export processing zones (Pineda-Ofreneo, 1987).

In particular, the Bataan Export Processing Zones (BEPZ) employ women for 70% or more of its workforce (Alternative Country Report, 1985).

Problems of women industrial workers include sexual abuse by supervisors (lay down/lay-off policy); the burdens of housework and job; unhealthy working conditions, low wages, no alleviation from childcare and housework (CWR, 1985; del Rosario, 1985).

*Some reflections on the conditions on women industrial workers point to global capitalism adopted by the Philippine government (del Rosario, 1985). Pineda-Ofreneo cited the new international division of labor wherein transnational corporations (TNCs) set up subsidiaries in "low-wage" countries to take advantage of cheap and abundant manpower supply.*

Amidst all these conditions, women workers are striving to understand their social position. In a participatory study (Ofreneo and del Rosario, 1984), it was noted that organized women have higher political consciousness compared to those who are not involved. This observation was also noted in another document (CWR, 1985). "Women workers' involvement in organized production and their struggle against capitalist exploitation as well as their contribution to family survival are venues of their progressive orientation."

#### Prostituted Women

"There is no facet of the crisis more offensive and hence, more symbolic of the Philippines' despoliation than the flagrant sale of bodies of women and children to visitors seeking exotic pleasures" (Aguilar, 1987).

Prostitution in the Philippines is a hard phenomenon victimizing a large number of women. According to Sr. Mary John Mananzan, "it has never existed in such a dimension and in such an institutionalized form as it is now in Philippine society" (6).



*A survey on the prostitutes' background reveals the marginalization of our women from the countryside, the lack of adequate employment opportunities in the rural areas, and the inability of the Philippine society to maximize the productivity value of women in gainful employment.*

Even as women flock to prostitution for lack of other opportunities for survival, and some, for the relatively good pay it offers, a study on the wages of these women reveal pitiful wages; most of the women's earnings are funneled back to brothels, their pimps, the hotels or the travel agents (Azarcon - de la Cruz, 1985).

The foregoing situation underscores the sad scenario wherein many Filipino women are trapped. Providing substantive solutions to the plight of women, indeed, require fundamental changes in the structures and culture of Philippine society.

## Other women belonging to low-income group

### *Women in fisheries*

In subsistence fishing, women are basically involved in fish processing and marketing. Their involvement in fish marketing depends in fishing operations involved.

Most women are helpmates of their husbands in the fishing industry -- handling, processing and marketing of fishery resources.

There is also a division of labor in fishing activities - men are in-charged of the production function, while women do most of the post-production activities (de Castro, 1990).

*The foregoing claim refutes the usual notion of men being the sole bread-winners of the family and women as simply supplementary income-earners.*

Another published review on women in the fisheries sector (7) noted that studies on the fisherfolk have glossed over the role of women in fish production. "Researches on the fisherfolk ordinarily focus their attention and base their generalized conclusions on the fish catching activities of men. Very often, such studies fail to recognize the existence of certain women who join their husbands in fish expeditions, as in the case of the Muslim women in Davao fishing villages, or neglect to show equal concern on the problems and the needs experienced in the other two stages of fish production, the pre- and post-harvest, where women perform 50% to 75% of the work." *In that sense, the projection is that fish production is solely a male activity.*

### *Minority Women:*

This group includes the Muslim women, Cordillera women, Samoki women, among others.

Muslim women's worldview and behavior are greatly influenced by two factors: culture and religion. Their culture defined the traditional role of women -- managing the home and bringing up the children.

From the religious angle, "the Muslim women is now aware of her rights ... She is aware that she can earn money by lawful means and that a wife has full control over property and she can dispose of it according to her will and liking. The husband has no right in his wife's property ... The Muslim woman also knows that she is entitled to pursue higher education in any field for her intellectual fulfillment and benefit... A Muslim woman is free to get involved in other human endeavors, but she must turn her efforts to her primary duty in the home" (Umpa, 1990).

The contemporary Muslim woman compared to her Christian counterpart is still tied to the traditional conservative roles that culture has given her. Recent developments show their growing interest and sensitivity to the teachings of Islam. There are a number of women's organizations that conduct seminars participated in by Muslim women.

Among Samoki women, the concept of womanhood is rooted in their belief system and rice culture (Dandan, 1990). Their main activities include housekeeping, child-bearing and farm work.

In the case of Cordillera women, there are social institutions that formally shape the gender role division in their community. The *dap-ay* (Sagada) and *ator* (Bontoc Central) are the male's domain while the *ebgan* (Sagada) and *ulog* (Bontoc) are female's domain (CWR, 1988). Women are also preoccupied with farm task (planting, seedbed cleaning, weeding, harvesting, etc.).

*It is shown that women in ethnic communities, like women in other sectors, are involved in both production and reproduction activities. Yet, the parameters of their lives are still shaped by the social expectation of their roles in the domestic sphere and by the dictate of cultural practices, which, to a large extent are defined by male views.*

## Women in Media

Women compose a formidable presence in the Philippine media industry. Some of them are owners of broadcast facilities, producers and publishers. Others are very influential, either as columnists and commentators, newscasters, or performers (David and dela Cruz, 1985).

The attainment of positions in media which entail a wide range of responsibilities is a result of hard work, or in some cases by their relationship (as wife, daughter, or sister-in-law) to the financier of the newspaper (Lolarga, 1990).

But in general, Philippine media are clearly dominated by men, especially in the crucial policy-making positions. Hence, the thrust and content of media materials are reflective of the interest of those who dominate the industry.

The presence of women in the industry has done very little towards altering the "deceptive" image of the Filipina. Some women in media do not themselves feel there is anything wrong with women's projection in the media.

On the other hand, the concern for images of women in media is a valid issue. "Certain stereotypes are revealed in the portrayal of women - weak, dependent emotional character; physically handicapped or mentally retarded; manipulative; prostitute, easy-going ... The decade has produced panorama of roles open to women with more denigrating ones being overused to serve profit and opportunistic forces in movie production and the prevailing powers in the country (Orozco, 1985).

The book ... *from Virgin to Vamp: Images of women in Philippine media* (8), women's stereotyped roles are highlighted. Both TV commercials and print ads use the promise of "male reward" to sell products to women (i.e., "buy this and you get your man"). Women are depicted as wife, mother, domestic helper and mistress in radio serials. In Tagalog movies, women figure as sex objects. In tabloid, front-page reporting focuses on rape

and other sex crimes, frequently using nude photos of starlets and sex symbols on their front pages. Regular and special features in weekly magazines project beauty, glamour, leisure as women's values and keeping one's man and homemaking as women's primary concern.



## Elite Women in Politics

The privileged women join traditional politics. Filipina elite leaders were of high socio-economic origin. In a study made on women legislators, this observation was confirmed. The socio-economic background of most women legislators reveal that they come from middle class of wealthy families by virtue of their birth, marriage or their own business acumen. Several of them come from families with access to politics and have other members who have participated in politics - either a father, husband or brother (Aguilar, 1989).

In a study made by Tangcangco on "*Women in Politics in Contemporary Philippines*" she articulated that those women who landed in top positions are members of the established dynasties in the country and are most likely seen as substitutes of either their fathers or husband.

Due to their class origin, they tend to preserve present institutions. They seek modernity only for their own sector and act to preserve the gap between themselves and the more traditional sectors of Philippine society (Green, 1980).

In general, women play a subordinate role to men in formal and informal administrative and political positions. A study on women's political status in Cebu confirmed this (Neher, 1980). In 1978, only 19.6% of councilors were women. In the barangay level, women also comprise a negligible minority - only 8.6%.

Aguilar's study noted increasing women's participation in national politics from 1978 to 1989. Yet, there is still male dominance in Philippine politics. The occupation of the top-most executive position by a woman does not mean an immediate broadening of political opportunities for Filipino women (Tangcangco, 1990).

*At every level of Philippine society, from the rural barangay to the highest echelon of national administration, the status of women in formal politics is low. With the highly personalistic type of politics based on family alliances and relations of patronage and clientage left unchanged, only the upper and middle class women are given the opportunities to run for top elective positions.*

*Other factors that may account for the low political status of women are the prevailing notion on women's role and domestic responsibilities. Philippine society has established patterns of "appropriate behavior" for women and men which prescribe that the "proper place" of women is in the home - or, for upper - class women, in the professions of service organizations but not in the public area (Neher, 1980).*

## **The Study of Women and Women's Issues**

**The foregoing information on women in the Philippines provide a substance to the *woman question* in Philippine society.**

# women's studies

*The tendency to see women as "victim" is highlighted in the sectoral studies especially of the marginalized groups. There are three levels wherein the assertion of women as victims fall:*

*>one, in the household level where women are conditioned to carry the bulk of home responsibilities because they are women (i.e. the reproductive function and nurturing roles tied together and make it a "natural" destiny for women to handle such roles);*

*>two, in the subsistence work like farming and peddling or other income-augmenting activities, women's functional roles are undervalued and in some cases, sideswept in favor of the role of men, as in farm technology such that they are displaced;*

*>three, in the public domain, both at the formal employment sector and the decision-making process, where they are tailored to meet certain national plans at their expense as women (i.e. the flesh trade, migration as domestic helpers abroad, factory workers) and the government policy as to the population program and the other national issues affecting women.*



On the other hand, various references/writings on women focus on the masses of women spread across subclasses or categories, who are considered capable agents who can direct or change their own situation. Beyond the criticism as to inequities that make women disadvantaged group in society, **the transitional approach to the study of women** unfolds the roots of women's oppression in the asymmetrical, hierarchical and functional relationship between men and women conditioned by social forces and prevailing social values. In particular, the emphasis of this type of work are seen in the following:

- Filipino women's oppression are due to several layers of causes: colonial and foreign domination, conflict of class, interests, gender oppression manifested in the family, in the workplace, in public life strengthened by patriarchal values (Sancho, 1984; del Rosario, 1985; Azarcon-de la Cruz, 1985; CWR, 1985; Santos-Maranan, 1987; Taguiwalo, 1987; Pineda-Ofreneo, 1989; Santos & Lee, 1989; Francisco, 1990; Tangcangco, 1990).

- the situation of women are accounted by the unequal distribution of housework and childcare, with women carrying most of the burden, even if they do other income-generating work, primarily because the norms of society dictate that it is the women's sole responsibility to be homemakers (Eviota, 1978; Escalada & Binongo, 1988; Sevilla, 1989; Pineda-Ofreneo, 1990).

Other materials/references on women can be considered as **compensatory in approach**. The studies on elite women in politics (Neher, 1980; Green, 1980; Aguilar 1989) and the writing of Quito (1978) qualify in this classification. *The focus are elite women and their exceptional achievement amidst social restrictions on the role of women*. The important emphasis is the class-privilege of these women that made them play some role in the public scene (i.e. they can afford to shelve-off domestic chores because they have helpers to do it for them.).

The **integrative approach in the study of women** sees society as a gender system such that societal realities can be understood in terms of how gender intertwine in the socio-political life of men and women. This approach postulates a new paradigm that intervenes in the mainstream. Writings on the women's movement fall in this category (Santos-Maranan, 1987; de Dios, 1989; Angeles, 1989).

*While there was an effort to focus seriously in the study of women as a distinct discipline, materials in this study still reflect some sort of an "add-and-stir-approach."* It means that most studies/writings still make use of the traditional method in knowledge-generation, which by its nature is limited compared to the feminist approach.

**It is important to stress that studies that use a participatory approach have paved the way for alternative means of getting information that respects people's (women's) view of their own situation.** This has been done by women's groups and those academicians who are involved with grassroots women. This trend has already affect mainstream research, both in the academe and other institutions.

Nonetheless, women's studies in the Philippines is beginning to re-shape the academic landscape. Through the linkage of development-oriented academicians with women's groups, women's studies has attempted to come up with its own parameters, seeing the world from the point of view of the marginalized group, "the muted group" of women who, for years, have been the objects of studies -- from fertility attitudes to family planning practices to other data on limited concerns. *The goal is to have information on women done by women themselves, as articulators of their own realities, with the facilitative role of writers/academicians grounded on women's experience.*

## The Woman Question: Exploring the Discourse

What are the implications of all these?

>That women across classes do experience discrimination as women, but for the low-income group, those belonging to the deprived 83% of the Philippine population, it means an added dimension of burden, being poor.

>That class differences exacerbated by the exploitation of fellow Filipinos especially by the bureaucrat-capitalists coated women's disadvantaged position into a *more structural dimension* with the incursion of capitalist treatment of women as commodities (bodies for sale, for export) and as tools of production (women workers' hapless plight, as well as the blatant disregard of homeworkers' rights) accentuated by *patriarchal values* where the males "call the shots", in almost all levels of decision-making (political/public or the private/homebase).

Hence, the type of relationship prevalent in society practiced in the home and in the public sphere, makes women simply an appendage of the men, and as most writings reveal, it is women's functional role as part of society's expectations to be supportive to the world of men.

The literature that tackled the women's movement stressed the validity of the women's agenda in the here and now simultaneous with this dilemma: *how can one talk of a far-flung national liberation when in one's home she is oppressed?* The debilitating effect of sexism camouflaged as part of the natural process of married life or the accepted norms in society cannot wait to be rectified only in the future. Because women's oppression are concretely felt in the realm of the moment, **the task of the women's movement** is to forward the goals of a gender-fair society, with women as equal partners in the societal struggle.

Along this line, women's studies can facilitate the concerns of the women's movement. **In this context, it is important that feminist epistemology reflective of our cultural realities must be developed along with its tools -- feminist research. Only then that the tendency for an "add-stir-approach" in the study of women will be minimized, if not obliterated.**

Knowledge-generation will surely take another shape along this course, perhaps, approximating the actual realities governing women's lives; or perhaps, reflecting their felt experiences and articulated views. Only feminist methods of knowing can more or less unravel these information -- process documentation of women's actual day-to-day existence in natural setting, life histories and collective sharing of autobiographies, experiential analysis, among other.

Only then can we begin actualizing the pedagogy of the "muted groups." *Only then that the advocacy for structural and relational transformation can be of genuine color.* Because women, as an oppressed group, are part of the struggle to unveil oppression and have committed themselves to transform society.

Again the importance of a correct reading of women's realities come to the fore. Hence, a critical-liberating approach must be institutionalized in the method of knowing in women's studies. Advocacy for social transformation will miss its direction when there is a misreading of the issues of the day -- issues that cut-cold women's gut-feeling, issues that cripple the human (women's) spirit.

The signposts are clear. The inadequacies, the personal problems of women, cut across classes and felt individually will make sense in a collective sharing of experience. Eventually, women can realize that the personal and private problems thought to be unique to each one until re-echoed in others, through

communal reflection, become a social experience. The common realization that something must be wrong somewhere leads to the social issue: **the woman question**.

As had been articulated by the studies/writings on women, **the woman question** pervades the daily life of women in the Philippines, whatever sector they belong. Concretely, the issues of the day are subordination and discrimination of women in the home, at the workplace, in the public arena. Even in training, technology and other opportunities, women take a preferential neglect by virtue of their being women, which in Philippine culture is translated as "women are inferior and suited only for the home." In our cultural parlance, these are reflected in the following phrases: *Eh, babae kasi; Babae ka lang*.

But the issue does not end here. The more crippling oppression are seen in the plight of women pushed to the flesh trade, women who migrate in foreign lands despite degrading jobs, women who experience violence in the home, in the countryside and the urban area. And perhaps, the dehumanizing effect of poverty can also be viewed as insidious violence perpetuated by the flaws of the economic and political systems.

The point here is that women's oppression in the Philippines is a complicated issue. In its complexity, a great number of women ignore its dimension, just to face the concerns for daily survival. Some sort of "faking" reality. To lessen the pain. To simply cope.

Further analysis of the *woman question* points to that which runs across the system -- *patriarchy accentuated by the socio-economic order*. The system can be viewed in terms of a more materialist and dialectical perspective. Eventually, the isolated patterns of reality when thought deeply come into a meaningful shape.

It can be said that there is no absence of theoretical reflections on the experience of women in the Philippines. In fact, towards the end of the '80s to the '90s, there were numerous literature that try to "make sense" of women's issues and struggles especially by women involved in the women's movement.

It is also important to note that **the Philippine women's struggle as spearheaded by the women's movements has gained solid ground in the arena of legitimate social movements**. As new information is generated on women and women's issues, the women's movement can benefit from these by integrating the valuable insights into *the world of praxis*. The process is ongoing, just as the people's struggle for social change continuous to forge ahead.

Ultimately, **knowledge-generation in the field of women's studies in the Philippines can be of practical use if it helps in the transformative process of the women's movement**. Only then can we rightly say that **scholarship is a tool for women's liberation. And national liberation, too**.

#### END NOTES

- (1) These lines are paraphrased from Friedrich Engels work on the mechanics of history, as quoted by Shulamith Firestone in the *Dialectic of Sex*.
- (2) Leela Dube, *Studies on Women in Southeast Asia* (Bangkok: UNESCO, 1980), p.17.
- (3) Michael Todaro, *Economics for a developing world* (London: Longman Ltd., 1981), p.162.
- (4) Leonora Angeles, *Feminism and Nationalism: The Discourse on the Woman Question and the Politics of the Women's Movement in the Philippines* (University of the Philippines, 1984), p. 14.
- (5) *Second Ploughing: The Philippine Peasantry* (Quezon City: PCPS & Peace Formation Program, 1989), p.14
- (6) Sr. Mary John Mananzan, *The Woman Question in the Philippines* (Manila: St. Paul's Publications, 1991), p.7.
- (7) Lorna Israel, "Women in the Fisheries Sector: A Review of Literature," LUNDAYAN, April -June 1991;
- (8) Cited in the work of Thelma Kintanar, "The Status of Women in Communications and Cultural Media: An Overview," Conference Paper, 1990.