

**‘THE WOMAN QUESTION’ AND  
THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES  
TOWARDS AUTHENTIC FILIPINO WOMEN  
LIBERATION**

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Filipino women are invisible

Patriarchy makes them

Far from gender equality, women  
empowerment, women liberation

## The ‘Woman Question’

- Questions the status quo
- Critiques patriarchy
- Demands affirmative action

1987 Philippine Constitution

Article II Section 4

Article XIII Section 14

Republic Act 7192 of 1991

Women in Nation-Building Law

# Objectives

**SHOW** and **CRITIQUE** the development of the feminist movement in the Philippines

**PROVIDE** a sort of program of action

geographically beautiful  
naturally rich

culturally Hispanized  
socially Traditional  
politically Americanized  
economically Globalist

Spanish colonization  
feudal-patriarchal ideology

American occupation  
bourgeois culture (pro-imperialist values)

Marcos regime  
struggle for national freedom, democracy

We are in a situation where patriarchal ideology and values are **deeply ingrained** in our social, political, economic, and cultural spheres

Women are not in equal footing with men

They are not given equal opportunities to work relative to men

Women are confined to doing housework

Filipino women end up as unskilled workers, service workers, and laborers (the very occupational groups vulnerable to discrimination, abuse, and violence)

Filipino women are **disallowed, dominated, repressed, overpowered, objectified, and dehumanized** because of patriarchal structures and apparatuses making men in the position to disallow, dominate, repress, overpower, objectify, and dehumanize

One premise of the feminist movement

# The Feminist Movement in the Philippines works toward Filipino women liberation

- 1 push for women's reforms in official processes
- 2 push for ideological and political feminist stance
- 3 push for specific services and education to women

*Asociacion Feminista Filipina* , June 1905

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*Asociacion Feminista Ilonga* , 1906

*Society for the Advancement of Women*, 1912

*National Federation of Women's Clubs*, 1921

*Liga Nacional de Damas*, 1922

The right to vote, 1935

*League of Women Voters in the Philippines*, 1939

*Women's Civic Assembly of the Philippines*, 1947

*Civic Assembly of the Philippines*, 1950

*National Political Party of Women*, 1951

*Women's Rights Movement in the Philippines*, 1958

1960's, 1970's, 1980's

2

no longer just seeking for reforms through legislations  
sought radical change in the system–structural level  
drastically challenged the status quo

women liberation cannot be achieved through peaceful reforms

The root cause of female oppression, exploitation, and discrimination is the capitalist class relationships

liberation of women is a constituent dimension of societal transformation and not an isolated, separate struggle

patriarchy is an ideology

*Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan* (MAKIBAKA), 1970's

- struggle for national democracy
- why women suffer: political, clan, religious, and male

*Kilusan ng Kababaihang Pilipina* (PILIPINA), 1981

*General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership, and Action (GABRIELA), 1984*

- transform women into an organized political force
- dealing with the problems of women as women
- working to free women from all forms of economic and political oppression and discrimination, sexual violence and abuse, neglect and denial of their health and reproductive rights
- integral to the national liberation struggle for sovereignty, a democratic and representative government and equality between women and men in all aspects of life
- harness the power of half of the country's population towards liberation

*Ugnayan ng Kababaihan sa Pulitika*

(UKP or Women's Political Caucus)

- *Katipunan ng Bagong Pilipina* (KABAPA)
- *GABRIELA*
- Alliance for Women's Health

*Sama-samang Inisyatiba Para sa Pagbabago ng Batas at Lipunan*  
(SIBOL), 1980's

- KALAYAAN
- PILIPINA
- Democratic Socialist Women of the Philippines (DSWP)
- WEDPRO
- Institute for Social Studies in Action (ISSA)
- WOMANHEALTH
- MAKALAYA
- SARILAYA

*Women Involved in Nation-Building (WIN)*

*Concerned Women of the Philippines (CWP)*

*National Council of Women in the Philippines (NCWP)*

*Development Action for Women Network (DAWN)*

*Development Institute for Women in Asia-Pacific (DIWA)*

*Women's Action Network for Development (WAND)*

*Philippine Federation of Local Councils of Women (PFLCW)*

*Sentrong Alternatibong Lingap Panlegal (SALIGAN)*

*Catholic Women's League Philippines (CWL)*

*Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP)*

*Kababaihan laban sa Karahasan (KALAKASAN)*

# A

The early Philippine feminist movement: ‘equal and full partnership with men’ was the sole end of the Filipino liberal feminists

- a. helped the country to achieve sovereignty in 1946
- b. promoted democracy as good and enduring way of life
- c. preserved in their homes solidarity and collective spirit
- d. contributed through nursing and medicine
- e. continued their services to home and family
- f. more on social welfare work
- g. petitioned for the women’s right to vote

They did not work for the abolition of patriarchy  
They still preserved and did not challenge the status quo

They left patriarchy unchallenged

Many achievements but did not address the root cause of  
gender inequality

They worked hard for some rights and liberties such as the right  
to suffrage, the right to education, and the right to free assembly  
and association

B

The feminist movement responded to the call of opposing the government, challenging the status quo, and transforming social reality

women liberation was to be guided by Marxist–Socialist political–ideological framework

women's basic rights and liberties were not enough to secure gender equality

women liberation can only be achieved through radical means

Social critique and analysis of the national and local situation is correct but the action to realize as response to critical analysis **does not need to uphold violence in order to correct violence**

Transformation of society through praxis does not only mean violent (arm) struggle

The feminist movement **must be open to new frameworks**, not necessarily to replace the given paradigm, but to improve, re-create, and develop further the worldviews we have

We may box a certain perspective itself but **not the one who construes the perspective**

We modify a certain view

not to negate the view itself but to advance it

The feminist movement, given its rationality, **has to be reasonable**

The feminist movement may put an end to patriarchy through collective efforts but **not necessarily through violent means**

Communicative action through a discourse ethic may be an alternative means

C

They are more on concrete action than in speech acts

Addressing the various needs of women (such as educational, legal, medical, technical, and financial assistance), responding to the special areas of concern of women (such as urban poor women, women with disabilities, minority women, indigenous women, women who are victims of sex trafficking and involuntary prostitution, women migrant workers, women in detention, elderly women, abused women, abandoned women, women migrant workers), and advancing the goals of feminism (such as involvement in governance and decision-making processes, economic participation, advocacies against gender inequalities and patriarchal structures

To form themselves in a **one cohesive umbrella women association**

That would organize and systematize the distribution of human and non-human resources

To respond to all the needs of women,

Thereby promoting solidarity, sustainability, and sensitivity to the vision, mission, objectives, and goals of the feminist movement in the Philippines

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We need to **organize more**, to **mobilize more**, to **educate more** to approximate ending patriarchy and sense women liberation

All women groups should organize themselves as **one big umbrella feminist movement** regardless of their social and political backgrounds and commitments with the sole purpose of advancing the welfare of women and end patriarchy

Such umbrella organization has to continue  
**organizing** women, **mobilizing** human resources,  
educating the citizens, and fostering  
international co-operation and solidarity

All stakeholders (National Government Agencies, Legislature, Higher Educational Institutions, Non-Government Organizations, People's Organizations, Private Sector, Media) have to exert effort **to develop and implement strict gender-fair policies** along labor, employment, and poverty alleviation (i.e. stable jobs for women and men), promotion of women's rights vis-à-vis women's health rights (i.e. reproductive health care, family planning), and review laws and practices that discriminate, differentiate, and victimize women limiting their capacities and opportunities to promote their conception of the good life

To raise feminist consciousness, we need to **build feminist knowledge through feminist theorizing** sensitive to our very own context and experience (i.e. to be initiated by the academe), conduct symposia, fora, conferences, seminars, and trainings to **teach feminism** (supported by curricula for elementary, secondary, tertiary education, and alternative learning system; not only to the formal schools but to local groups and assemblies), **impart Philippine history and women's role** in shaping political economy (i.e. mga babaylan at balyana, Gabriela Silang, Trinidad Tecson, Melchora Aquino, Agueda Kahabagan, Teresa Magbanua, Gregoria de Jesus, mga babaeng katipunero, Corazon Aquino), and **promote sexual equality and fulfill women empowerment** (i.e. re-thinking particularistic cultural beliefs and traditions)

To effect feminist consciousness,

the feminist movement under the umbrella organization should rest on *women's rights and liberties*, promote *cooperative values*, advocate *social cooperation* and shared responsibility, facilitate *public reason*, and enrich *public political culture*

*“No man is free until women are free.  
The pain of women is the pain of God.”*

Rose Cerdona-Quebral