
Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

January 2006

The Women's Movement in the Philippines

By Ciorsdan Simonett

The Manila Women's Forum was very fortunate to have the dynamic, award-winning Philippine Daily Inquirer columnist, Rina

Jimenez-David as our guest speaker at the December 5 meeting. The opportunity to hear Rina speak was well worth the trip to Alabang, where we were spoiled by Carolyn Gibson's wonderful hospitality and a surprise performance by a group of talented Christmas carollers during dinner.

Rina has worked for the Inquirer since 1988, and currently writes the "At Large" opinion column, which

appears daily except for Mondays and Thursdays. While this alone would be more than enough to keep most people busy, Rina also sits on the board of the National Commission on the Role of the Filipino Woman, is the National Chair for FILIPINA (a women's rights organization?), President of Abanse! Pinay (a party list political party for women's issues), is a board member of the Remedios AIDS Foundation Inc., and is involved in several other organizations. In her spare time, Rina indulges her latest obsession, which is for Korean television dramas! As many of you who read her columns would know, Rina has been a tireless

voice bringing the public's attention to many of the issues that women face in the Philippines.

Rina told us that many Filipinos perceive the women's movement in the Philippines as a recent import from the West that is not grounded in the local history and realities of life for the average Filipina. And yet, the pre-Spanish society was far more equitable for women. Prior to the Spanish occupation in the 16th century, women played crucial roles, as healers and Babaylans (shamans). Unfortunately the Spanish Friars targeted these women, and many chose to go into hiding. In fact hiding became one of the earliest forms of protest for Filipinas.

During this era, women were only allowed a very basic education, and

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Christmas carollers who dropped by during the MWF meeting in December



Next MWF Meeting

When: 6:30 p.m., Monday
January 23, 2006

What: Children's book
illustrator Beulah Taguiwalo
and publisher of Tahanan
Books for Young Readers Reni
Singer will speak on children's
literature in the Philippines.

Where: Jennifer Wallum's
home, 1665 Dasmariñas
Avenue, Dasmariñas Village,
Makati City

Bring: Something to share for
the pot-luck dinner.

February meeting: 6:30 p.m.,
Monday February 20, 2006

One more time, from Rina Jimenez-David:

“Yes, feminism—or at least its formal, organized expression—is already a hundred years old in the country!”



Here's more, plus other women's voices. And related topics.

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KaWoMeNaN

Selected and Edited
by Beulah Pedregosa Taguiwalo

Courageous women activist women, revolutionary women then and now

“The point, however, is to change it.”

Sheila Coronel, quoting one of her favorite Marxist epigrams.

“What else would one call sparking another government's downfall with an exposé on its president's 'housing program' for mistresses?”

Sylvia L. Mayuga, citing Sheila Coronel's founding of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) as "proof of the basic revolutionary impulse to confront ruling equations, political and otherwise, for the sake of the larger whole."

“Kalinga women are not barred from belonging to the highest rank of society, which entitles them to the privileges equal to those of men in similar rank. Some are recognized as pact holders and as she is the one who owns the pact, only her children or relatives have the right to inherit it.”

Teresita Infante, in her documented study, *The Woman in Early Philippines and Among Tribal Minorities*.

“...it must come as a distinct shock to these critics and the rest of the nation to find out that this year the country is observing the Centennial of the Feminist Movement in the Philippines.”

Rina Jimenez-David, in her article *Pioneering Women* in *AsianJournal.com* January 8, 2006.

“Is it relevant? Is it necessary? Does it make the world a better place?”

Sheila Coronel, Philippine journalist who observed that "even as we are inundated by this talk of gigabytes of information swirling around the world in nanoseconds, we are also distracted from the quality of this crisscrossing information." From *Overlapping Agendas, Different Priorities* at www.womenaction.org

“Sheila belonged to the Left. Lest we forget, from its original brilliant, passionate and focused pioneering came the seeds of political ferment that led to EDSA People Power in 1986.”

Sylvia L. Mayuga, veteran freelance writer on historical and cultural issues, in her article *Sheila's Covey*, about Sheila Coronel receiving the on Magsaysay Award in 2003 for her outstanding and courageous work in media.

“Because of her gender and because of her tie to wealth, Spaniards did not suspect her of revolutionary sympathies. This proved to be an asset as she acted as an intelligence agent and secretly raised funds for the revolution.”

Dr. Robert L. Yoder, FAPC, in his article *Philippine Heroines of the Revolution: Maria Clara They Were Not*, about Patrocinia Gamboa who hailed from Iloilo, is popularly known as the "Heroine of Jaro," and although born to a moneyed family, longed and actively fought for freedom from Spain in the Philippine revolution of 1898.

“I was undressed, made to sit on ice overnight, and given the water cure.”

Judy Taguiwalo, UP professor who, in an article by Lorna Kalaw-Tirol in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 20, 1999, acknowledged that [when she was captured during martial law in the Philippines] her torture, compared to what countless others suffered, was minor. She was not electrocuted, raped, salvaged, or killed in a massacre or summarily executed.

“...can we say that peace in this country lies in the hands of women? ...note that the potential for escalating our present political conflicts lies in the hands of two other women: President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo who can choose to ride out the storm regardless of the state of the nation afterwards; and Susan Roces-Poe, whose persona has undergone swift transitions, from grieving widow to wise counselor to combative figurehead of the opposition.”

Rina Jimenez-David, on page A13 of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 2, 2005.

“In closing, I am bothered by the thought that some of my Colleagues may attribute my approach to Diokno’s petition to my being a woman, and I may even be accused of allowing my emotions to overpower my reason. If there is such an assumption I would say that it is incorrect. However, if it is indeed true that my being a woman led me to take this stand on Diokno’s petition, then I am happy and proud that I was born a woman.”

Former Justice Cecilia Munoz-Palma, in her original dissenting opinion written in September 1974 during martial law in the Philippines, on the eve of the Supreme Court decision on the habeas corpus petition of Jose W. Diokno. She had produced a draft of a dissenting opinion which, in the judgement of some of her colleagues, could destroy the image of the President in the international scene. The pressure on her to tone down her language was so strong that felt compelled to go in hiding so she could finish her final draft. (Adapted from *Sounding Board*, the column of Fr. Joaquin G. Bernas, S.J., on page A13 of the Philippine Daily Inquirer, January 9, 2006)

“And mothers who appear to be unwilling to strive and quit the workplace altogether to go raise their kids? ...they’re competing for the most enduring stakes of all, putting aside their near-term goals to ensure the long-term success of their line.”

Jeffrey Kluger, in his article *Ambition - Why Some People Are Most Likely to Succeed*, Time magazine, January 9, 2006

What is feminism?

The word is often thrown around and used in negative contexts, in embarrassment, or as a rally call. So what exactly does it mean? Feminism is belief, theory, and political movement promoting gender equality, women’s rights, and women’s issues. Feminism is believing in women’s rights. Feminism is believing in equal rights among the genders, in social, political, and economic aspects. Feminism is believing in equal opportunity. Feminism is the advancement of women. Feminism is not taking away from, or removing the rights of, men.

- From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Why some people do not like feminism

Some people do not like feminism because it wants to change society and may reduce the power of men. Some Religious people say that feminism is not what God wanted. For example, in the Bible, it says that God made Eve (the first woman) as a companion for Adam (the first man) and people think this means he made women to serve and be ruled by men. However, not all religious people think this and some feel that God created men and women to be equal so that feminism is actually a very good thing.

- From *Simple English Wikipedia*, a free encyclopedia written in simple English for easy reading

Who is Betty Friedan?

The modern women’s movement in the U.S. had its real beginnings in Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) which examines the dehumanising conditions of middle-class American women isolated and imprisoned in suburbia and excluded from social and productive life. Friedan exposed the desperate position of housewives in 1950s USA who had achieved the “American Dream”, and were imprisoned in their automated suburban homes with little to do but visit the hairdresser in order to look her best when hubby came home.

She is also the founder of the Community Resources Pool, a collective of artists, politicians and social workers who work with gifted children in the public school system in New York.

“The personal is political”

In the late 1960s the women’s movement in the United States formulated the slogan, “The personal is political.” ...The slogan was directed in part to other activists and was created to justify attention to a new cause: the personal relations between men and women.

Such justification was perceived necessary because of the widely held attitude that the practices which took place between women and men acting *qua* women and men stood outside the domain of politics.

For the activists of the 1960s, if these practices were not political, they were not appropriate objects for the scrutiny and struggle for change that were demanded by the relations between, for example, different racial groups. The early feminists intended to challenge this attitude through this slogan.

- From *Gender and History* by Linda Nicholson (Columbia University Press, 1986)

Postcolonial feminism

Postcolonial feminists criticise Western forms of feminism, notably radical feminism and its most basic assumption, universalization of female experience. They argue that this assumption is based on the experience of white, middle-class women in the developed West, for whom gender oppression is primary; and that it cannot so easily be applied to women for whom gender oppression comes second to racial or class oppression.

March 8, Women's Day

In Spring 1908...New York garment workers declared March 8 to be Women’s Day. The following year, in support of the locked-out Triangle Shirtwaist makers, the mass outpouring became known as the “Uprising of the 20,000” that so inspired the German working women’s movement that its leader, Clara Zetkin, proposed to the Marxist International that March 8 become an International Women’s Day.

- From *Thoughts on the Eighth of March* by Ding Ling (1904–1986) Chinese writer known for her novels, stories, and plays that explore the evolving role of women in Communist China, and opposed both Stalin and Mao

(The Women's... from page 1)
they suffered the double burden of having to work both outside and inside the home. The founding of women's religious orders became another form of protest for women who wanted to live an autonomous life. Rina informed us that women also played an important role in the fight against the Spanish, however this is

Egalitarian versus Protectionist Feminism

In her book *A Fearful Freedom: Women's Flight from Equality*, Wendy Kammer identifies another conflict between forms of feminism, the conflict between what she calls "egalitarian" and "protectionist" feminism. In her characterization, egalitarian feminists focus on promoting equality between women and men, and giving women and men equal rights. Protectionist feminists prefer to focus on legal protections for women, such as employment laws that specially protect female workers and divorce laws that seem to favor women, sometimes advocating restricting rights for men, such as free speech (specifically, the right to produce and consume pornography).

- From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

not well known, because history is typically written by men!

In the last 100 years the women's movement in the Philippines has made a great deal of progress. Women's groups have been able to influence and introduce legislation in important areas such as the right to vote, maternity leave, anti-domestic violence laws, anti-trafficking laws and the amendment of the constitution in 1987 to provide a "gender budget." Rina stressed the importance of women's groups putting their differences aside to work together towards a common goal. Development is not gender neutral, and women need to get involved in the process of politics and be in a position to influence policies.

Rina gave a very informative presentation on the women's movement in the Philippines, and despite the late hour, she was gracious enough to stay back and answer a stream of questions. There was a lively and heartfelt discussion regarding maternal and reproductive health issues in the Philippines, and the difficulties of challenging traditional practices. Rina said that for every column that she writes about contraception, 9 out of 10 letters she receives will be against her. I think that we could have happily stayed discussing these issues all night, and Rina has certainly given us a lot to think about. It was also inspiring to hear from so many women at MWF who are contributing to the women's movement in the Philippines in their own way. □

What you held in your hand, / what you counted and carefully saved, / all this must go so you know / how desolate the landscape can be / between the regions of kindness.

From *Kindness*, by Naomi Shihab Nye, poet and songwriter born in 1952 to a Palestinian father and American mother

The Manila Women's Forum

The Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, to talk to women of various cultures, and to share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join. The current officers are **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair, Programs, Treasurer, and Newsletter. **Cecilia Leung**, Programs. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. Please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 812-3932, Tel/Fax 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com for more information about MWF.

Visit our website – a work in progress
www.geocities.com/manilawomensforum

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