

**SOCIALLY TRANSFORMATIVE TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISM:  
FILIPINO WOMEN ACTIVISTS AT HOME AND ABROAD**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Twelve Filipino women activists who shared the same ideology were interviewed in three locations: the Philippines, the Netherlands, and Vancouver, BC. The study considers how massive migration and displacement of Filipino women have produced transnational communities of struggle that are a source of political consciousness and positive social change. The research compares personal and social changes among those immersed in daily struggle under different circumstances. It looks at how and why women and communities are transformed in the very process of struggle -- women becoming more socially empowered and communities learning to be more assertive, democratic, and politically engaged. In the stories they tell, the women historicize, contextualize, and politicize actions for structural change.

While *transnational feminism* appears to parallel global strategies of transnational entities and nation-states, feminist movements struggle to be relevant. Mohanty (2003) sees anti-globalization activism as imperative for feminist solidarity, yet feminist projects continue to seek focused, collective efforts against neo-liberalism. This group's activism enhances our understanding of *feminist praxis*. They jointly address neo-colonial domination (capitalist globalization) and systemic race-class-gender oppression. Economic experiences of those from a poor Majority World nation and actions from socially and politically conscious activists are integrated into community-based and academic feminist theorizing. Their analyses of global trade/labour trafficking contribute to learning about responsible communities and hope for transnational solidarity.

This project proposes a *socially transformative feminism* that does not merely recognize anti-globalization efforts, but analyzes progressive feminist praxis that points to women's liberation as directly linked to positive structural change locally, nationally, and transnationally, while already demonstrating its possibility. Citing the work of Mohanty (2003), Tuhiwai-Smith (2002), Sandoval (2000), and community-based research by the Philippine Women Centre of BC (1996-2006), it builds on feminist research and social change movements. It focuses on marginalized women's/communities' capacity to show creative assertion and political participation, and examines criteria for what is socially transformative. The study concludes by reassessing the relationship of feminism and transnationalism in the context of these women's lives and work -- the realities of migration, the dialectics of women's marginalization and empowerment, and the perpetual, constantly changing nature of social transformation.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all the women in this study who have devoted their lives to the struggle of Filipino people and most especially, Filipino women. Whether in the Philippines, Canada, or the Netherlands, they have risked their lives and made sacrifices that deepened my understanding of nations' struggles. What I have learned from them has changed me and inspired my public life. I dedicate this work with utmost respect and humility to the Filipino people who deserve a prosperous society, and who continue to struggle for change at the highest cost through means that manifest, and lead to, genuine peace and justice.

I honour the volunteers and staff of the Philippine Women Centre of BC and other groups in Canada under the National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada, the women's organization in the Netherlands, *Pinay sa Holland*, and GABRIELA Philippines including the groups there to which the women in this study belong.

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## **PART I**

### **FRAMING THE STUDY**

*“Ang taong nagigipit, kahit sa patalim ay kakapit.”*

“A person in dire straits, cornered, will cling even to a knife’s edge”. —Filipino saying

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Personal Preamble: Situating the Researcher**

It is perhaps with great presumption that I claim that this study both records an important part of the history-in-the-making of Filipino women at the start of this millennium and participates in it. When I first came to North America to enter second-year of university in 1968, I learned some lessons very quickly: not those of my own history as a young Filipino woman, but from the experience of being a visitor to a wealthy United States mansion. Ignoring my own privileges in the Philippines, I was mesmerized by the size and scope of affluence in the US. I remember one of my first trips to Kroger's grocery store in Evanston, Illinois, when I whispered to myself, "This is just like Manila, only bigger and better." Some fifteen years later, as I was leaving Merida, Venezuela, where I had lived for almost five years, to return to Canada, I looked down Avenida 2 at the market and said to myself, "I am not likely to ever see this type of under-development again." Now, over twenty years later, I can no longer frame my perceptions and experiences in "privileged" terms, or compare in binary terms who or what is "bigger and better," "developed or underdeveloped." Further, I see that escaping and abandoning "Third World" experiences as I did then, not appreciating them but feeling indifference instead (even shame), became reasons for personal remorse and social radicalization. This study, therefore, hopes to contribute to the assertion of a Majority World story that makes history. The words and feelings of Filipino women in the midst of social revolution, militancy, and creative action at home and abroad are history-in-the-making, within the dialectics of personal awakenings intertwined with local, national, and transnational social change.

The origin of this study lies in the multiple experiences of a community of Filipino women living, like myself, in Vancouver, British Columbia (BC), who were or are immigrants or migrant workers, spanning two generations. Some of those from the younger generation were born in



the Philippines to immigrant parents or migrant workers, while others are Canadian-born with either one or both parents being Filipino. As an immigrant whose Filipino parents now live in Los Angeles, California, I am situated as a member of this politically active community. My link is particularly with a women's organization within the community, the Philippine Women Centre of BC, working in solidarity with other Filipino organizations and community groups advocating for social change both here and in the Philippines. I am an "academic" researcher whose aim is to further the re-conceptualization of feminism from "the margins" or the "Third World," while being a "community" researcher and activist aware of the potential impact of this study on the community's understanding of itself. I negotiate an interactive, fluid terrain between and through academic and community research, in the hope of contributing to an understanding of feminist methodology and feminist theory informed, shaped, and (re-)conceptualized by my own and others' lived experience. Although I am learning about various women's communities' struggles, my own struggles within and outside the community as an educated, academic, socio-economically privileged Filipino woman from a non-peasant, non-migrant-worker class, need also to be acknowledged. This position is a springboard to (re-)conceptualizing notions of solidarity among women, in women's communities that have, among other differences, diverse race and class perspectives (as discussed by Freire, 2004; Mohanty, 2003; Naples, 2003; Narayan, 2000).

My own awareness of the intersections of race, class, and gender comes from my personal experiences as a transplanted young Filipino woman who first studied in the US and then became an immigrant to Canada. It was not until my involvement in the Philippine Women Centre in the late 1980s that I became aware of the interlocking oppression of women in marginalized communities in a North American/Canadian context and the complex analysis required to name their experiences. It was obvious to me that intersectionality, for Filipino women, is part of our lives as well as something to be theorized: that poor, brown women from

the “Third World” still serve affluent, white, “First World” employers is nothing new, and I understood easily that this needs to be explained and contested. My increasing consciousness of how the impact of gender discrimination compounds that of race and class (through grassroots organizing and later theoretical framing of this intersectionality) led me to commit to a feminist perspective in the many sites of struggle in my work experience and range of studies. These have encompassed theology, education, labour, non-governmental sectors, community organizing, conflict resolution, and academic feminist studies. Given the persistence of patriarchy, the effective tools of racism, and increasing class disparities in the world today, an intersectional analysis of women’s liberation in relation to a specific “national liberation” movement, where both men and women participate, is still an important task. Thus, a race-class-gender analysis will be developed and applied in this study, focusing on the Philippine context and building on the work of scholars who have already thrown light on these relations<sup>1</sup>.

### **Aims: Research Hypotheses and Questions**

This research project seeks to find out more about the history-making activism of women from the “Majority World” who are experiencing social transformation daily in their communities<sup>2</sup>, through a focus on a particular group of women activists from the Philippines. Based on my own experience, I hypothesize that these particular women, speaking from specific global and marginalized locations, can contribute to our general understanding of the links and tensions between the “liberation” of women and that of a nation, in the specific Philippine context. I set out to discover, through interviews with a selection of women activists working in different

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<sup>1</sup> Particularly Delia Aguilar, *Toward a Nationalist Feminism*. Quezon City, Philippines: Giraffe Books, 1998; and Nora Angeles, *Feminism and Nationalism: The Discourse on the Woman Question and Politics of the Women’s Movement in the Philippines*. Master of Arts Thesis, Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Briefly, *community* in this study can have a meaning as narrow as women’s local neighbourhoods or as broad as the community of migrant women throughout the world. The hope is that the process of understanding this term is part of what this study can help elucidate or add to our present understanding of “community.” “Majority World” will be used in preference to “Third World,” see p.9.

locations across the world, what they set out to achieve, how they go about it, how they assess and analyze their results, and how they situate their efforts in the current context of far-reaching economic globalization. (See more detailed presentation of questions and lines of inquiry, pp. 78, 111-112.)

This inquiry delves into the complex and subtle relationships between the personal and the political, the individual and the collective, when women leaders, often originally from relatively privileged social classes, attempt to represent and work for large numbers of underprivileged women, in this case workers and peasants in the Philippines and migrant workers abroad. The women concerned (including myself) share a political ideology that sees personal and social or political transformation occurring in and through the very struggle represented by grassroots activism. I aimed to examine the characteristics of their local, community-based actions and strategies, while bearing in mind that these women are situated in a particular national and transnational context in global history. While they share a common national history and often the experience of forced displacement, the insights gained and lessons learned from their stories may be applicable to other women's movements related to national and social change, especially for globally dispersed female migrant workers.

Much has been written by feminist theorists on women's movements in relation to socialism/ Marxism, global justice, postcolonial studies, and cross-cultural feminism (Grewal & Caplan, 2000; Holstrom, 2002; Saunders, 2002; Brenner, 2003; McCann & Kim, 2003; Lewis & Mills, 2003), as well as on the complex relationship of feminism to nationalism in supposedly postcolonial contexts (Jayawardene, 1986, McClintock, 1997, Kaplan et al., 1999, Bannerji et al., 2001, Vickers & Dhuruvarajan 2002). While appreciating their insights, this study examines a particular form of feminism inseparable from a national situation, which has grown from women's experiences of daily struggle for practical results in community-based collective

contexts. This does not prevent these women from having their own, perceptive theoretical analyses of their situation and their actions. Another central hypothesis of my inquiry is that the dialectical relationship between doing and educating, personal action and collective vision, is essential to a better understanding of Majority World feminist praxis. Through this project, the women interviewed, whose analysis is in dialogue with various feminist theories, share their experience and understanding of women's drive and passion to confront globalization within the highly problematic conditions of nation-states, while still addressing women's liberation as women.

Witnessing and documenting women's activism in relation to (trans)national issues, as in this study, problematizes the assumption initially shared by some of the participants that women are comfortably included in "nation-building." A number of those in this study acknowledge that they continue to face oppression based on gender, class, race, or sexuality, within both socialist and nationalist movements, both from men and from women who do not practice feminist gender and class analyses, and sometimes even from those who do. They admit that their loyalties may be divided, especially in the case of those who were born or now live permanently in another nation. Yet even these emphasize their on-going involvement and concern with issues arising in the Philippines.

The study documents and conveys stories from the lives of a number of Filipino women activists representing a range of ages, locations, and types of political engagement, although they all to a large extent share similar ideas. Framed by a theoretical discussion of the use of storytelling to convey the perspective of Majority World women involved in community action, their stories provoke further discussion of how transnational women's roles as activists constitute significant aspects of an evolving transnational feminism, both on the ground and in theory. The particularity of this study is that it adopts the complex standpoint of Majority World women

involved in transnational spaces and relationships, in contexts defined by the impact of economic globalization on their lives. Filipino women, more than any others, are dispersed across, and move back-and-forth among, national and continental borders. While this may appear to disenfranchise and disempower them, I propose that the reverse may also be the case. This may happen when some become prominent spokespersons, not only for their own national or transplanted groups but for all women whose labour and bodies are commodified in the present globalized context. This exploratory research looks at a particular group of activist women, caught in the midst of massive diasporic and transnational phenomena, who are actively working to change their own and their nation's situation.

To address these questions and bring theory and practice together, I conducted and recorded interviews with twelve Filipino women activists over a thirteen-month period (see Chapter 3, Methodology, for further details). Six were living in the Philippines, three in Canada, and three in the Netherlands. The different locations reflect the changing social and geographical conditions of many Filipino women over the last twenty years, including women involved in political action and social change movements. They were selected for their contribution to the "women's movement" in the Philippines and/or abroad, and for their conscious participation as women in a national movement for social change rooted in the Philippines. They include young women and middle-aged ones, who work either in poor or marginalized mixed communities of women and men or in grassroots women's organizations, or both at once. They are all directly involved in actions organized by and for local communities and they bring women's perspectives to their work even when the actions pertain to both women and men. In their respective national and transnational locations, I asked them to describe their struggles and successes as activists, in order to deepen feminist understanding of the role of women in social change movements, including what they/we refer to as "national liberation" struggles. While their voices convey "difference" among them, the analysis of their stories reveals the similarities

of their endeavours. The convergence or “sameness” reflected in their “movement” reveals the complexity of balancing the politics of acknowledging difference with the understanding of “unity” sought by social movements. I asked the women basic, open questions about their experiences in women’s activism and work for national change, how this work impacts on and is sustained by their communities, how the transnational situation of Filipino women relates to social activism wherever they are, and how and why they would describe their work as socially transformative in the present and future (see Appendix 2 and Chapter 3).

As well as contributing to theoretical debates and practical discussions, I hope the shared stories can be a dynamic resource for the women themselves and serve as a basis for their analysis, to help critique and reflect their praxis, and contribute to the social change towards which they aspire. I also hope and expect to contribute to the creation and preservation of Filipino community history, by drawing attention to these particular women’s experiences from the margins and across borders. The public sharing of narratives through storytelling provides “critical and community-accountable modes of reasoning” and allows communities to make responsible judgments” (Stone-Mediatore, 2003). These stories provide a deeper understanding of Filipino women’s contributions to social change. Attention to these individual narratives can also go beyond the Philippine particularity to examine the theorizing processes involved, to recognize common struggles globally in comparable sites (mostly in the “margins”), and to engage with the long-term projects of other women located in many parts of the world who are determined to transform their societies. The current resistance and struggles of Filipino women do not constitute a new phenomenon, but their stories illustrate new and complex differentiations. While demonstrating change, they echo historical realities, confirming that when there is unbridled exploitation, colonization, and re-colonization of a nation’s people and resources, there will also be the necessary cries and struggles for freedom, justice, and liberation. These laments are heard across a wide spectrum of political protest, coming from

organizations within dominant structures or taking the form of armed rebellion or civil wars, as lived by many nations in the past and today (Fanon, 1963). In the context of globalized migration, the historical struggle of Filipino women for autonomy continues. The women in this study assist in understanding the reasons and recognizing the forms of the struggle they are undertaking today. It is my hope that feminists in other communities, including academia, can relate to the analyses and theories of this particular group of politically active women from one part of the Majority World.

### **Key Concepts: Situating the Research**

This study is situated in relation to a socio-political and theoretical context that requires clear understanding and use of certain key concepts. Two main global perspectives are relevant: (a) Majority World feminism and transnational feminist struggles; and (b) social transformation activism in response to the impact of neo-colonialism through globalization. The following terms will be defined here: Majority World, globalization, neocolonialism, imperialism, semi-feudal/semi-colonial society, praxis, and transnationalism.

***Majority World.*** The term *Majority World* will be used in preference to “Third World” or “Two-Thirds World” because the use of “Third World” and “Two-Thirds World” constructs a world outside of Europe and North America, while also creating a hierarchy of First and Third World nations, with Third World being of lower rank than First World. More importantly, it excludes both migrants to the “developed” world and the underprivileged indigenous/ aboriginal women and men who are present in large numbers in struggles within the “First World” of the European Union (EU), North America (Canada, Mexico, and the US), and other “western” contexts, as well as in Central and South America, Africa, the Asia/Pacific, and Polynesia. The term “Majority World” does not presuppose the complete inclusion of indigenous/aboriginal women or assume an essentialism often observed in non-aboriginal projects. As Linda Tuhiwai-Smith has said,

"Fragmentation is not a phenomenon of postmodernism as many might claim. For indigenous peoples fragmentation has been the consequence of imperialism" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 28). By utilizing "Majority World," I wish to acknowledge the critiques and contributions of indigenous/aboriginal scholars, writers, and activists in the de-colonization and re-construction of local and national struggles, particularly from the perspective of women activists. "Majority World" represents an attempt at naming a larger world comprised of great numbers of people outside of the Euro/North American/western circuit, though they may be located in "rich" countries. They may be the original peoples of these lands (like the Aetas of the Philippines) or products of colonization (like Filipino lowlanders), or migrants/immigrants (as are Filipino-Canadians).

**Globalization.** I will assume the context of globalization policies that directly impacts the work of the women in the study and unites them in their struggles against those policies (see further analysis below, "Globalization: The Context of the Study"). *Globalization* is usually defined in conjunction with capitalism as the dominant economic system of our day, which leads Chandra Talpade Mohanty to urge women to take up the decolonizing, anti-capitalist feminist project necessary to combat "global capitalism" (Mohanty, 2003, 7-9). Nancy Naples defines globalization as the global economic restructuring of capitalism as well as the worldwide movement of peoples, information, and consumer culture (Naples and Desai, 2002, 8-9). Manisha Desai notes that globalization is associated with the "homogenizing impact of global capital" through increased economic integration, resulting in one world market shaped by transnational corporations as well as the global flow of people, ideas, and images into a hybridity with homogeneous (political and economic) or heterogeneous (cultural practices) dimensions (Naples and Desai, 2002, 15-16). These political-economic and cultural aspects of globalization are seen as closely intertwined by Chela Sandoval, following the theories of Fredric Jameson (Sandoval, 2000, 15-27; Jameson, 1998, 54-77). Sandoval sees globalization



as a neocolonial force associated particularly with the expansion of North American capitalism, which has resulted in the “perversity of postmodern socio/political/ economic culture” that has transformed the globe and must be confronted in all its dimensions (17), that is, more comprehensively than was ever undertaken before.

**Neocolonialism.** This *neocolonialism*, the force that expands capitalism globally, has its inherent roots in “colonialism,” constituting its “new” manifestation today. The term implies a new face to what is a continuation of the essence of colonialism, which is the domination by militarily strong, wealthy nations of North America and Europe over technologically and economically deprived Majority World nations. If colonialism is the term used for the era before colonized nations were granted “independence” by their colonizers, then “neo-colonialism” is a useful parallel term for today’s form of imperialism or empire-building. Tuhiwai-Smith ties “imperialism” and “colonialism” closely together, stating that “colonialism is but one expression of imperialism” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2002, 21). She analyzes these interconnected concepts, situating the colonialism that started in Europe in the fifteenth century as but one expression of an imperialism that “still destroys and is reforming itself constantly” (8, 19). The term *imperialism* is used by Tuhiwai-Smith in four ways, to evoke “economic expansion, subjugation of others, an idea or spirit with many forms of realization, and a discursive field of knowledge” (21). All these elements of imperialism will be assumed when the terms *imperialism* or *imperialist* are used here.

**Imperialism.** If the term *imperialism* is used to mean the colonization undertaken by competing empires, then “imperialist globalization” could be considered the parallel term for new forms of “empire” created by powerful transnational corporations associated with equally powerful nation-states, staking their economic claims on nations of the Majority World for resources, labour, and markets. Hence the term “globalization” reflects the range of continuities and discontinuities of

old and new forms of domination. How is this “neo-colonialism” within “imperialist globalization” expressed in the world today? Further analysis of today’s “neo-liberal policies” reveals the strategies used by proponents of globalization in market capitalism as the expression of modern-day conquest. The women in this study identify the impact of these policies of “liberalization, privatization, and de-regulation”<sup>3</sup> as implementing a modern triple strategy of dominating the world’s production, trade, and commerce within one global market.

This study recognizes the paradoxical dialectic that while very little has changed in the experience of colonization for a country like the Philippines, resulting in an ongoing need to resist and oppose the oppressor, much has changed in the new forms of colonialism experienced today (Kagarlitsky, 1989). Globalization policies assume that a country like the Philippines has been granted independence by its last colonizer (the US) and has benefited from capitalism’s insatiable drive towards industrialized “progress.” World Social Forum meetings, however, attempt to address the incompatibility of democracy and development, and question the inevitability and desirability of a globalization that creates the conditions for the resumption of “development” (Amin, 2001). This concept of globalization as ultimately progressive and desirable (Bello, 2002) is contested when a country like the Philippines has not had stable industrialization since the U.S. took over from Spain at the turn of the century, nor acquired technological and financial infrastructure through today’s neo-colonial enterprises (see next section below for discussion of the Philippine context).

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<sup>3</sup> The acronym for neo-liberal policies of liberalization-privatization-deregulation is shortened by Filipino activists to “la-pi-da” (l-p-d) which in the national language, Tagalog, means “tombstone.” The notion of “de-nationalization” is starting to be introduced to this triad, not only as a result of l-p-d but as a strategy of conquest. In the Philippines and other Majority World countries, governments under US influence insist on constitutional changes that favour US capital and transnational corporations. In the Philippines protests against “cha-cha” or charter change occurred in 1998 (under Fidel Ramos and his economic policies of courting foreign investment called “Philippines 2000”) and are being re-visited by the current Macapagal-Arroyo government. This current revival has once again been thwarted by people’s protests, as a form of “street parliament.”

***Semi-Feudal, Semi-Colonial Society.*** With the women in this study, I claim that they/we are active in present-day history not only because of <sup>4</sup>the historical context which is continually invoked, but also by being consciously present in history as it evolves. Past history is melded into a future project to make history, as when the participants repeatedly describe the Philippines as still a “semi-feudal, semi-colonial” society still needing liberation. Like other European colonial powers, Spain colonized the minds, bodies and societies of Filipinos through religion, education, and politics, with the might of military force and economic exploitation. After 1946, when it received its “independence” from the United States, the Philippines remained under US tutelage. The feudal structures, relationships, and values remained, governing 80% of the population who are indentured peasant farmers or workers. The Philippines has never been completely isolated from industrialization, but is not considered an industrialized nation. At the same time, it is immersed in globalization, so cannot be labeled as still a feudal and colonial state. Thus, the terms *semi-feudal* and *semi-colonial* describe the relatively unchanged feudal and colonial world that Filipino peasants and workers live in, while also reflecting the discontinuities and new forms of world-wide (re)colonization. This is seen in how their labour and products are subject to new, modern regulations enforced by capitalism and globalization, that perpetuate semi-feudal and semi-colonial conditions (if not identities), to confirm their full 100% status as a neo-colonized nation within a culture of globalization under neo-liberal policies. The labour and sex trade migration of Filipino women illustrates the global dimensions of semi-colonial and semi-feudal conditions. While massive international trafficking of Majority World people appears “new,” it also manifests a recognizable colonial use of surplus labour to serve empires. The women in this study thus address neo-colonial, semi-feudal condition on

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<sup>4</sup> According to International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), about “half the population of the Philippines is rural...where 80% of the country's poor people live.” <[www.ruralpoverty.org.web.guest/country/home/tags/philippines](http://www.ruralpoverty.org.web.guest/country/home/tags/philippines)> February 2007. According to US Aid, in 2000 59% of the population was urban, and that 38% of the poor live in urban areas. <[www.makingcitieswork.org/files/pdf/southeast-asia.philippines.pdf](http://www.makingcitieswork.org/files/pdf/southeast-asia.philippines.pdf)> August, 2002.

the global stage by recognizing that transnational procedures of trafficking and processes of migration and immigration maintain familiar colonial power relationships.

***Praxis.*** These activists refer to their work as feminist praxis. *Praxis* is a formerly Marxist term that re-emerged relatively recently out of the struggles of grassroots communities in Central and South America in the 1970s and 1980s. It represented the phenomenon of grassroots struggles by peasants and workers subjugated and persecuted by military regimes in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay, whose brutal suppression of opposition was considered by many as following the fascism of Nazi Germany. A key concept and practical tool in a movement for social and political transformation, in the Latin American context *praxis* implied action undertaken within a theoretical framework.

The relationship between theoretical thinking and daily practice was established through the intense struggles of the poorest and most marginalized people of these nations. This occurred with the collaboration of academics, scholars, researchers, and theoreticians from academic settings immersed in poor rural and urban poor communities. Because of the historical hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin American countries, grassroots communities where praxis was demonstrated were actively developed as “Christian based communities” largely influenced by academically and religiously trained priests and nuns. Alongside the influence of the Church was the authority of academic and university research institutions which, traditionally, assumed theorizing to be solely within their purview. Often, in Latin America, these universities were founded by religious institutions of the Church, particularly the Jesuit religious order. Historically, they served the elite and privileged classes, as colleges and universities tended to be private institutions with tuition fees prohibitive for the peasant and worker classes, and instruction was in Spanish. The Philippines, under the “sword and cross”

colonization of Spain, followed the same path of knowledge production, with authority lodged in privileged, church based institutions of learning.<sup>5</sup>

The spread of base communities in the 1970s and '80s in Central and Latin America, which *conscienticized* peasants and workers and empowered their communities, was an unprecedented systematic transformation that connected the religious and political beliefs of academics to the practical knowledge and lived experiences of peasants and workers. The theoretical privileges of academics and the practical resistance and struggles of peasants and workers were deeply integrated. Campaigns for justice, inspired by Christian (mainly Roman Catholic) liberation theological premises and socialist (particularly Marxist) political analyses, were based on the emerging praxis of action-reflection in grassroots communities. One of the most memorable experiences of this integration was that of six Jesuits of the Central University of San Salvador in El Salvador in the 1980s, who had embarked on research and community projects that revealed the exploitation and human rights violations suffered by peasants and workers. The murder and martyrdom of these six white, male, European (Spanish) Jesuits was a direct assault on the concept of praxis as engagement in concrete struggles. Their "coming down from the ivory tower" had allowed them to immerse themselves in the life of the people and transform theology into "liberation theology"; the peasants, workers, and armed rebels, in turn, were able to sustain their actions with the power of theory through processes of conscientization, thanks to the priests' contribution. Undoubtedly, the Jesuits struggled with the contradictions of their privilege while attempting to integrate themselves and their ideas with the peasant community. Although the sustainability of such processes is not yet known, these base communities certainly demonstrated the effectiveness of their actions and the possibilities for

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<sup>5</sup> While the role of the Roman Catholic Church in Philippine colonization and its impact on women is immense, religion did not emerge as a major theme in this study. Sister Mary John Mananzan (1988, 1994, 1997) describes the impact the Catholic religion has had in shaping women's identities and national problems affecting Filipino women, including their contradictory responses as religiously influenced women when entering prostitution.

social change through collective praxis, when solidarity can be achieved across class difference and the tension between religion and politics. However, the failure of their social and armed revolution to beat the odds, even after intense praxis, warns of the on-going power of historical class lines and the hierarchy entrenched in a colonial mentality and hegemonic structures, even among those consciously seeking social transformation.

Rather than implying conflicts within the movement, this analysis is a reminder that Filipino people, like the poor of Latin America, are still subject to colonialism from within and beyond national borders. The activists interviewed attempt to be as aware as possible of their own class situation in relation to those they work with, and to become an integral part of the communities for which they are leaders or spokespersons. As in Latin America, alliances have been built between academics and peasants or workers, and between those with a religious background and motivation and those espousing a non-religious socialist ideology. Many individuals in the Philippines, as in Latin America, combine elements from apparently contradictory sets of beliefs in their own ideas, and have firsthand experience of living in widely divergent social settings.

The development of a particular kind of context-specific *praxis* has also been an essential part of other relatively successful collective struggles, such as those of the Maori people in Aotearoa/New Zealand since the 1980s. The difference from the Latin American or Filipino situation is that there was no traditionally privileged class or elite group, like the foreign Jesuits, that injected themselves into the Maori struggle. This is not to imply that the Latin American base community/ liberation theology phenomenon was only a “top down” process. By its very nature, it was only possible in conjunction with the raised awareness, initiatives, and direct action of marginalized, grassroots communities. Similarly, the Maori did not seek “equality” (or

sameness) with the dominant (white) society, but rather the autonomy to be Maori.<sup>6</sup> They acknowledged that university institutions continued to be privileged sites of knowledge production, and therefore these became “sites of struggle” to express Maori identity and empowerment. Maori students and academics entered and immersed themselves in academic institutions and undertook social transformation through policy engagement, gaining credibility from academic theory and research “from the ground.” Their praxis was sustained because of *who* instigated their social struggle (the Maori themselves) and *how* they raised their activist aspirations to the level of theory – by engaging in creative theorizing and sustained social actions until they developed a process associated with a specifically Maori enterprise, including academic research and education.

The Maori experience has inspired other aboriginal groups around the world, as part of a transnational movement of indigenous peoples rediscovering their past and affirming their identities. Philippine women are part of another marginalized transnational category, those dispersed across the globe as migrant workers. Sharing their successful praxis as activists contributes to a parallel transnational movement for the rights of displaced Majority World women. Their goals and methods share important characteristics with the Maoris’ organizing, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.

***Transnationalism.*** *Transnational* is used here to mean the movement across geographic and socially constructed national borders and spaces of “capital, labour, culture and knowledge” (Razack, 2000), in preference to the term “international,” which tends to divide these spaces, as in *regional* versus *national* versus *international*. The term is used positively when women make more and more connections globally. However, it is not a neutral term when “transnationalism”

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 3: Graham Smith, Professor of Educational Studies at UBC, explained this distinction in a course (EADM 508B, Winter, 2004).

is usurped to legitimate unjust economics, such as the sheer size and power of “transnational corporations” (TNCs) that wreak havoc on local economies. Here, transnationalism refers instead to the ongoing, existing global connections and shifting relations among communities in different parts of the world, which parallel the equally borderless global domination by the world’s economic powers (Ong, 1999; Sarker & Niyogi De, 2002).

This concept of transnationalism is not akin to the “outreach” notions of those speaking from Euro/North American/western locations. Rather, the implication of its use in “transnational feminism” is of the mutual flow among all locations. It will not be understood as a derivative of western feminism, nor placed in a continuum of feminisms; rather, in the case of Filipino women activists their feminism is transnational because of their locations, because of what it resists in a globalized world, and because of what it contributes to social transformation. One of the central hypotheses of this study is that a unique Filipino feminism contributes to the understanding of “transnational feminism” by its ability to speak from various locations of linkage, confronting the familiar patterns of divisive global socio-economic policies that have devastated women’s lives and many Majority World social systems, economies, and societies.

### **A Brief History and the Current Context**

Several aspects of Philippine history<sup>7</sup> help to explain why the country continues to be a colonized/neo-colonized entity with many aspects of feudalism/semi-feudalism remaining intact. Prior to Spanish conquest the Philippines was a group of island-based sea-faring Malay kingdoms. In pre-colonial times, it is known that there were different levels of development among the many islands of the archipelago encountered by the Spaniards. There was little class stratification or division of labor, as men and women participated equally in subsistence

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<sup>7</sup> Sources: Abriza, 2003; Bautista, 2003; Constantino, 1966; Golay, 1997; Ileto, 1998; Philippine History Site, 2003; Ocampo, 1999; Rafael, 2000; San Juan, 1997; Simbulan, 1985; Sta. Romana-Cruz, 1992.



fishing, hunting, and agricultural activities. As a class system developed, so did gender roles. Women were assigned more domestic and agricultural work, planting and food gathering, while men moved to hunting, the development of weaponry, claiming of territory, and eventually warfare. Class lines emerged with the beginnings of private ownership. The class categories described include the *datus* who owned slaves, tools, land, animals, and boats; *freemen* who owned shares in communally cultivated lands; *semi-slaves* who served or paid tribute to the *datus*; and the *slaves* who sustained their masters. The earlier social groups were sometimes matriarchal and in general egalitarian. Their genderless deity, *Bathala*, and a Filipino creation myth, both evoke the union, not subordination, of women and men, in the notion of the godhead as the union of man/woman in light.<sup>8</sup> A woman was valued with a “bride price”, because she was a loss for the family, and there was no equivalent of the modern notion of “marriage.” Reproductive labor was considered a most important aspect of society, with polyandry being practiced<sup>9</sup>. Inheritance was not based on gender lines but on birth order. Women have been described as *diwatas*, healers or spiritual mentors, and *babaylanes* (priestesses) in this society. Their positions of leadership and prominence are well-known from documents left by Spanish friars and oral traditions in indigenous communities today. They had great influence over the people and an important role in leading rituals, as healers, midwives, and religious practitioners with special training to contact the spirit world (Mananzan, 1988, 2-4). Encountering women completely different from those in the streets of Spain, the Spanish colonizers set out to domesticate the indigenous women. From 1521 to 1898, Spain conquered the islands by force

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<sup>8</sup> This is explained by Sister Mary John Mananzan in *Woman and Religion* (Manila: Institute of Women's Studies, St. Scholastica's College, 1998, p.3). The first consonant in *Ba-Tha-La* is the first syllable of *babae* (woman) and the last consonant is the first syllable of *lalake* (man). The middle consonant is an aspirated sound which means light or spirit. In a Filipino creation myth, a bird similar to a crane opens a bamboo stalk. Upon splitting it open, the first humans, *Maganda* (woman) and *Malakas* (man) emerge. It is the mutuality of the creation of male and female that is emphasized, without which neither one would be created.

<sup>9</sup> Helena Norberg Hodge (1992) describes the polyandric relationships among the Ladakhi people today as a means to preserve and sustain the community and their resources in the subsistence regions of the Himalayas; the situation may have been similar in parts of the Philippines.

through its army and by deception through Catholicism. Indigenous Filipino women were domesticated through the use of education and religion. The Church established schools, translated training manuals for young girls, and promoted the cult of the obedient Virgin Mary. Later, the Spaniards also used the model of a *doncella* (a little *dona*) named Maria Clara,<sup>10</sup> who was "sweet, docile, obedient, and self-sacrificing." Maria Clara became the image of the "ideal" Filipino woman, an image which also looms large in the reverse image of the Filipino woman as prostitute.

When the Spaniards came in 1521, they were shocked by the freedom manifested by the *mujer indigena* (indigenous woman), which did not fit into their concept of how women should be and behave since the women in the Iberian peninsula at that time lived like contemplative nuns. Although the missionaries were forced to acknowledge the superior quality of life of the indigenous woman, they set out to remold her according to the image and likeness of the perfect woman of the Iberian society.<sup>11</sup>

The first Spanish explorer who landed in the Philippines, Ferdinand Magellan, was killed by Lapu-Lapu, a local chieftain, in 1521 on the island of Mactan in the Visayas region southeast of Manila. The Spanish government was officially established in 1565 and the Roman Catholic Church became its strong ally in domesticating the indigenous people of the archipelago with its 7,100 islands and more than 80 dialects and languages. Domination and domestication of areas of the Philippines were successful in the more accessible regions of Central Luzon and near-southern Visayan Islands. There was less expansion in the northern mountains of the Cordilleras, where indigenous communities remain today, and in the more southern Mindanao region, where Muslim Filipinos live in large numbers.

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<sup>10</sup> Maria Clara is a character in the epic, *Noli Me Tangere*, written by Jose Rizal, declared the national hero of the Philippines during the Commonwealth government under the US. Her character is a demure, "domesticated" Filipino woman of the privileged class. Rizal also used her as a symbol of the Philippines subdued by Spain. "Maria Clara" has entered the lexicon to mean demure, submissive, religiously devout Filipino women. (With regard to Jose Rizal, many from peasant and worker backgrounds consider Andres Bonifacio, himself from the peasant class, the more prominent revolutionary leader. Even this difference, as to who the "real" hero of the Philippines is, reflects the significant class differences in the Philippines.)

<sup>11</sup> Sister Mary John Mananzan. *The Woman Question in the Philippines* (op cit.) p. 4.

The *encomienda* system was the first imperialist system put in place. This gave lands to Spanish authorities and forced the indigenous people to pay tribute to the Spanish crown. Only men were allowed to pay tribute. Later the *hacienda* system gave large tracks of land to landowners and this began the concept of private ownership on a national scale. Both men and women were exploited under this feudal system. There was a re-organization of villages and people were re-located to “urban” areas. Men were forced into labor and women and children fell under the control of the clergy who spread the Catholic faith. The formation of the *hacendero* and peasant classes in fact constituted a working class who harvested crops. Women became part of teams for harvesting and weaving, and were subsequently categorized into four groups: daughters of the elite who had no interaction with the economic or production spheres but had the role of spreading the faith (many worked for no pay in religious convents); working women (who were the first recorded strikers in the tobacco industry against harassment and usury<sup>12</sup>); peasant women working in *haciendas*; and an informal group of “prostitutes.” The latter were “privileged housekeepers” exploited by friars, and being away from their lands, became sex workers for survival. Thus intricate relationships based on economic hardship, sexual and gender exploitation, and the subjugation of non-white/non-European women by white, European men, were systematized and continue to the present day.

Spain remained in the Philippines for three hundred and thirty-three years, until its defeat by the United States in 1898. During this period the Spanish government extracted much of the natural resources, including minerals such as gold, silver, and copper, and marketed products such as sugar and coconut materials. The Spanish galleon trade to and from Mexico and the Philippines, and from there to Europe, was a global transport system. The opulent structures

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<sup>12</sup> Maria Luisa Camagay, *Working Women of Manila in the Nineteenth Century* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, University Centre for Women's Studies, 1995) p. 13.

which are seen in Spain today were built during this era of colonization. They are evidence of the economic plunder of resources from the colonies (of Central and South America and the Philippines in Asia), goods transported to the markets of Europe, and profits transferred to the coffers of the Spanish Crown.<sup>13</sup> It is not a coincidence that the valuable minerals mined after Spanish rule were taken from the northern Cordillera region, this area not having been fully exhausted by Spanish extraction. The indigenous peoples of the Cordilleras continue to struggle for land, the environment, and their livelihood to this day. Since the 1970s local protests in the Cordilleras against the collaboration of transnational mining companies and the Philippine state have been marked by political killings. Warnings of a similar fate for southern Mindanao's mineral wealth are well known. Armed rebellion by indigenous groups in this region fighting for their lands and for regional autonomy has been ruthlessly confronted by the Philippine armed forces and national police. Along with US military presence in the region since 2002, the fighting in this significantly Muslim area is carried out under the pretext of what the U.S. government has called the "second front" against worldwide terrorism.<sup>14</sup>

After 1898, the Philippines was governed by a Commonwealth government with presidents and an elite hand-picked by the US government. They were sent to the US to study, learn the US legislative, judiciary, and executive systems, and return to become heads of state. These men from the upper *ilustrado* or *comprador* classes became the politicians and bureaucrats who developed what we know today as bureaucrat capitalist structures. These elite classes

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<sup>13</sup> Also during this period, Britain and the Netherlands made unsuccessful excursions to the Philippines in their attempts to conquer it. In Southeast Asia the Netherlands conquered Indonesia, Britain took Hong Kong and Malaya (and India further away), Portugal had Macao, and France lay claim to Indo-China. When I was at the national museum in Amsterdam during my interviews with the women there in 2004, the exhibit I saw was on the "Golden Age of the Netherlands." The exquisite items that came from trade with the colonies were used to illustrate this "golden age;" they were obtained from Indonesia, China, and other places during this era of colonization.

<sup>14</sup> Associated Press. "5,700 US troops to join military drills in RP, officials say." Inq7 Network. Oct.7, 2006. <<http://www.inq7.net>>; and National. "US warships head to Mindanao for drills." ABS-CBN News. May 24, 2007. <<http://www.abs-cbn.com>>.

continue to hold economic wealth in society and political power in the Philippine government. Philippine independence was granted by the US government on July 4, 1946. With rare exceptions, the succession of presidents of the Republic of the Philippines maintained old social and political patterns. They were pro-US, upper-class, mixed-white *mestizo* or Spanish-descended, Roman Catholic (or of other Christian denominations), and/or US-educated, bilingual/ English-speaking, and men. The current president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, is the daughter of a former president, Disodado Macapagal. She attended Harvard Law School and married into the wealthy Arroyo family, thus repeating the cycle of merging economic and political power among the Filipino elite. The upper class shaped during Spanish times had Spanish wealth and white-European roots. They were light-skinned *mestizos* whose descendants today make up the leadership of the country under US rule in its capitalist globalized form.

Ferdinand Marcos was elected president in 1968. When he declared Martial Law in 1972 Filipinos experienced an openly declared authoritarian and dictatorial form of leadership. Marcos and his wife Imelda ruled firmly and utilized the Philippine armed forces to their advantage. It was in 1986, after over twenty years of the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos and his wife, that the Filipino people organized to oust the Marcos regime, and succeeded. Marcos was followed by Corazon Aquino, the first woman president. Not a politician herself, she was hoisted to power for being the wife of Marcos' assassinated political opponent, Melchor "Ninoy" Aquino. It was in the aftermath of the Marcos ouster and under Cory Aquino's presidency that the framers of the 1987 constitution included a provision for a party-list system in which groups representing "marginalized and underrepresented sectors" may have congressional representation.<sup>15</sup> It was also under Aquino that paramilitary squads flourished and killings

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<sup>15</sup> These sectors included labor, peasant, urban poor, indigenous cultural communities, women, and youth. Party-list groups receiving at least 2% of the total votes cast are entitled to one seat each and if

increased, particularly in Mindanao. When General Fidel Ramos was elected, after her term, he launched a program called "Philippines 2000" in an attempt to have the Philippines enter the economic prosperity achieved in the 1990s by the "Asian Tigers" (Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan). His presidency only succeeded in immersing the Philippines into the economic agenda of the IMF and World Bank, and extended the Labor Export Policy of exporting cheap Filipino labour started by Marcos. Joseph Estrada followed him but he did not finish his term since the Filipinos, especially urban citizens, ousted the president for the second time. Their protests in the streets of Manila forced Estrada out of office and he was subsequently charged and sentenced for corruption.<sup>16</sup>

It was under these circumstances that Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, then vice-president, assumed the presidency. She ran as a candidate after completing what would have been Estrada's term of office. Controversy surrounded her election, as evidence emerged of her participation in cheating on electoral votes. The women interviewed in this study are presently living under this president, who won re-election in the May 2007 elections. The women who are living in the Philippines participated in national elections, supporting three candidates who ran for the Gabriela Women's Party in the party-list system. Two of the candidates now sit as representatives, one more than after the previous election. In the two years prior to the 2007 election, street protests were squelched by the national police and political killings have increased in numbers greater than during the entire Marcos regime. Relevant details of past

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greater than 2% are entitled to additional seats for a maximum of three seats. This move towards proportional representation has been counteracted by attempts to undermine the process in the last national elections in May 2007 by putting in place government-sponsored "party-lists", as well as increasing political killings leading up to the elections.

<sup>16</sup> Estrada has since been pardoned by the current president in 2007, and released from comfortable prison arrangements.

Philippine history and current developments will be discussed further, as they arise in relation to the work of the women in this study.

For the Philippine context<sup>17</sup>, the scope of the transnational perspective I will adopt is vast, because the globe now is unlike what it was in the era of the *conquistadores*, from 1521 to 1898. The soldiers of the Spanish Crown passed months at sea in order to arrive at the Philippine Islands. Their voyages of exploration and conquest were inhibited by the great distances and time traveled from Spain. Even in the years after 1898, the growing US empire had difficulties in implementing the Monroe Doctrine of “Manifest Destiny” from across the Pacific Ocean. Present-day air travel and telecommunications enable an electronic, high technology conquest of all the resources of the Majority World, taking place through satellite pictures, espionage, and economic warfare. While traditional foot soldiers from what is often labeled the US empire continue to enter Majority World nations, it is economic globalization that drives the current imperialist enterprise. Conquest and exploitation still entail conditions of enslavement of workers, the destruction of “native” or “othered” bodies from disease and hunger, and human rights violations committed by the State. The women interviewed reiterated that the situation is grave at home and abroad, starting from the need for personal survival. Their feelings and attitudes, embedded in the Majority World’s ancient and surviving cultures which defined humanity in very different terms (Schlegel, 1999), are compromised. Yet in response to “modernity” Filipino women, including indigenous and Muslim minority women in the Philippines, still manifest a spirit of resistance, struggle, and assertion, as demonstrated in their activism today. It is from an awareness of these historical, social, and economic contexts that this study, through the women’s narratives, strives to actively contribute to current understandings of Filipino women’s unique experiences at home in the Philippines, here in

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<sup>17</sup> Sources: Centre for Women’s Research, 1990; GABRIELA, 1998; Choudry, 2003; Guzman, 2001; Hutchcroft, 1998; Lindio-McGovern 1997, 2003, 2004; McCoy & de Jesus, 1982; Pagsibol, 1993; Philippine Women Centre, 2000; Sison, 1998; IBON 1993, 1996, 1997.

Canada, and worldwide. Most importantly, it serves as a testimony to the lives of women who are, as I write, engaged in ongoing liberating and transformative social actions, from the rice fields of the Philippines to the meeting rooms of Amsterdam and Vancouver.

### **Activism and the Women's Movement**

As is to be expected, the recent history of the women's movement<sup>18</sup> in the Philippines emerges from the country's overall history. In order to understand the context of Filipino women's activism in the '70s, the '80s, and up to the present, it is necessary to know the background of the contemporary women's movement in the Philippines. This movement, born out of opposition to the Marcos dictatorship, has been analyzed by Judy Taguiwalo (1993), a professor at the University of the Philippines who was herself already an activist during the Marcos era. While it is generally acknowledged that women have been part of Philippine revolutions since Spanish colonial domination, it was not until the national democratic movement of the 1970s that, for the first time in Philippine history, women were named and placed in the revolutionary agenda of Philippine liberation. This was a result of the groundwork of two youth organizations, Kabataang Makabayan (KM), or the *Nationalist Youth*, and Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan (SDK), or the *Democratic Youth Alliance*. Protests and demonstrations were followed by violent dispersals which resulted in what is known as the First Quarter Storm (FQS) of 1970. The FQS led to broad dissemination, by students throughout the country, of a political analysis that significantly exposed the basic social and economic problems faced by Filipinos. This resulted in a national mass-based democratic movement in the Philippines.

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<sup>18</sup> Angeles, 1989; Centre for Women's Research, 1990; De Stoop, 1994; GABRIELA, 1998; Pollock & Stolfus, 1992; Ledesma, 2001; Mananzan, 1994, 1997, 1998; Monte, 1998; Rosca, 2001; Taguiwalo, 1992, 1993; Uy, 1993.



Then as now, Filipino women's oppression was rooted in the semi-feudal, semi-colonial national situation of the Philippines. As discussed earlier, "semi-feudal" means that even though Spanish rule had nominally ended in 1898, feudal systems were maintained during US colonialism, and feudal relationships remain largely intact even to the present day. The system is still "semi-feudal" in that, just as under Spain, Philippine agricultural or mining products are exchanged for other products from the developed world, now primarily the US. Peasants continue as indentured landless farmers who still comprise 80% of the Philippine population, and 50% of them are women. Workers, professionals, small businesses, etc. make-up 10-15% of the labour force, and women's participation is growing in numbers as more female workers are deployed in export processing zones. The 5-10% of landowners and landlords continue to own 80% of the land and sources of production.<sup>19</sup> It is "semi-colonial" because, although the Philippines was granted "independence" by the US in 1946 under many conditions, US rule remains pervasive.

One of these conditions was a US military presence in the Philippines in order to have a strategic advantage in the Pacific region (Simbulan, 1985). A significant change in 1944 to the Tydings-McDuffie Act<sup>20</sup> enabled the US military to remain in the Philippines, a condition

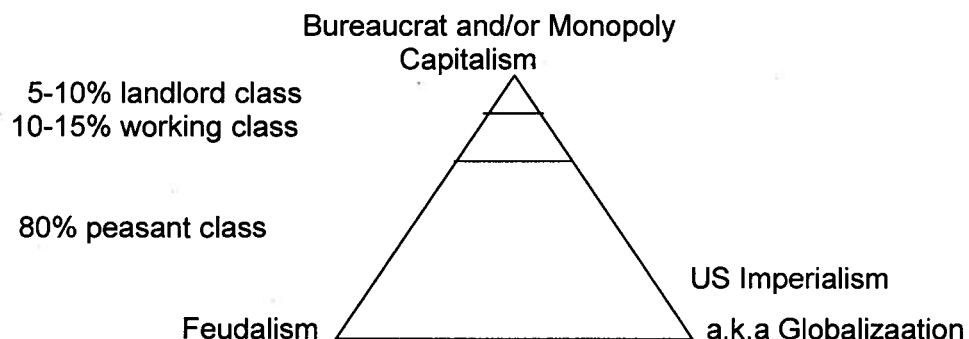
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<sup>19</sup> IBON Foundation and BAYAN submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in November 2007, noted that 52% of all farms in the country are under some form of tenurial agreement. In spite of agrarian reforms, "less than a third of landowners still own more than 80% of agricultural land. <[www.ibon.org](http://www.ibon.org)>

<sup>20</sup> The Tydings-McDuffie Act was also the Philippine Independence Act of 1934. The original version did not include the retention of US bases, but allowed only naval fuel stations. However, in the midst of the second world war, the US succeeded in 1944 in getting the Commonwealth government in exile in Washington to agree to the retention of the bases as a condition for independence. In return for granting Philippine independence, the US made it a condition, as early as 1933, that military bases would have to be allowed. Without ever submitting this to the people of the Philippines, the Bases Agreement was signed under President Osmena in 1947, changing the law of the Tydings-McDuffie Act. The agreement was ratified by the Philippine Senate, but never by the US Senate. Similar amendments made to the agreement in 1983, to extend the term, were not submitted to the people and so the Bases Agreement has been illegal from the start. The history and issues of US bases in the Philippines have been analyzed in

demanding by the US prior to granting Philippine independence. In 1991 (the year of the Mount Pinatubo eruption which hastened the closure of Clark Air Force Base in Angeles, Pampanga) U.S. bases were finally disbanded after broad mass movements demanded that the Bases Agreement be terminated. However, this was short-lived. US militarization of the Philippines resumed with the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA)<sup>21</sup>, approved by the US and Philippine Governments in February, 1998. In the absence of official US bases, the VFA allows any and all US military personnel to be present and to operate in *any* part of the Philippines. Thus, US imperialism, safeguarded by continued US military presence, was ensured after 1946, and is expressed today in intact trade patterns advantageous to US-owned transnational companies, US corporate ownership of Philippine resources, and maintenance of Philippine-US relations through bureaucrat capitalism (Lindio-McGovern, 1997, 2003, 2004; CWR, 1990; IBON, 1993, 1996, 1997).

**Figure 1 Three Intersecting Problems of the Philippine State**




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depth by Roland Simbulan in *The Bases of Our Insecurity: A Study of the U.S. Military Bases in the Philippines* (Metro Manila, BALAI Fellowship, Inc., 1985) p. 13-15.

<sup>21</sup> The VFA was passed by the Estrada-dominated Philippine Senate in May 1999 and took effect on June 1, 1999. Estrada was shortly after ousted by what is known as People Power II after People Power I which ousted Marcos in 1986. With the VFA, some features have a direct impact on Filipino women. While prostitution was previously generally confined to the US bases, the sex trade became widespread and increased significantly with the presence of US troops throughout the country. The VFA allows US ships to dock at any port and military exercises with the Philippine Armed Forces, known as *Balikatan* exercises, are conducted in many parts of the country. The VFA also shields US military personnel from prosecution when they have broken Philippine Law. At present, protests continue as demands are made for four US Marines to stand trial for the rape of a young Filipino woman. The US Embassy in Manila has refused to allow this.

The Philippine reality from the 1970s to the present is exposed in Delia Aguilar's analysis of US imperialism (Aguilar, 1998). She cites James Petras' assertion that globalization is "nothing more than a code word for US imperialism" (1998, 2). Figures for 1998 substantiate this claim, showing that the United States holds 244 of the 500 biggest companies in the world, 70% of the 25 largest firms whose capitalization exceeds US \$86 billion, and 61% of the top 100 companies. Europe and Japan share control of the remainder. Thus, the development of the Philippine women's movement in the 1970s coincided with the start or expansion of US-led globalization. It expressed and developed itself within the broad national-democratic movement in direct opposition to the semi-feudal, semi-colonial US imperialist enterprise of the latter part of this century.

Democratic national youth organizations already recognized that women suffer from both class (economic) and male (patriarchal) domination. They saw that for national liberation to be achieved, women's emancipation had to be an integral part of the struggle. Thus, the first women's organizations emerged from these times and efforts. The first action by women from youth organizations was to picket a major beauty contest. This action drew attention to a women-specific issue -- the commodification of women through beauty contests -- an issue never before addressed by the broad nationalist movement. This mass action also led women from mixed-gender organizations to form a distinct women's organization in 1970, Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan (MAKIBAKA), the *New Women's Liberation Movement*. The acronym MAKIBAKA also means *solidarity*. "MAKIBAKA's political program was essentially a restatement of the national-democratic position that the liberation of the Filipino women was tied to their participation in the overall struggle against feudal and foreign oppression" (Taguiwalo, 1993, 4). Two of the founding members of MAKIBAKA were interviewed for this study.

The gains during this period, in addition to raising women-specific issues, were to allow women to develop organizing, decision-making, and writing skills. It was a time when, with little information on western feminism available to many, Filipino women were able to study and define their position in relation to women's liberation. The dangers of "bourgeois feminism," which emphasized "equal rights and equal access," were debated along with the issues of women-only organizations. Women in various organizations were able to construct a class-based critical framework based on theoretical and practical analysis by Filipino women of their own social and historical situation. They raised issues related to the political economy of women's work and the "woman question,"<sup>22</sup> analyzing how monopoly capitalism and feudalism create and maintain women's subordination at home and in the workplace. Therefore, they argued, women's participation in political/social movements for change is necessary in order to eliminate this subordination (6-7).

The main theoretical challenges during this period in the 1970s lay in the incomplete elaboration of the specificity of women's oppression and liberation in Philippine society. From a gender analysis perspective, the theory did not pinpoint why the forms of oppression experienced by working-class women were different from those experienced by working-class men. From a class analysis perspective, the fact that the movement was city-based, and dominated by youth and students, led to a lack of understanding of the particular issues faced by rural, peasant, and worker women. Pushed underground by Martial Law (declared in 1972), women nevertheless continued their active resistance, further developing the analysis of women's participation in the national democracy movement, and struggling at the same time to eliminate women's oppression through their participation in the national struggle. It was in this period that

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<sup>22</sup> The phrase originates from Marxist-Feminist roots, starting from Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1972, as well as applications by Filipino feminists, as discussed in *The Woman Question in the Philippines*, 1997, by Sister Mary John Mananzan.

activists, such as Lorena Barrios, a member of MAKIBAKA, were killed by the Marcos regime for their outspoken opposition to the “fascist dictatorship.”

In the 1980s, women went to the countryside to bring the concept of women’s liberation to the rural areas and to peasant women. It was not until the early 1980s that open, nation-wide “anti-fascist” protests against Marcos involved women from different class backgrounds. A Women’s Day of Protest, held on October 28, 1983, represented a new unity among women against Marcos and led to the formation of GABRIELA<sup>23</sup>, a national coalition of women’s organizations that marked a new stage in the development of the Filipino women’s movement. This multi-class, multi-sectoral coalition, with representation from the urban poor, rural women, youth, political elite, women from religious institutions, academics, and intellectuals, developed women-specific analysis of national issues, defined women’s problems, and highlighted the impact of government policies on women. Many women began attending international conferences and gatherings, becoming exposed to different currents of feminism.

The debates and challenges of the 1980s reached deeper into political and ideological differences. Taguiwalo’s analysis of this period may be summarized as the coming to the fore of the issues of gender and class (1993, 40-43) within Filipino women’s struggles. The main difference in this phase was the shift in the analysis of Philippine society away from its semi-feudal, semi-colonial nature to its semi-capitalist or capitalist economic structure, thus placing an emphasis on the workers rather than the peasants. The appearance of malls, highways, and export-processing zones (EPZs) led to the assumption that industry was now dominant, although Philippine society for the vast majority had not changed. The women’s movement was

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<sup>23</sup> GABRIELA stands for General Assembly Binding Women for Reform, Integration, Equality, Leadership and Action; the name is also a commemoration of Gabriela Silang, a woman general who died fighting Spanish colonizers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. See Neni Sta. Romana-Cruz, *Gabriela Silang* (Manila: Tahanan Books for Young Readers, 1992).

affected by these debates, moving towards a critique of capitalism, with some espousing the view that this needed only to be "reformed." Downplaying the class perspective and struggle, an emphasis on the common interests of women led to compromises between "liberal feminism" and "socialist feminism," until women's oppression was perceived as primarily due to *patriarchy*, or male domination, rather than economic forces. Analysis of the particular problems of Filipino women who were peasants and workers did not play a major role in the women's movement until the lessons of this period were analyzed in the next decade.

The result of this shift in ideology and critical framework was that upper-class women assumed leadership over working women, under principles of "coalitionism." Co-optation of educated women by foreign states and NGO funders pushed "mainstream" feminist issues. By 1985, women were divided along political and class lines, as was conveyed concretely by women's support of Cory Aquino, the first female president after Marcos was ousted by the broad mass mobilization of Filipinos.<sup>24</sup> There was a focus on mobilizing upper- and middle-class women for specific political campaigns, rather than the mass work of organizing the marginalized sectors of Philippine society, who had invested heavily in the anti-Marcos movement. With this loss of focus on the basic economic struggle, the women's movement became open to influence by other movements. However, GABRIELA continued its independent and militant mass actions,

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<sup>24</sup> I would surmise that the allegiances that formed after the Marcos regime returned to the traditional political factions that have ruled the Philippines since Spanish times. The privileged, wealthy, *ilustrado* class who benefited from social and political positions under Spain was made up of the same families that were handpicked by the US and sent to the US to study and return to be the ruling politicians under the US Commonwealth. They were generally Philippine or foreign university-educated landowners and politicians who ran and continue to run the Philippines economically and politically. Among these families are the Cojuangcos from Tarlac province, Cory Aquino's family. Although Marcos was ousted, the ruling class re-confirmed their allegiances and maintained the structural powers defended by subsequent presidents. Joseph Estrada, also ousted, ran on the image of being the defender of the masses, but was, in reality, a member of the elite wealthy class. The current president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, is the daughter of a former Philippine President and married to a member of another traditionally wealthy clan. Although two female presidents have run the country in the last twenty years, both belong to the elite 2-5% ruling class. These traditional dynasties that carry on in today's political factionism and social alliances are analyzed historically and politically in *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*. Ed. Alfred McCoy (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 1995).

at the cost of losing support from upper-class women. At the end of this period, mainly the urban poor and rural peasant women remained as the backbone of GABRIELA. Three of the six women in the Philippines interviewed in this study belong to organizations that are part of GABRIELA and work to represent women in the urban poor, rural poor, and student youth sectors.

In the 1990s, there was a call by more grassroots women leaders for the broad-based women's movement to go "back to basics," as in the 1970s, to understand the Philippine situation through study and mass organizing. This call affirmed the priorities of the national-democratic movement, with broad social perspectives that are expected to lead to women's emancipation. In this period many activists also focused on building women-only organizations and raising women-specific issues in all sectors and organizations, attracting the widest participation possible. This branch of the women's movement was, and at present still sees itself as, an integral part of the broad national democratic movement.

The attitude of the grassroots-based women activists in this study, who all describe the triple oppression of women, arises from this period. They agree that in the Philippines women suffer male oppression as women (gender), oppression due to exploitation by a rich elite (class), and economic oppression as a segregated, colonized nation of colour providing servants and low-wage workers in the global economy dominated by foreigners and especially the US (race). Their transnational contexts and links reflect this situation.

## The Feminization of Migration

That a massive worldwide trade and commerce of Filipino women exists is indisputable. The forced, feminized migration of Filipino women has created a transnational community of migrant Filipinos who remain closely and directly tied to their homeland. This migration is *forced* because 10% of the 80 million Filipinos now leave their families to work abroad,<sup>25</sup> and 70% of those three thousand Filipinos who leave daily are women. Analyses of the Philippine economic and political situation confirm the slave-like coercion of overseas work; 80% of Filipinos in the Philippines today are unemployed or underemployed, in an economy which officially has 12% unemployment, and the minimum wage is not a living wage in light of rising commodity and food prices (IBON, 2005; Aguilar, 2003). The double-edged sword of international market prices and external debt servicing has no realistic end anywhere in sight, without deep, structural changes within the nation-state which is the Philippines. Forced to “hang on to a knife’s edge,” Filipinos who migrate as overseas foreign workers (OFWs) are often entrapped in deplorable conditions as modern-day slaves (PWC, 2003; Pratt, 2005), and held hostage by the threat of lower wages, job loss, or expulsion. In a great irony of this history being lived by eight million Filipinos today, they keep the Philippine economy alive by the monthly remittances sent home to their impoverished families, as they themselves continue to live in poverty abroad.

This migration is *feminized*, not only by the sheer numbers of women leaving in relation to men, but more so because after they maneuver, manipulate, and finance their ways through immigration systems across the world, these women, who are often well educated, are relegated to low-paying domestic work, low-status manufacturing jobs, or sexual exploitation for

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<sup>25</sup> IBON Foundation and BAYAN submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in November 2007, point out that over nine million workers or one-fourth of the country’s labour force is now in 192 countries worldwide. Of a total population of 86.3 million in 2006, that would be approximately 10%. <[www.ibon.org](http://www.ibon.org).>



profit (Rosca, 2001; PWC 2000, 2003). These jobs are connected to the question of *women's* productive and reproductive roles, which are vital to the maintenance and expansion of capitalism. A Filipino woman in the Philippines today with no employment (even though she was well trained) has only three forced "choices." She can either work in a factory in export processing zones (EPZs), which are not likely to be close to her home, enter the "entertainment" industry (i.e., prostitution or the sex trade), or go abroad as a domestic worker or Mail-Order-Bride. Women's contribution to monopoly capitalism, whether at home or abroad, is a continuation of their role in the early days of western industrialization. This consists of no-pay or low-wage domestic or production work, or serving as sexual partners for reproduction or male gratification.

Those abroad in 2004 sent remittances back to the Philippines of US\$8.5 billion (US\$12 billion if "informal" channels are included). It is no wonder the current Philippine government had a target of one million Filipinos to work overseas in 2005, since these remittances account for 40% of servicing the external debt to the IMF/WB and other banking corporations. In the context of globalization, which is monopoly capitalism achieved through the neo-liberal policies of liberalization, privatization, and de-regulation, transnational feminism can no longer be discussed without acknowledging its direct link to capitalism. Mohanty articulates this inevitable and necessary link as "anticapitalist transnational feminist practice" (2003, 230). In this study, the women interviewed assumed a similar definition of transnational connections among women's struggles worldwide. Any political activism from Majority World women that is not "anti-globalization" or "anti-capitalism" would be ignoring the critical and vital context of the neo-liberal practices imposed today, which directly impact the daily lives of women in or from much of the Majority World. Mohanty points out that

an analysis of the employment of Third World women workers by multinational capital in terms of ideological constructions of race, gender, and sexuality in the very definition of 'women's work,' has significant repercussions for feminist

cross-cultural analysis. In fact, questions pertaining to the social agency of Third World women workers may well be some of the most challenging questions facing feminist organizing today (2003, 74).

The forced, feminized migration of Filipinos under globalization is the context which can never be forgotten, in this particular Majority World feminist project. Analysis and interpretation of the interviews with women activists at home and abroad will constantly take this context into account. Through their accounts, the role and connection of migrant women to national liberation from their respective locations may also be better understood.

The women interviewed considered the feudal domestic role of women as a key point of struggle in Philippine society itself. However, the exportation of this role, embodied in thousands of domestic workers scattered in more than 190 countries in the world, has led to the notion of the feminization of migration. Of the 200,000+ immigrants admitted into Canada in 2004, 1.4% enter through the Live-in Caregiver Program. Of all Filipino immigrants/migrants (now the fourth largest immigrant group in Canada and third largest in BC), 65% are women who have entered through the LCP. Of all the LCP temporary workers, 90-95% are Filipino women (PWC, 2003).<sup>26</sup> The “woman question,” regarding women’s productive and reproductive roles in the world market, is particularly relevant to this burgeoning exportation of Filipino workers. Their service/servile work is domestic – cooking, cleaning, childcare, care-giving to the elderly and infirm – and they are confined without choice to the house and the household. One might argue that this migration cannot unequivocally be called “feminized”, because Filipino men are also migrant workers and also often caregivers. However, the analysis here is not about the principle of including men, or the minority, in discussing the composition of the migrant worker class, but adopts the perspective of gender analysis with a focus on women’s

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<sup>26</sup> Cecilia Diocson, Executive Director of the NAPWC noted in a February 2005 draft report for Status of Women Canada, that from “1998 to 2003, Filipino entrants made up an average of 92.6% of those entering Canada under the LCP,” taken from “Annual Flow of Live-in Caregivers by the Top Source Countries,” CIC, 2005.

particular issues. As systematized by the Philippine government and receiving countries, such as Canada, immigration policies do in fact bring in primarily women, who are channeled to do domestic labor. This is evidence of the role and the use of women in the global market. The fact that Canada has an immigration program for temporary workers that is “genderized” alters the attitudes, expectations, and ultimately the system of values in Canadian society in regard to Majority World women of colour.<sup>27</sup>

Systemic feminization of migration is the method utilized in order to achieve market goals. From a gender perspective, G8 and other host countries are invested in importing/allowing women into the country to do exclusively domestic/ “women’s” work, or to work in corporate manufacturing of goods and technology, not in the professions related to health, science, and education that many of them have been trained for, and which would serve the Philippines.<sup>28</sup> In a global market economy, their skills and professions are not utilized or available in the Philippines, but are downgraded to fulfill market needs abroad. Rather than seeing this as a problem, the Philippine government has efficiently systematized the migration of workers, instead of building the much needed infrastructure at home to retain skilled workers for services and production. Over-qualified women are more “marketable” abroad, but for the women

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<sup>27</sup> A comparison of live-in versus live-out domestic help, published for potential employers by a recruitment and placement agency operating in Canada and the US (Care Match, Inc.), assesses the advantages of an LCP domestic worker for the employers: lower wages, highly educated, docility, hardworking qualities, and legal visa status. These “advantages” are pitted directly against the “disadvantages” of those who live out of their employers’ homes. This advertisement legitimizes the exploitation of the labour of educated Majority world women in competition with other women also seeking domestic work. (See Appendix 4.)

<sup>28</sup> According to Peter Cordingley, WHO Asia-Pacific spokesperson, in 2006, an estimated 15,000 nurses and medical workers were leaving, primarily for the US, Britain, and Australia. The Health Secretary acknowledged the exodus and that 85% of nurses have left since the labor export policy was implemented in the 1970s. The state-run lottery agency, the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office, pledged P252 million or US\$4.93 million to train 6,000 students, including 100 medical students per year, with the first batch starting this year. Stories abound of newly graduated physicians unable to find work, training to be nurses in order to enter Canada through the LCP. March, 2006.  
[www.wpro.who.int/media\\_centre/press\\_releases/pr\\_20060329.htm](http://www.wpro.who.int/media_centre/press_releases/pr_20060329.htm). Also, see  
<[doh.gov.ph/news/04092006.pdf](http://doh.gov.ph/news/04092006.pdf)>

concerned their professional training is either irrelevant to the work for which they are hired or uncompensated, which leads to an increased sense of frustration.

It is not merely the number of women that is significant as they are pushed into the global market by conditions in the Philippines and pulled into affluent countries in need of cheap domestic labour (this has often been termed the “push-pull” factors that force women into working abroad). The nature of the work itself (domestic, assembly-line, sexual) and the significant role women continue to play in global capitalism (as cheap labour in both the public and the private spheres) point to the vital connection between “women’s liberation” and national struggles to escape from colonial and neo-colonial enterprises.

The phenomenon of worldwide migration appears as a double-edged sword, because on the surface it may appear to be “non-colonial” in bringing a new “independence” to Filipino women, who are in many cases suddenly the main breadwinners. Living away from their families and making their own decisions abroad could be seen as shaping their lives in new contexts with increased self-reliance, if not empowerment. On the other hand, while this massive movement across the world (on jet planes and ships, with cell phones in hand) may appear “non-feudal,” women also land in western societies under feudal-like conditions, with master and servant/slave relationships, and their new-found “independence” exposes them to isolation and loneliness. In any case, the global picture of this migration remains unchanged, maintaining colonial relationships between Majority World populations and the rich European/North American (sometimes Middle Eastern and Asian) states and societies they sustain through their subservience and labour. This forced, feminized migration produces contradictions in Filipino women’s experience as migrant workers in these changing social and economic contexts. The women interviewed understand the need for analysis of the changes in Filipino women’s experiences, at home and abroad. They see how, under the conditions of struggle for survival

and displacement, women can exert agency and organize themselves, to bring about a better understanding of their situation. They can take action in order to make profound, positive changes in their lives and those of their families and communities.

### ***Commodification***

In discussing economic issues, the term *commodification* was used frequently by the women in the Philippines and Canada, to refer to the exportation of women's labor from the Philippines to work abroad, as well as their work within the Philippines. Reciprocity between the Philippine government's Labor Export Policy (LEP) and Canada's Live-In Caregiver Program allows the exit and entry of Filipino women by the thousands. In the case of the Netherlands, no such reciprocal policies exist. For the Filipino women in a very small, affluent country like the Netherlands, commodification is seen more clearly in the low-wage labour of undocumented domestic workers who are not officially sanctioned by the Dutch government. Commodification was experienced in the Philippines as contractualized labor and displacement to export processing zones (EPZs). This is a form of internal migration from rural to urban zones or from one region to another where EPZs are set-up. For women in the Philippines, the Netherlands, or Canada, one common critical issue is their continual low wages, associated with the fact that they are allocated certain types of undervalued jobs, such as domestic work, assembly-line factory work, agricultural labour, or "tourism." Peasants are commodified in not owning any part of the land they till and not being able to influence the market price of their products. They are often asked to work for very long hours or piecemeal, which means they need to work faster in order to earn more. Peasants are forced to overwork themselves in order to pay off debts and ensure the landowner's share of crop revenue.

Finally, there is a cluster of commodification issues around the lack of access to social, health, and educational benefits. Job security was inaccessible to many workers in the Philippines and

especially so for women in their allocated jobs. Loss of wages and jobs leads to lack of access to all manner of social services. Access to health is one urgent issue constantly named. Women in the Philippines have little or no access to health services, for different reasons from those facing the women in Canada. In the Philippines, people cannot access health care simply because they cannot afford to pay for the service or the medication required.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the massive migration of health workers, who have skills that are in demand in Europe and North America, or some Middle East countries where oil-rich governments have budgets to sustain their health care system,<sup>30</sup> has resulted in the lack of doctors and nurses in the Philippines. For Filipinos living abroad, access to health care is related to their immigration status. Filipino migrant domestic workers in Canada on temporary visas (i.e., non-residents), are excluded from access to Canada's health care system, in spite of the fact that contributions to the health system are deducted from their salaries. They experience this lack of access in spite of the contribution of their labor to the nation's revenues in terms of human capital as well as visa fees, taxes, and pension deductions. In the Netherlands, those with permanent residence and refugee status can avail themselves of the public health service, while undocumented Filipinos cannot.

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<sup>29</sup> In one of the poorest communities in Manila I visited (Tondo), one of the first projects the women undertook to meet their needs and change their situation was to run a "pharmacy" with some basic medicines available at low prices.

<sup>30</sup> A US immigration bill in 2006 proposed to remove the cap on the number of nurses allowed to enter the US (*New York Times*, May 24, 2006). A domestic worker in Vancouver told me that she was a nurse in Libya for several years, learned Arabic (adding to her regional dialect, Tagalog, and English), while her husband also worked there. Their daughter was left in the Philippines with her sister. With the promise of resident status and family reunification that brings many Filipinos to Canada under the LCP, she became a nanny in West Vancouver. Although she has attended many nursing review classes and passed her nursing and English exams, she has yet to find a nursing position in Vancouver, although there is an ongoing nursing shortage. She continues her domestic work in order to save money for the high expenses required in the resident visa application process and the airfares to bring families to Canada once the domestic worker has been approved as a landed immigrant. The luring of foreign workers has a significant impact on the countries where they are recruited. The greatest demands are from the US, Britain, and Australia. For those trained health workers remaining in the Philippines, jobs suffer from budget cuts, are low-paying, and most are unable to support families. The Philippine government recognizes this loss of thousands of health workers yearly and has recently included (in this year's budget) the training of 6,000 health workers per year to remain in the country, according to the Health Secretary in April 2006.

Habiba Zaman (2004) has explored the term, concept, and processes of *commodification* in a study of transnational migration and female domestic workers under the LCP in Canada. She discusses the critical role of the State in implementing commodification processes. Whereas women's domestic work has been and continues to be invisible and "non-commodified," the Canadian federal government and other host countries have now systemically made changes in immigration and labour policies to perpetuate a market-driven economy that extends to the non- or under-commodified sector of the family, marking a shift from public to private sectors (43). The women I interviewed analyze the direct relationship between the Philippine LEP and the Canadian LCP as coinciding with Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in the 1980s. These SAPs were a key globalization strategy used by the IMF and WB to implement neo-liberal policies in the Philippines.<sup>31</sup> For the Philippines this meant the export of Philippine labour in exchange for renewed external loans and adjusted debt payment schedules. Ironically, the State (be it a G8 or Majority World government), now acknowledges and uses women's domestic labour and other forms of social reproduction as pivotal in a growing capitalist economy.

Zaman also points out the role of market relations in commodification. Rather than entering into the type of employee-employer relationship that is usual in paid work, women under the LCP are in a contractual relationship that preserves an imbalanced power relationship and exposes the women to exploitation in the confines of a private home. As Zaman points out, "Commodification is typified by the absence of family obligations and the existence of an [unusual] employee-employer relationship. This contractual relationship preserves a

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<sup>31</sup> PWC. *Trapped: Holding on to Knife's Edge: Economic Violence Against Filipino Migrant/Immigrant Women* (Vancouver, BC, 1997). The current Philippine president has announced a target of sending one million workers overseas (OFWs) in 2006 alone. November 21, 1006.  
<[http://globalnation.inquirer.net/news/news/view\\_article.php?article\\_id=33928](http://globalnation.inquirer.net/news/news/view_article.php?article_id=33928)>

hierarchical power relationship that can lead to exploitative and oppressive situations due to the private nature of households, where monitoring of work conditions does not exist (43).”

In the Philippines, this contractual relationship has expanded into the public arena.

Contractualization was noted by one participant as a key general issue for Filipino workers.

Instead of workers being able to access and benefit from monitored working conditions, wages protected by labor laws, access to social benefits, and job security, workers under contractualization schemes are “bought” and dispensed piecemeal depending on market trends in certain areas of production and exportation. Contractualization is an important element in neo-liberal market expansion, because it provides “flexibility” in manipulating wages and benefits to enable companies and corporations to remain competitive in a global market.<sup>32</sup> Prices of other commodities, like oil, minerals, food, are fixed by the global markets, and therefore difficult for companies to manipulate. Thus “flexibilization” is best applied to reducing human wages (and benefits), and human labour becomes a commodity traded and manipulated in global markets. In these commodification-contractualization-flexibilization processes, Filipino workers, particularly a growing number of women because of the ever-expanding “feminization” of migrant labor, are paradoxically major/minor players.

Ligaya Lindio-McGovern also explores “the commodification of Filipino women in globalized labor export “(2003, 2004). After completing studies of Filipino domestic workers in Rome, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, she describes commodification as a form of political and cultural alienation: “Commodification occurs when human beings become the commodities for exchange and work under exploitative conditions that others profit from” (2004, 222). It is dehumanizing to the extent that work, as “an extension of the human personality should lead to

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<sup>32</sup> Editorial. “Women Workers and Labor Contractualization.” *Kali: Voice of Cordillera Women*. 2:1, June 2001.



one's humanization and affirmation of one's dignity, but these are precluded when labor is commodified "(222). This form of capitalism exports people purposely to do low-paying, low status work. It is not that workers are providing services, nor practicing professions, but their bodies are transferred as a market commodity to do excessive work that increases profits for companies, through their wage loss when overload work is not remunerated (also termed "surplus labour"). For Filipinos, this transfer of bodies for labour extends beyond the movement among national regions and into massive migration to other nations.

Although world economies are being integrated under the capitalist system, individual states continue to segregate and alienate workers from the Majority World. Lindio-McGovern notes that in Italy, the only work available to a migrant who is not from the European Union is domestic work. One woman interviewed for this study reported that in Hong Kong the government had even imposed a wage cut on foreign domestic helpers, the majority of them women from the Philippines (with some from Thailand, Indonesia, and Nepal). These women were able to organize and fight against this common issue, and succeeded in -- reducing the amount of the decrease! Lindio-McGovern adds that in addition to the state, private employment/recruitment agencies are a new group of capitalists trading in migrant workers. She looks in detail at the processes by which these agencies generate profit through labor export, from fees for training programs for domestic workers in the Philippines (with more than 600 agencies there), placement fees, and loans to domestic workers. Taiwan, where wages are actually decreasing, has placement fees for domestic workers that are known to be as high as a year's wage. Agencies require very little investment, accumulate capital, and reap large profits. Because migrant workers make up the bulk of labor export, the profits are largely at their expense (223).

At the same time, sending and receiving states also make enormous profits from the processes of commodification. In 2004, 7,284 applications were received through the LCP at the Canadian Embassy in Manila, with an accompanying non-refundable \$500.00 fee for each application, and 3,371 temporary visas were issued. The applications in 1994 took approximately 4-6 months to process, while in 2005 it was taking about one year. In the first trimester of this year, there were 5,820 reported active cases in the Canadian Embassy in Manila. Thus, from LCP applications in 2004 alone, the Canadian government made \$3.6 million from Filipino women's labour migration.<sup>33</sup>

In this government-to-government arrangement, the Philippine government also profits greatly from the export of Filipino labour. When applying to leave the country for work abroad, migrant workers pay a series of fees to the government in addition to the private agencies mentioned above.<sup>34</sup> More significant than these fees prior to leaving the Philippines are the remittances sent home by Filipino migrant workers from overseas. In 2005, an estimated US\$8 billion was sent as official bank transfers through the Central Bank of the Philippines. It is estimated that if

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<sup>33</sup> Significant as these fees are, they pale next to Canada's enterprise in extracting Philippine natural resources, estimated at Can\$1.5 billion, made by mining companies in the extraction of mineral ore, i.e., gold, silver, copper. Citizenship & Immigration Canada (CIC) statistics, 2004, 2005. <[www.cic.gc.ca/english/pub/facts2004/index.html](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pub/facts2004/index.html)> (Statistics August 2005) and <[www.cic.gc.ca/english/monitor/issue09/index.html](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/monitor/issue09/index.html)> (Newsletter, June 2005)

<sup>34</sup> Prior to leaving the Philippines, women pay private agencies for placement fees, 6-months' nanny training, and a trade test fee to the Technical Education Skills Development Authority (TESDA), which all amount to over 100,000 Pesos or approximately US\$2,000. At the same time, the Department of Labor has a Job Fair Program, which serves as a venue for recruitment for different private agencies. In addition, air travel (about US\$1,000 to Canada, for example) is usually on Philippine Airlines, the privately owned "national" flagship. It announced in May, 2006 that it will more than double its fleet with an order of US\$110 million from a US TNC (Snecma and General Electric). For the State, government fees include: the Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) fee and the Overseas Welfare Workers Administration (OWWA), Mandatory Insurance Repatriation Bond (MIRB), travel document fees including a birth certificate, police clearance, passport, and medical, airport, and travel tax. This amounts to approximately 15-20,000 Pesos or US\$ 300-400 per migrant worker (Exchange: about 52P = 1USD). When approximately 3,000 leave the Philippines every day, the government receives a total of about US\$100,000 *daily* or US\$36.5 million *yearly*, before the workers have even left the country.

informal, unofficial channels were included, the remittances totaled US\$12-15 billion.<sup>35</sup> These remittances now cover the equivalent of 30% of the government's debt-servicing costs, as foreign debt among Majority World nations increases with the expansion of globalization.

### **Globalization: The Context of the Study**

Globalization, or the unfettered mobility of capital and the accompanying erosion and reconstitution of local and national economic and political resources and of democratic processes, the post-cold war U.S. imperialist state, and the trajectories of identity-based social movements in the 1980s and 1990s constitute the ground for transnational feminist engagement in the twenty-first century.

Women of the Two-Thirds World have always organized against the devastations of globalized capital, just as they have always historically organized anticolonial and antiracist movements. In this sense they have always spoken for humanity.  
(Mohanty, 2003, 237)

The context of globalization and its effects are shared by the women interviewed in this study in spite of their three separate locations. Capitalist globalization (the old-new face of colonialism) is the context of all their experiences. While many women resist globalization policies and their effects in their own local situations, there is a fundamental doubt as to whether radical social change can occur within the present context (Freeman & Kagarlitsky, 2004). Economic globalization policies demand that a nation's revenues be re-invested into the economy. If programs and expenditures cannot be funded in order to achieve social justice in current economic schemes and international and national structures, how can "genuine" social change and long-term liberation from such policies be achieved? Globalization, as it is presently implemented, particularly when considering its impact on women, appears beyond repair.

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<sup>35</sup> In its Report in 2006, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) stated that remittances sent by migrant workers were estimated at US\$ 167 billion. Top receiving countries were: Asia-India \$21.3 billion, China \$21.7 billion, and the Philippines \$11.6; also, <<http://www.bsp.gov.ph/statistics/spei/tab11.htm>>, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas [Central Bank of the Philippines], "Overseas Filipino Workers/ Remittances: By Country and Type of Worker," 2 April 2006.

Women can expose and oppose current social and political globalization structures that produce these policies, but what alternative processes and structures can women who oppose it propose? How can or does opposing globalization lead to being liberated from it? Anti-globalization movements, while useful in understanding current issues, do not necessarily contribute towards changing the future for the women whose complex lives are increasingly lived out on the transnational stage. As was long ago articulated by Audre Lorde (1983, 98), the master's tools may never dismantle the master's house, but what other tools are available? The "new collective imperialism" (Amin, 2004) asserted by today's economic powers may seem invincible. However, understanding the effects of globalization from the margins (Zaman and Tubajon, 2001; Salazar Parrenas, 2003; Lindio-McGovern, 2003, 2004), and resistance to it by drawing attention to the experiences of women affected by forced migration, is a necessary step in establishing links between women's liberation and socially transformative national change. This triple agenda for change may be furthered through transnational feminist organizing and theorizing.

Mohanty points to the intersection of "gender, race, colonialism, and capitalism" (2003, 246) rooted in the subjugation of women of the Majority World by globalization. This perspective is fundamental to many feminist projects across the world, and the Filipino women interviewed for this study share it. Mohanty's "transnational anticapitalist feminism" will be a basis for my discussion, as it is central to my theoretical framework. Starting from the experiences of women from the Philippines I aim to contribute to strengthening a feminism from the margins, challenging the hegemony of western/North American/European feminist theory and the sense that other feminist movements are only a uni-directional continuation of it. Filipino women's struggles for liberation offer a self-reflective, borderless contribution to what "feminism" means, as lived by women from the "Majority World" – be they geographically located in the so-called "Third World" or "First World." This study not only seeks to create an audience for those

speaking from the margins, as a social and political responsibility (Stone-Mediatore, 2003), but bears witness to the efficacy of a particular type of community-based feminism demonstrated by politically engaged Filipino women in the Philippines and abroad, who assert a commitment to “social transformation.”

Globalization distorts history and culture by its amalgamation of politics and economics which imposes the one global, corporate culture now transforming the world even when it is camouflaged, by promoting “multiculturalism” for instance. The result is that our stories “from below” become eclipsed or co-opted, subsumed or merged into globalization stories “from above.” The women in this study narrate their experiences as resistance to this distortion and thus seek to maintain their place in the making of history. While still claiming their past history as women emerging from a feudal and colonial society, they now also claim their present history as women struggling to transform a semi-feudal, semi-colonial one. They are aware that critical thinking and consciousness are required to resist the all-encompassing impact of neo-colonial, capitalist globalization on the peoples of the Majority World (as urged by Mohanty, Sandoval, and other transnational and/or Majority World feminists), as well as compassionate, committed actions that can produce incremental change, forging effective strategies to achieve short-term goals without losing sight of a long-term vision for a better future.

### **Outline of the Study**

The study is divided into two main Parts, each with three chapters. Part I presents the project, provides a theoretical frame, and describes the methodology used, and Part II conveys and interprets the material from interviews with a number of Filipino women activists in three locations. The concluding chapter brings together the theoretical discussion in Part I and the narrative discussion of Part II, and attempts to assess the outcome of the study, with a focus on the complex transnational dimensions of these women’s activism.

## Part I

The first chapter, the Introduction, has aimed to locate the researcher, present the aims of the study and research questions, discuss terms and key concepts, situate the research historically and contextually, and delineate the shape of the study. The researcher is situated as being an observer-participant located in similar contexts to those of the women interviewed, but also as the one who proposes the questions being explored. I am both part of the “we” the women use, and a relatively distanced academic analyst, as I select and combine elements from their stories and contextualize them.

Chapter 2 will outline the theoretical framework, conceptualizing action and theory as seen from the perspective of a community of marginalized women, interacting with the central ideas of several theorists, and providing a frame for considering these Filipino women’s political, social, and historical contributions to social transformation. The framework parallels and further theorizes the context, in that it moves from decolonizing theories (de-colonizing from both colonialism and neo-colonialism/ globalization) to feminist praxis in transnational contexts. A focus on the pivotal roles of women in local and national political action and transnational communities will reveal how many transform themselves and their community through struggle. The framework brings out the limitations of oppositional consciousness and resistance against present domination and turns attention towards active, materialist social transformation.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology used to collect twelve women’s narratives through one-on-one interviews. This qualitative research method, based on feminist principles, allowed these women activists, who live in the Philippines, the Netherlands, and Canada, to share their understanding of the impact of globalization on women’s daily lives in general, in the Philippines and abroad. The selection of women from the three sites is justified in terms of their

participation in national/transnational communities and common struggles. Economic constraints and worldwide migration comprise the historical and political context of their activism. The use of narratives of marginal experiences will be discussed, recognizing the influence of social locations on the individual narratives.

## Part II

In Part II, the data collected through the interviews are conveyed and interpreted. The purpose was to explore how the women experience and practice social transformation in their daily lives and how organizing in different locations is linked to the situation in the Philippines and transnational issues. The analysis covers several aspects: Chapter 4, which recounts how each woman became politically engaged, explains the issues that motivate their work and the priorities they are addressing as activists in their particular local and national conditions. It reveals economic factors as central in women's lives, in conjunction with other women-specific issues, and how trans-generational and transnational ties are formed and influence their praxis. Chapter 5 explores the complex situations and tensions experienced by these women and those they work with, in personal and political contexts. Their intersecting experiences of class, race, and gender, bring about personal, social, and political change in their homes and communities through political awareness and action. Chapter 6 focuses on their activism as feminist praxis, looking more closely at the specific actions they take and challenges they face in their efforts to change their situation locally, nationally, and transnationally.

The insights gained from the interviews question as well as confirm the hypothesis that an understanding of the praxis of these marginalized women can advance women's movements and feminist theory in various transnational contexts, contributing to shared knowledge and a vision for a better future. A critical understanding emerges of some of the contradictions faced by an impressive group of "conscious," "empowered" women, who are living the legacy of

colonialism and the dark side of globalization, yet continue to believe in the effectiveness of collective action towards achieving “transformation” at the personal, political, national and transnational levels. Their role and influence in the national Philippine context are too significant to ignore, yet it is in many cases locally that they make the most immediate difference to their community. They share self-reflexive principles of organizing that create links between diverse locations and contexts, and make their efforts transnational. These women’s stories help to explain why and how some Filipino women activists, dispersed across the world, have often succeeded where others have failed (or not even tried) to make a difference, largely because of their particular political and cultural background as Filipino women. Their achievement can serve as a model for others engaged in transnational and anti-globalization struggles, and they certainly deserve recognition.



## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We live....needing to pose, contest and struggle for the legitimacy of oppositional or alternative histories, theories and ways of writing. At some point there is, there has to be, dialogue across the boundaries of oppositions. This has to be because we constantly collide with dominant views while we are attempting to transform our lives on a larger scale than our own localized circumstances. This means struggling to make sense of our own world while also attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful.

Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (2002, 39)

This study examines whether and how women's political action and their identities as activists are enhanced, when their activities are theorized at the grassroots local level and consciously aimed at transformative action, locally and on a larger, national scale. This large scale picture is even more necessary when the women find themselves, like those in this study, involved in transnational movements in global contexts. At the same time, their involvement transforms them as individuals and as women. The women concerned here are all activists in the frontline of socially engaged, politically informed work with other women, and believe that their experience can contribute to Majority World women's feminism(s), through analysis arising from intense engagement in political actions. Their comments emphasize that they would not be able to speak of the struggles involved unless they had lived them. A particular characteristic of this group is that they wish to theorize about their experiences, because for them "theory" is based on how social transformation is lived and how it is shared by talking about it.

In accordance with their priorities, the theoretical framework deployed here brings together three interrelated concepts: the *de-colonizing/de-feudalizing process* that is essential for positive social transformation to be initiated; *political activism* that brings about the de-colonizing as well as the advancement of individuals and communities in processes of political and social change; and a *feminist understanding* that without the liberation of women in their everyday lives, the

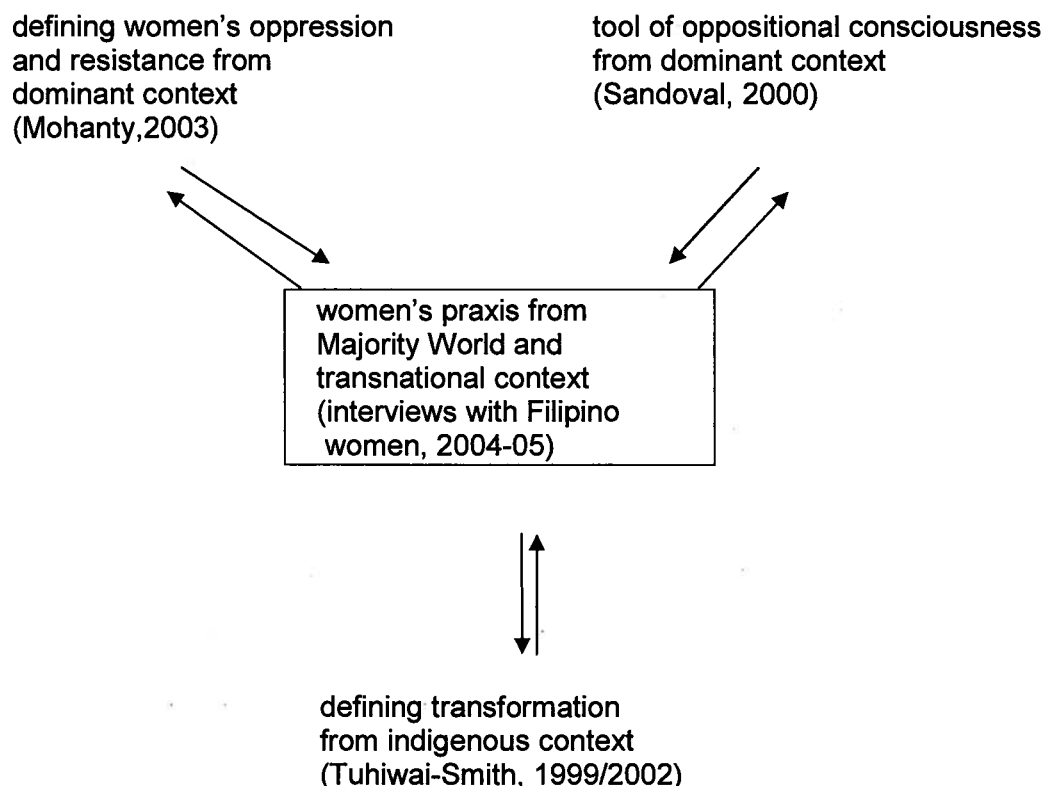
struggle for national democracy and freedom from colonization/neo-colonization becomes fragmented and is sure to fail. Because of the current migration history of Filipino women, struggles abroad and in the Philippines are necessarily intertwined, and the interrelationship between Filipino women activists in the Philippines and those abroad is therefore central to this study. The understanding of their struggles at home and abroad as mutual efforts towards national democracy and personal freedom for women is an essential part of any transformation these women may envisage for the Philippines or for Filipinos living elsewhere.

The framework of this inquiry developed through exposure to the theories put forward by Mohanty (2003), Sandoval (2000), and Tuhiwai-Smith (1999/2002), whose work on Majority World movements can be seen as complementary. Mohanty defines systemic oppression(s) within dominant discourse and outlines the obstacles faced – and the resistance(s) performed – by women's communities and movements against global domination of imperialist capitalism. Sandoval takes the dominant context, navigates within it, and theoretically develops a tool of oppositional consciousness for liberation by those oppressed. The tool she elaborates serves to bridge dominant discourse and the methods of resistance that dominated communities might undertake. Tuhiwai-Smith extends these theories of resistance to forces of (neo)colonialism and imperialism, to community-based praxis that positively transforms marginalized communities in daily reality. Her work, which is practiced and theorized within her own local/national Maori community, evokes some similarities to the Philippine experience of struggle. The present study proposes that this group of Filipino women's praxis integrates theories of resistance and opposition with concrete actions that lead to social change, from a marginalized Majority World perspective, and in transnational contexts. Their accounts invite us to reflect on a shared experience of what it is like to theorize from the ground of struggle, always with a positive goal of social change, for women who live in varied and particular contexts but all resist capitalist globalization. The concept of women's liberation necessarily includes women's grassroots

struggles, but the latter are often overshadowed by weighty dominant discourse, when they are analyzed. Thus, the process of analyzing grassroots experiences within dominant settings can become a site of struggle in itself. In a way, Tuhiwai-Smith “leaves behind,” but does not set aside, the realities of struggling within the bounds of dominant forces. The present study can engage in an exploration of how some women from the Majority World work to improve their future, trying to stay within discursive boundaries determined by themselves and not by recognizable frames from dominant discourse, although these cannot be ignored. The diagram below illustrates how I see the three theorists’ ideas coming together here.

**Figure 2**

**Theoretical Framework**



While the daily resistance and struggles of Filipino women are unique in some ways, they are also recognized as connected to the resistance of other women in the Majority World suffering from similar results of neo-liberal policies under globalization. When Gayatri Spivak (1988, 271-313) used the term “subaltern,” she acknowledged the emerging role of women from the “Third World” in the global women’s movement and in the women’s movement within their own national

boundaries. During the repressive years of the 1970s and 1980s, women from Latin American countries such as Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Chile, and Argentina were forced to organize and confront military dictatorships at the cost of their own lives (as they still continue to do, up to the present) (Lycklama et al., 1998; Valdez, 2000; Gonzalez & Kampwirth, 2001; Kampwirth, 2002). Similarly, Filipino women organized, protested, and were imprisoned as activists in the 1970s and 1980s, from the Marcos dictatorship until today's context, as described by the women in this study.<sup>1</sup> Women from the Majority World, including Filipino women, who have ended up in industrialized countries by virtue of forced migration from repressive states, have influenced the women's movement in the West as well. This study posits that the reverse also happens – that Filipino women politically organized abroad inform the politicized women's movement in the Philippines.

Mohanty, in her seminal article "Under Western Eyes" (1991, 51-80), highlighted the perspectives of women of the "Third World" (which she later terms "Two-Thirds World, 2003). The activism of the women of several nations proved critical for changes in the women's movements in their respective homelands. As they fled for their lives to industrialized countries, many took their activism with them.<sup>2</sup> Through their experience of confronting the state's abuse of power, women's liberation became tied to national (and even global) projects and the call for structural changes within their societies, rather than associated only with reform (Perez, 1999, 219-239; Mojab, 2001, 133-138; Mohanty 2003, 236-251; Basu, 2003, 68-77). The struggle for emancipation and equality by women and women's organizations became an essential element in national

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<sup>1</sup> In early October, 2006, 763 political killings by military and police forces were reported since the current president, Macapagal-Arroyo, took office in 2001; 10-20% of those killed were women, among them youth activists and political leaders.

<sup>2</sup> Among Filipinos, not all expatriates, especially second generation (including activists and feminists), remain as connected to the homeland as the women in this study. Some have become even more emphatically "non-political" or "apolitical" and wish to distance themselves from current Philippine affairs. The reverse can also be true, in that those without any experience of activism in the Philippines become politicized to varying degrees when they arrive, live, or are born in Canada.

democracy movements in many Majority World nation-states. Women's liberation was inextricably linked to national struggles, but did not necessarily entail the theorizing needed to better understand the relationship between the two. Without the deeper and more integrated understanding provided by collective reflection, assessment, and analysis of lessons learned, actions may succeed only in producing immediate and superficial solutions, rather than the structural changes essential for a society like the Philippines to advance. Hence, the term *praxis* (explained in Chapter 1) will be used here because it encapsulates this vital relationship between theory and practice and conveys the efforts of responsible communities to transform themselves and to reflect on the process.

Women's oppression in the West has been analyzed as an element or result of patriarchy (hooks, 1984; McClintock, 1995) along with developments rising from national and global concerns, including feminism in nationalism (Perez, 1999; Kaplan et al., 1999), post-colonial discourse (Lewis & Mills, 2003; Pratt, 2004), interrelated race-class-gender systems (Bannerji et al., 2001; Razack, 2002; Mohanty, 2003; Thobani, 2007), militarization and the war on terror (Rosca, 2003; Razack, 2004), as well as sexuality and sexual identities and eco-feminism not particularly addressed in this discussion. In a still semi-feudal, semi-colonial society like the Philippines, women's oppression must be considered in a broader, de-colonizing/de-feudalizing framework. Women's struggles must be situated as part of the national struggle, whether or not the two always coincide.

### **Decolonizing Theories**

Mohanty asserts that "globalization is an urgent site for the recolonization of peoples, especially in the Two-Thirds World" (2003, 236). It is reasonable, then, to argue that anti-globalization, anti-capitalist work is critical decolonizing work (see below, on Feminist Activism and Praxis).

Winona LaDuke describes how the wealth of native peoples attracts colonialism. She states that

“an industrial society is not content to leave other peoples’ riches alone...the more a native people has, the more colonizers are apt to covet the wealth and take it away “ (1997, 31). When capitalist globalization tries to maintain and re-establish colonization, especially over those from former colonies or indigenous communities, then countering globalization forces becomes imperative de-colonizing work that can lead to re-establishing liberation and sovereignty for those being colonized. Mohanty has made anti-globalization “a key factor for feminist theorizing and struggle” (237). She insists that feminist projects would be lacking if they were not decolonizing projects, and in today’s world decolonizing work means an anti-colonial, anti-racist movement practiced as activism against globalization.

The women in this study share this anti-globalization practice, within the context of a world dominated by global capital. They extend this notion to women’s struggle beyond national borders and beyond solidarity between women’s movements within defined nation-states. These women consider themselves as part of the same sector of Filipino women victimized and exploited by globalization policies in a debt-ridden nation like the Philippines. Whether they have migrated abroad or remained at home in the Philippines, they belong to the social, political sector of “Filipino women” living under the impact of globalization policies, as imposed specifically on the Philippines. Transnational relationships occur when women living in different nation-states stand in active solidarity within a defined transnational social sector rooted in the same country.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I originally planned to use the expression “diasporic phenomenon,” but upon reflection, I felt that because of the “forced” nature of Filipino migration, “transnational phenomenon” better reflects the Filipino migration on which this study is based, rather than the narrower meaning of “diaspora” which focuses on the dispersion of a people. In the Jewish experience, this dispersion was also forced and subsequently became permanent. The first-generation Filipino experience is that of Filipinos forced by economic crises at home to work as “temporary” foreign workers in more than 190 countries. They remain, however, rooted in their homeland, returning home frequently, and sending back large amounts of money. For second-generation Filipinos (youth), however, although their identity is rooted in their heritage their experiences are lived in a country outside the Philippines.

The resulting transnational phenomenon led me to consider Filipino women's struggles in countries outside the Philippines in the context of the Philippine struggle, and to realize how vital this relationship is. Their diverse struggles in transnational spaces may contribute to the understanding of transnational feminist struggles in general. This approach draws attention to the multiple spaces that Filipino women occupy – women who are active in national movements in different places but see themselves as in solidarity with each other. In both the intra-national spaces within the countries where they reside and in inter-national spaces, they create transnational connections and live out a transnational reality brought about by the phenomenon of forced migration. I will explore what theories and forms of praxis emerge out of these spaces and what elements are common to their experiences, seeking to understand how Majority World women can resist both the old and new faces of colonization (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2002; Monture-Angus, 1995), as they construct their current actions and transformations on their own terms. They weave together social issues and political interactions that are often seen as separate, but are inseparable in their eyes. For example, they move between addressing women-specific issues that challenge patriarchal attitudes that propagate women's subordination (sexualizing women, assigning women exclusively domestic roles and jobs), as well as protesting against economic or social policies that affect men and women equally (minimum wage, poverty, anti-terrorism laws), in terms dictated by the analysis of their experiences in the Philippines or abroad. Their activism is innovative and constitutes de-colonizing work in this particular era of history, where borders are permeable in some ways, while national affiliation also takes on new significance.

Tuhiwai-Smith's and Graham Smith's work provides a significant contribution in deepening our understanding of social transformation (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2002; Smith, 2003), from addressing immediate changes required to aspirations for long-term systemic structural change. While the Maoris are situated in a different context from that of Filipino women, their experiences of social

transformation in their communities are a source of learning. A profound difference is their history of genocide through direct and indirect means.<sup>4</sup> Another is that the white settlers stayed in Aotearoa/New Zealand, while in the Philippines the conquerors “left.” They neither reside there in large numbers, nor settled there to make it their own “homeland.” The consequence is that the Maori are able to directly engage with the *pakeha* (white) communities in policies and institutions.<sup>5</sup> Filipino activists, in spite of their proactive stances in public places, are still struggling to find the political power and democratic space that would enable them to change their own society, and it is often difficult for them to know which entities to address. The ruling elite to be challenged is also Filipino, albeit a tool of foreign powers and economic interests. Recognizing that the Maori struggle is quite distinct, as that of indigenous people in a white settler society, their community-based activism is nevertheless a useful point of comparison here.

For them, a significant part of their struggle is for cultural identity, as it is eroded by colonization. What started out as a linguistic/cultural concern, in the early 1980s, resulted in the transformation of the Maori community itself (Smith, 2004). In addressing the threat of the disappearance of their spoken and written language, the Maori communities embarked on their linguistic preservation through a project of community awareness and organizing. In the process, they learned about the social and economic forces that keep Maori youth and others in marginal limbo. When the project of establishing “language nests” to propagate the learning and use of the Maori language was started, many feared (in spite of the positive aspects of bilingual

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<sup>4</sup> Although more than one million Filipinos were slaughtered in the Philippine-American war in 1898, in some populous areas subjugated by the US military, numbers preserved as conquest was achieved with the help of local leaders. Other native peoples worldwide teetered on the brink of survival and many continue to fight for material, cultural, and political survival today.

<sup>5</sup> However, this engagement cannot be taken for granted, as not all Maori people negotiate with the *pakeha* and some may become themselves part of the elite social structure. Maoris continue to engage in high-risk (imprisonment, death) protests for land rights and sovereignty and not just cultural rights.



learning<sup>6</sup>) that their children would have even less of a chance in life if they cannot speak English. The radical plan of educating young children in Maori emphasized their cross-generational struggle to bring about empowerment and find ways of transforming their situation. As Smith stated in a seminar,<sup>7</sup> the Maori do not seek “equality,” but to be Maori in all aspects of society. One generation after this initiative, Maori youth demonstrate bilingual proficiency in everyday life as an important element in affirming their identity.

Decolonizing mental states, and not just material domination, is equally critical and integral to women’s struggles. The widespread use of English in the Philippines, which will be discussed in describing the interviews, is an important indicator of cultural hegemony and reflects the impact of colonialism, just as it does for indigenous peoples. Like the Maori, Filipinos struggle for basic survival and economic justice, but also for freedom from all forms of violence, cultural domination, and mentally constructed inferiority. Another important similarity, in terms of the present study, is that in the struggle people’s consciousness is raised, communities are organized, and concerted action by those in the struggle can lead to tangible changes in society as well as liberation from internalized colonization. There are lessons Filipino women in movements for social change can learn from the Maori experience, and Tuhiwai-Smith’s and Smith’s work on de-colonizing methods and community transformation therefore provides a useful point of reference and reason for hope.

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<sup>6</sup> Jim Cummins in “Research, Ethics, and Public Discourse: The Debate on Bilingual Education” (presentation at the National Conference of the American Association of Higher Education, March 22, 1999, Washington, D.C.), summarized research on bilingual education, showing that a solid first language ensures the competent acquisition of a second language and the presence of more than one language enhances cognitive development and learning abilities.

<sup>7</sup> Graham Smith. UBC Course EADM 508B entitled “The Politics of Transforming Education: The Struggle for Knowledge” (UBC, Winter 2004).

This study acknowledges the complicity in Canada of migrant/immigrant Filipinos (and others) arriving in large numbers to live on land to which First Nations peoples are entitled.<sup>8</sup> While we learn from the experiences and wisdom of indigenous people, are we not complicit in settling on lands that have been taken away from indigenous communities? How have we, who were colonized, become instruments of colonization and re-colonization from the standpoint of indigenous peoples? Do women have a particular role in this situation? In light of the context of this invasion through migration and immigration policies, are we not also impinging on their intellectual rights, in “learning” from their experiences to benefit our own situations in the host countries, our new residences? The narratives of the women in this study can co-reflect indigenous women’s scholarship and theories, to share experiences of colonization and strategies for action from their respective particularities. If they so desire, building solidarity between migrant and indigenous women needs reciprocal processes, processes of communication, and critical, comprehensive thinking, in order to further understand transnational processes of women’s liberation. Such solidarity would impact significantly on Canada’s own need for “liberation” from the abuses of capitalist globalization, forcing recognition of the perspectives and efforts of both migrant and indigenous women.

### **National Struggle and Participation in Nation-Building**

The women in this study often spoke about “national liberation” as the basis of their struggle. Yet the term needs clarification, since it is often primarily associated with the struggle of non-European lands during colonial times for freedom from foreign occupation by European and United States interests and governments. When independence was “granted” by colonizing nations, often after long and painful revolts and armed rebellions, post-colonial governments were formed. As previously described, during the era that followed, the national elite of former

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<sup>8</sup> Sunera Thobani. “Multiculturalism and the Liberalizing Nation.” *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 144-175.

colonies governed. In the case of the Philippines, after 1946 the national elite administered a colonial, transition Commonwealth government under the tutelage of the United States, through English-speaking, US educated, male members of the wealthy class. The new entity, the modern “independent nation”, allowed US control to be reduced to the “background,” replaced by generations of the ruling elite whose practices and relations within the Philippines and with other states centre on a certain construct of what constitutes a “nation.”

This concept of the *nation* appears advantageous to modern governments who foster nationalism for their own ends, as well as to resistance groups who continue the call for “national liberation” from neo-colonizers, whether local or national politicians or foreign companies. However, the construct is problematic and limited when it comes to trying to create social change, in contexts where the “nation” includes conflicting groups. Women activists from other national projects have struggled to re-frame participation in nation-building to include indigenous resistance and women’s experiences (Anzaldúa, 1999; Perez, 1999). Contradictions in the concept of nation have also been examined by women scholars through women’s role and influence in social or armed revolutions in the process of nation-building, pre- and post-independence (Kaplan et al., 1999; Stasiulis, 1999, 182-218). They point out the dangers that befall those who fight for “national liberation” when they too carry a limited concept of nation, and do not acknowledge the complexity of the many divisions and differences within a “nation.” Ruling classes and opposition groups share the dilemma of how to include all groups in nation-building, in the midst of heightened ideological, political, regional, and social tensions. The very notion of nation has been problematized and de-constructed by both theorists and activists, and may need to be completely dismantled.

This leads to a paradox in the conceptualization of “nation-building” in the “simultaneous denial and universalization of difference” (Kaplan et al., 1999, 3-6). Activists may ignore or deny

different interests and agendas in society while trying to achieve a unified, universal social revolution for all citizens. The role of the upper class in the process of nation-building and the place of middle-class and marginalized sectors cannot be ignored or sidelined in a re-configured sovereign nation. Two of the women in this study are engaged in rocky, unpredictable negotiations with the current Philippine government, in what they see as part of an ongoing nation-building process for the Philippines. Activists, women and men, in the Philippines may also over-generalize the idea of the “nation” they believe they represent to include all the poor and working classes, when some in these strata politically support, or at least are loyal to, wealthy groups on whom they rely for their livelihood, and may therefore not share opposition groups’ goals and interpretations of the “nation.” In the same way, those from upper social and economic classes are not homogeneous. As in other social and armed revolutions, many privileged members of society (including some of the women in this study), have risked and given their lives for the defense of the poor and marginalized. Therefore the term “national struggle” must be seen as navigating problematic and contradictory terrain. Nevertheless, it is evoked by the women interviewed to encompass the reality of the complex and ongoing problems of the Philippines today, where efforts to formulate a national agenda include peasants, workers, the middle-class, and even some members of the ruling elite, who all perceive themselves as members of the same “nation”, while some minority groups may seek to dissociate themselves from it.

How do the women in this study use the term “national liberation” fifty years after independence? This group of Filipino activists considers the Philippine situation as unchanged since colonial times, as the distinction between colonial and post-colonial eras blurs in this neo-colonial age of globalization. They use the term not only as a rhetorical device but as the long-term goal of their activism, while at the same time they are aware that the history of women’s roles in fighting for national liberation shows that their activism is embedded in their daily, concrete lives as women.

Because of the extensive dimensions of current social stagnation, cultural deterioration, and economic crises in the Philippine context (the direct results of globalization policies imposed upon the country), any effective change through political and social struggle, no matter how small, is a step towards “social transformation.” “Social transformation” is thus used here to refer to any effective, positive change that contributes to and builds towards the liberation of individuals’ lives, with an impact on a local community and implications for national policy. While the long-term goal of social transformation is the desired outcome, short-term changes may occur as women struggle for survival and find solutions to daily hardships, whether these hardships affect women only or men as well. Social transformation in the Philippine context thus evokes the long-term goal of the women activists chosen for this study, as well as referring to the local, positive changes that may allow the principles of the future goal of nation-building for greater freedom, democracy, and autonomy to be lived out in the present as personal and community liberation. Both short and long-term goals evoke issues combining their commitment as Filipinos to a national struggle for fundamental political, social, and economic change and as women in a feminist struggle for women’s liberation. Findings of this study can help elucidate this feminist and nationalist relationship in theory and practice.

### **Feminist Activism and Praxis**

A de-colonizing perspective moves beyond an “anti-colonialism” stance. This means that while supporting ongoing opposition to colonialism or domination in all its forms, such movements also see limitations to being “anti.” The de-colonizing work of these women asserts a view of the future that is unique to the history and context of an ongoing Filipino struggle for national liberation, from 1561 to the twenty-first century. For them, political activism certainly includes de-colonizing work in general and women’s liberation in particular. Feminist activism as praxis<sup>9</sup> is

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of *praxis* (see Chapter 1), by its etymology and definition, implies both theory and action for change. Therefore, in this study, it evokes a number of dimensions. I posit that women’s form of activism

political activism that brings together women's ways of participating in local, national, and transnational processes of social and political change.

This study reconsiders the relationship between feminism and solidarity with broader movements involving women who do not see themselves as feminists, as well as men. The women in the study are dealing with issues that they see as "bigger than feminism." Yet Mohanty (2003) links feminism and nationalism in the economical and political contexts that have been evoked here. In response to capitalist globalization she proposes a "decolonizing" feminism that brings women's organizing efforts together across national borders. Her materialist transnational feminist solidarity approach is a significant element of the frame for this study. However, in spite of her extensive analysis of capitalist globalization, Mohanty has refrained from putting forward a clear model of how women might transform the fundamental structures of capitalist society that enslave women like Filipino migrant workers. The metaphor of examining the basic structure of an old house is relevant here. If one wishes to renovate (or re-form) an old structure, this may be acceptable for particular purposes. However, if one discovers that the basic foundations on which the house is built are faulty, then further examination is required (see Chapter 7, "Social transformation and Trans/National Solidarity"). There is grave danger to the residents since the structure may collapse, and the existence of those involved be at risk. This study theorizes beyond Mohanty's analyses, since she primarily urges the "networking" approach to women's solidarity. The Filipino women's situation demands that they transform their political consciousness collectively and work together transnationally for the precise purpose of changing what has deteriorated in society (at home and abroad), to rebuild foundations in order to save their lives and those of others.

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represents praxis as a theoretical concept. Praxis also emerges as consistent with the practical descriptions of these women's narratives. Finally, it is also one of the bases of my reflections on how and why praxis methods and social transformation are so intertwined. For these reasons, the term is incorporated into the study's theoretical frame, the analysis of narratives, and the conclusions.

Mohanty's "cartographies of struggle" do, however, provide a model that is very useful here because it asserts the standpoint of Majority World women (she herself is an immigrant from the Majority World to the United States). The model assumes their political stance, analyzes race, class, and gender oppression, and confronts underlying ideologies that result in oppression, as expressed in history, colonialism, imperialism, and the capitalist state (Mohanty, 2003, 43-84). "Struggle" is a term that is used in everyday confrontation with hardship. It is also used by Mohanty and others, in Marxist and non-Marxist contexts, to evoke long-term resistance to continued exploitation of the poor and the marginalized. In political terms, "struggle" from below opposes and engages authority and ruling elites and proposes actions for change, at varying degrees of cost to those who are committed to the struggle. Mohanty engages with the complex relations and interdependence between theory, history, and struggle. She names sites of struggle, and provides examples of the social agency of "Third World women" and the solidarity among Majority World women based on political alliances. She also traces the historical context of colonialism, as equated to white, masculine patriarchy and hegemonic middle-class structures, from which feminist politics in colonized places rose within the framework of national liberation movements. In linking feminism with political liberation movements, combining feminist and nationalist struggles, she focuses on women's engagement in "feminism" as inseparable from other struggles, especially for those Majority World women who struggle to survive in the societies of their former colonizers, such as black women and brown women in Britain. The struggles of the Filipino women interviewed are directly linked to the State policies and ideologies (Mohanty, 2003, 53-57) which are "fundamental to any form of ruling" (58), so that racist states and puppet regimes are seen as inevitable sites of struggle for women. In such contexts, feminism has become "a productive ground of struggle" (50), shifting "conceptual cartographies" (45), and continuing to the present time as the Majority World confronts all forms of gendered, racist, competitive economic policies and laws. Women from the Philippines confront racist, anti-woman migration/ immigration, naturalization, and labour policies and laws exercised on them as

poor Majority World citizens, by what they consider their own puppet state and by their host country abroad.

Mohanty's "decolonizing" methodology, linked to national liberation movements, is critically extended in this study. As migrant workers forced to work or emigrate abroad, Filipino women become the evidence, the symbol, and the actors for the close link between women's liberation and "national liberation." The inequalities in ruling relations, and the corresponding policies that maintain these relations within existing and new national and transnational conditions, are analyzed by the women interviewed as immediate struggles in the day-to-day, as well as a long-term struggle, perhaps even far beyond the era of globalization. Women's political struggles continue to be questioned, in terms of their being "feminist" and whether their "feminism" is inseparable from national resistance and struggle. This study demonstrates that the feminist struggles of a group of activist Filipino women go beyond such moot questions. Rather, what emerges is the interconnectedness of feminist and national struggles in the Philippine context, given the ideological force and pervasiveness of capitalist globalization. The result is a contextualized feminism arising out of intricate global conditions. The research questions thus pivot around what the women interviewed describe as their feminist political actions, and I perceive as examples of a feminist praxis necessary for social transformation. Because of the complexity of the global context within which these women organize, educate, and mobilize, their praxis necessarily reflects a specific transnational focus, as they confront the impact of capitalist globalization, drawing attention to the conditions under which they, and many other women in the world, live and often perish.

Like Mohanty, the women interviewed emphasize women's grassroots "struggles." The most significant difference in their approach is that they describe changes that occur, not only as the direct result of actions to achieve the eradication of immediate injustices, but when,



simultaneously, there is the exercise of agency by the community that produces a collective self-transformation. Mohanty's "communities of resistance," from these women's perspective, develop into communities empowered to exercise their capacity to change, lead, and assert alternative models of social interaction. They describe communities that not only fight to end injustices, but promote reflection on what the "nation" would look like if it were no longer under the rule of neo-colonial entities of any stripe. To build women's capacity to analyze their situation, Mohanty configures the multiple contexts of women's struggles as including the following elements: state rule in historical junctures of decolonization and the rise of national liberation movements; the constitution of white, capitalist states through a liberal gender regime and racialized immigration and naturalization laws; consolidation of a multinational economy as both continuous and discontinuous with territorial colonization; scholarly "Third World" feminist praxis to take apart a hegemonic mode of discursive colonization of "Third World" women in academic, disciplinary-based knowledge practices; and oppositional practice, memory, and writing as crucial aspects of the creation of self-knowledge for "Third World" women (57). This study engages directly with these multiple contexts in the interviewing, analysis, and writing processes.

Nancy Fraser's model of re-distribution and recognition is also useful to this feminist analysis, as she expands it to include a critique of post-colonial imperialism and class and social hierarchies (Fraser, 1997, 2005). From a western/North American perspective, Fraser's original redistribution-recognition framework attempts to address economic injustice rooted in the political-economic structures of society, and cultural and symbolic injustice rooted in social patterns of representation, to achieve greater social justice. She recognizes multiple intersecting struggles against intersecting injustices, but ultimately is unable to separate economic injustice from cultural injustice. She claims that economic redistribution is an expression of recognition and attempts to resolve the "dilemma" that arises when various injustices are differentiated by

both political-economic structures and cultural-valuation structures; both aspects involve “primary and co-original” problems that require remedies. Fraser bases egalitarian socioeconomic redistribution on the “equal moral worth of persons” and seeks remedies accordingly. In contrast, this study takes a more political, collective view that starts from the analysis of the structures that create these injustices. The changes required are not “remedies” to problems, but paradigmatic, structural changes that radically address the needs, not of individuals or individual communities per se, but of all those who need to be liberated urgently and definitively from structural oppression. Fraser analyzes her model from gender, race, and class perspectives. She sees that political-economic differentiation results in the gendered economic exploitation of women, at the same time that racialized women are specifically culturally devalued and denied certain rights, including economic rights. Gender exploitation and race oppression result from capitalist economic deprivation and colonial exploitation and marginalization. Fraser comments on class hierarchies as “social differentiation,” sustained by the dominant political-economic structures. We shall see that class analysis is certainly critical in understanding the motivation and modes of action of this group of Filipino women activists, as well as the situation of the women they represent.

Fraser suggests remedies that would result in a socialist redistributive economy and a deconstructed, critically aware culture. These can only be achieved by weaning ourselves away from current cultural constructions, interests, and identities. She classifies solutions to the redistribution-recognition dilemma into “affirmative” and “transformative” remedies. Affirmative remedies for gender injustice are part of the liberal welfare state, where we may perhaps reform and revalue cultural feminism, but the binary gender code remains unchanged; women are supposed to be given a fair share of jobs and educational places but there is no change in the nature and number of those places. Similarly, such remedies for race affirmation leave the black-white binary intact; “multiculturalism” respects group differentiations, and aims to give a fair

share of jobs and educational places to those from different non-white races, without modifying the jobs themselves. On the other hand, Fraser's use of "transformative" remedies is also inadequate when attempting to achieve change within the existing structures of society. She suggests a "deconstructive feminism," a "socialist feminism," a deconstruction of Eurocentrism and racial dichotomies, and an anti-racist social democracy, but without a critique of the overarching structures of capitalist globalization. There is risk in accepting Fraser's engagement in class analysis. As a western scholar, she would have to critique a vital pillar in western/ capitalist democracy, which is access to private ownership and individualist achievement through and/or resulting in material wealth. To do this would, for western academics, be to engage in their own social and national transformation.

Privileged women in colonizer and neo-colonizer societies in the "First World", including migrant and immigrant women who worked hard to get there, may find it difficult to see themselves as requiring social and national transformation just like Majority World women.<sup>10</sup> In spite of the contributions of socialist feminism that advance our thinking about women and politics, economics, and society (Holmstrom, 2002), western feminist movements have yet to engage more openly in the anti-capitalist globalization movement, and by direct implication, in class analysis for the liberation of all women in western societies. Unlike the "deconstruction" Fraser suggests, the women in this study are engaged in contextualized systemic analysis and recommendations for action that can liberate women, from their perspective as a group of Majority World women activists. It is hermeneutically advisable to be suspicious of

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<sup>10</sup> The notion that wealthy nations require "liberation" may be contradictory for many, as general discourse assumes that the social, economic, and political achievements of wealthy nations are models for Majority World societies to emulate. Although social justice movements exist, often strongly, in these societies, privileged groups, or those who aspire to have privilege, within wealthy nations may not themselves identify with the struggles of indigenous, minority, or other marginalized groups in their country. They would not see these struggles as related to their own, much less their nation's, "liberation." Analyzing the need for "national liberation" in "western" countries appears necessary but is beyond the intent of this study. Yet the study hopes to show the relevance and applicability, if not interconnectedness, of struggles of this group of women to struggles that exist in all other countries because of the pervasive, negative impact of capitalist globalization, particularly on women.

interpretations by those with economic power and social privilege, particularly in the west, and not to accept without question what they claim as “moral value.” This is difficult to judge and interpret within a liberal society driven by capitalist accumulation at the same time that it may be attempting to reform itself. For this to be a feminist critique, relevant to women like those in this study, broader results-based analysis of feminist praxis in a world of capitalist globalization is urgently required.

In her later analysis, Fraser seeks “more integrated forms of feminism” (1115), because she acknowledges that women are dealing with issues “bigger than feminism” (1121). She offers a third “r” (in addition to recognition and redistribution), which is “representation,” becoming aware of the limitations of her original model which lacked the participation of oppressed and devalued groups in a democratic society. She continues to include social and economic justice as feminist issues, but adds participatory democracy as a feminist concern. She concedes that it is necessary to go beyond what may be considered the more individualistic “identity-politics phase,” emphasizing representation as problematizing governance structures and decision-making procedures. She places this in the political realm, yet continues to ignore direct class analysis and the political-social-economic culture of globalization. Remaining within Euro/North American frames, she continues to use the language of “altering,” “problematizing,” or “decentering” the “sovereign state,” presumably in privileged states where this sovereignty has already been “achieved,” as in the nation where she is located, the United States. The present study hopes to contribute to opening up the definition of what is “transformative,” from the standpoint of Majority World activists. Deep changes in mental paradigms, social structures, and democratic processes in daily social-economic-political lives are “transformative.” These should not be confused with continued attempts to reform or liberalize existing structures. In various historical contexts, these have proved futile and have not resulted in sustained liberation in daily lives.

Sandoval's "differential coalitional oppositional consciousness" theory moves into "deeper" consciousness and methodologies for the oppressed, from an "oppositional" orientation (2000). Her model for transnational de-colonization is consistent with the ideas of Mohanty and Tuhiwai-Smith, and it goes further as she examines forms of opposition undertaken over time (53-63). She reviews a four-fold topography of oppositional consciousness developed under earlier modes of capitalist production: (1) an equal rights or integrationist form which, following World War II and the war crimes (most visibly) against the Jews, argued for civil rights based on the belief that all humans are created equal, a form embraced by "liberal feminism"; (2) a revolutionary form, whose aim is to lead society to function beyond domination/subordination power axes, and that believes that external and ideological differences cannot be assimilated (or erased) within the present social order; (3) a supremacist form, where subordinated groups aim to lead society to a higher ethical and moral vision, superior to the existing dominant forms of feminism and nationalism; and (4) a separatist form, which protects and nurtures a group's differences through complete separation from the dominant social order (55-56). Although these four forms of consciousness and resistance are all relevant to this study, a fifth form she discusses pertains directly to the present discussion. It is what Sandoval sees as the current "differential"<sup>11</sup> form of consciousness and social movement as resistance to global late-capitalist and postmodern cultural conditions, responding to the "shifting currents of power" (54, 57-60). Where previous forms addressed certain aspects of liberation movements, differential oppositional consciousness alerts us to the urgent need to adapt to the changing rules and strategies of late-capitalism, even as we interpret globalization while remaining subject to its power and domination. She states:

Differential consciousness represents the strategy of another form

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<sup>11</sup> Sandoval clarifies three meanings in her use of *differential*: the differential form of social movement aligned with global movements towards decolonization (41); a specific "technology" of the methodology of the oppressed that changes consciousness through meaning (5); and a process referring to Derrida, Anzaldua, and Lorde, involving the "unnameable," the "soul," where "our deepest knowledges" are found (5).

of oppositional ideology that functions on an altogether different register. Its power can be thought of as mobile – not nomadic but rather cinematographic: a kinetic motion that maneuvers, poetically transfigures, and orchestrates while demanding alienation, perversion, and reformation in both spectators and practitioners. Differential consciousness is the expression of the new subject position called for by Althusser – it permits functioning within yet beyond the demands of dominant ideology (1991, 23).

Sandoval stresses the need to show grace, flexibility, and strength in order to confront domination. Her proposals appear valid and creative as means to respond to constant changes in the strategies and impact of hegemonic structures and relationships. However, how can societies change within such ubiquitous structures and relationships? Her theoretical tool, when joined with Tuhiwai-Smith's community research theory, can link socially transformative goals in women's struggles for liberation. While she still frames social change through the analysis of oppositional ideologies within dominant discourse, Tuhiwai-Smith takes the struggles and resistance to the local level, opposes, asserts, and focuses on discourses from marginal communities. Sandoval's theory, and others developed by groups such as the Maori community mentioned before, are related in that she sees Majority World women living permanently in Europe or North America as having common struggles with indigenous peoples, such as the Maori, located around the world, and migrant women (many of them Filipino) around the globe. For all of them, Sandoval proposes "liberatory stances in relation to the dominant social order":

The idea here, that the citizen-subject can learn to identify, develop, and control the means of ideology, that is, marshal the knowledge necessary to "break with ideology" while at the same time *also* speaking in, and from within, ideology, is an idea that lays the philosophical foundations enabling us to make the vital connections between the seemingly disparate social and political aims that drive, yet ultimately divide, social movements from within (2000, 43).

She proposes a model of oppositional ideology that "apprehends an effective oppositional consciousness igniting in dialectical engagement between varying ideological formations" (43). This addresses the struggles waged by racialized groups living in "First World" societies. Filipino migrant women certainly engage with authoritative agencies in their host countries to improve their situation there. However, being in the First World continues to create much of their social,

political, and economic predicament, and also reduces their efforts to fight against the injustices suffered by Filipino people in the Philippines, even as they contribute to the advancement of First World societies. This discontinuity is addressed by migrant/immigrant Filipino women activists abroad vis-a-vis the women in the Philippines. While Sandoval's theory points to tools of consciousness women and men can use, it does not address the tools already being used in marginal spaces of struggle. The women in this study address these, particularly as lived in transnational spaces of engagement. What are the "liberatory" models of engagement proposed, in the spaces where these groups are attempting to assert their own visions of society even when they feel like "outsiders" of the society in which they live? In order to be liberatory in the longer term, would the struggle of those working for fundamental changes in their society not need to use philosophical and ideological frames not readily acknowledged in dominant spaces? In a dialectical process all who are in society inform each other in ongoing ways and influence the direction of society, in spite of their social differences, ideological disagreements, and competing priorities.

What makes the concept of oppositional consciousness problematic is that it could lean too much towards opposing and resisting dominant parameters and far less towards asserting inclusive and community-based criteria for better lives. In the short term, oppositional strategies may indeed lead to changed futures; in the long-term, socially transformative systems are sustained by creative, constantly changing flexible models of functional liberation and democracy (not always readily available to those in the margins of society), such as those described by the women in this study. Efforts need to be made in both arenas of engagement, in both dimensions of space and time: within and outside of dominant spaces, within and outside of marginalized spaces, and in short-term and long-term conceptualization and practice. The Filipino women activists in this study can help further our understanding of how transnational efforts contribute to national and global debates and efforts to achieve change, whether they are

at home or abroad. It seems to me that this interpretation of differential consciousness extends beyond Sandoval's opposition to dominant ideology and engagement with dominant formations, when seen from the perspective of marginalized, exploited, displaced, uprooted Filipino women in transnational spaces. Social change movements, feminist praxis, and their standpoint knowledge can add depth to differential coalitional oppositional consciousness in this late-capitalist period – a consciousness that is even more necessary on the current transnational world stage.

Sandoval develops and supports the possibility of oppositional methods, while also transcending oppositional ideologies (182-93). She concludes with her notion of a “physics of love,” when differential social movements join and “operate as a single apparatus” (183). This appears as her attempt to draw on oppositional consciousness to lead eventually to a less disparate and more unified consciousness. This is the point where I would like to extend her ideas, since it connects with the narratives of the women in this study, who see unity as necessary in order to work together towards social change in an assertive rather than resistant mode. These theories of “love” and “unity” in global liberation appear themselves to deploy terminology from marginal rather than dominant discourse. This aspect of bringing struggles (and those who struggle) together, rather than fragmenting them, is a theory I wish to explore further, as well as an aspect of my own practice in examining de-colonizing, liberatory research from women's communities.

Geraldine Pratt, on the other hand, goes beyond oppositional frames and demonstrates the positive affirmative value of women's praxis with the dynamic interaction implied by the expression “putting feminist theory to work” (2004). She focuses on the spaces occupied by marginalized women, to illustrate materialist transnational feminism as it occurs in sites of struggle, including grassroots communities and academic settings. She listened to stories from Filipino women and youth in Vancouver and addressed their questions through collaborative research, conferences



on Filipino themes, and arts-based community projects. She put “feminist theory – and especially post-structural theory, which many feminists have taken to be irrelevant to practical political organizing – to work in this concrete case to see how well it works, and what it is capable of producing” (3). She interrogates the “geographies of democracy” where spaces of exclusion can be addressed, and connections, affinities, universalisms, and feminist solidarity can be practiced even across language and political or ideological differences. By pointing out the structural unevenness of relations of power (as in the case of unequal access to rights by domestic workers in Canada), and placing this analysis in a broader critique of social differences and exclusions, she brings activist groups (be they women of colour, migrant workers, or “mainstream”) into democratic spaces where competing claims can be addressed. This can occur even as they are often paradoxically excluded from such discursive and geographic spaces. In this way, Pratt relies on democratic processes that allow women to organize and build alliances, thus supporting the notion of “building solidarities across global difference.” Pratt’s question regarding “what unifies women’s organizing” relates to what Sandoval names as the “differentials” of social movements aligned globally, and what Mohanty requires as “cross-border feminist solidarity.” All these theorists turn towards movements that could unite amid differences, not only in order to oppose existing structures, but to create “geographies of democracy” within a nation and transnationally, beyond geographic and contextual borders.

### **Response-Able Communities Transforming through Struggle**

The women interviewed for this study are part of a national movement that struggles for sovereignty from foreign and national domination, and my hypothesis is that their activism may provide insights into how responsible and democratic communities can function. The varied forms of struggle they undertake in their local contexts will be analyzed not only as reactions or resistances to neo-colonialism (important as these are), but as illustrating processes of (trans) formation, of responsible communities-in-process bringing about positive change. Through the

interviews, the study attempts to describe women's struggles that are collective and occur in community settings, and to discover how transformation within their particular communities may exemplify the changes that are possible in the larger society.

While the ambivalence of women's role in many nationalist and social transformation movements is well known (Jayawardene, 1986, Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Perez, 1999; Bannerji et al., 2001; Dhruvarajan & Vickers, 2002), their liberation as women often proves inseparable from national aspirations, as their efforts are tied to the liberation of all groups within the nation. In Filipino women's migration experience, their movement has gone even beyond national borders. The notion of feminism bursts open when it is not based primarily on gender analysis (the male/female binary more commonly associated with western feminism). Without denying the importance of gender issues and the challenges of sexuality, the Philippine situation, which reflects the precariousness of both personal and national survival, is primarily founded on class struggles profoundly shaped by gender and race. When Filipino women migrate to mainly white Euro/NorthAmerican/ western contexts, where they are (re)constructed as "women of colour," race analysis becomes more urgent and immediate. On a global scale, the racism which was a tool of colonialism continues to be a tool of neo-colonialism. There is a "segregation" of peoples/nations, where the G8 nations are mostly Euro/North American and composed mainly of white populations with capitalist economies ruled by an ongoing patriarchal system. In the non-white, non-industrialized nations, cheap labour, outsourcing, and contractualization strategies maintain monopoly capitalist enterprises within the neo-liberal triad of privatization, deregulation, and liberalization of trade and tariff policies. That debtor-nations happen to be poor, of colour, and characterized by women's labour, points to systemic rather than particular or coincidental forms of colonization/neo-colonization. From its colonized past to its semi-feudal, semi-colonial, neo-colonized present, the Filipino situation demands intersectional analysis of the multiple oppressions of class, race, gender, and sexuality. In practice, these intersections are clearly

present in the daily issues the women who were interviewed encounter in their respective communities.

The situation of women workers within national contexts often reflects their resistance to existing social hierarchies and dominant social, political, and economic ideologies. Much has been said about their abilities to respond to old and new colonizations and re-colonizations, and lately, to the more prominent anti-globalization struggles. As stated before, while Sandoval (2000) convincingly develops an oppositional consciousness theory that necessitates creative responses as oppressive forces change tactics, her theory is nevertheless within an oppositional response paradigm. In national struggles, these resistances and oppositions are vital to survival. Mohanty also argues for a transnational struggle and solidarity along the same paradigm of opposition, struggle, and creative abilities to respond. I posit that oppositional politics cannot by itself change entrenched structures of domination, because even as communities “oppose” the dominant regime, the paradigmatic ground remains unchanged. This is evident to the extent that entrenched legal, educational, and governance systems are still in place; if opposition led to new social models replacing existing paradigms, then social transformation might have already been reached, but this is still far from occurring.

Patricia Monture-Angus (1995) situates dominant institutions of law, justice, and education as tools of assimilation and oppression of aboriginal people. She states,

We must always have in our sights the process and nature of our oppression and colonization. Education is important if and when we are able to educate our young in a decolonized way. Colonialism and its consequences are the obstacles (1995, 80).

This statement is equally true for non-aboriginal populations. Monture-Angus analyzes aboriginal history and traditions, speaking from her aboriginal beliefs and foundational world view based on three elements: collective rights, structures based on relationships between people and creation,

and responsibility that is not rights-based (77-89). While she acknowledges the need for marginal communities to both oppose and seek to be included in the larger society controlled by dominant structures of colonial power, she sees that transformation of their communities cannot rest on these efforts alone. The more critical part of the change process developed by Monture-Angus, and applied in this study, is that marginalized people need to assert their own perspectives, including their colonial histories. This imperative brings out traditional beliefs and proposes transformative structures based on social, cultural, and historical experiences from “outside” dominant assumptions. In the case of Filipino activists, some locally developed models for organizing may be transferable to national or transnational levels, just as aboriginal peoples “reclaim” traditional models of community practices that can change how they relate to the dominant culture.

Activist communities in the Philippines and abroad are changing rapidly and dynamically as they persist in their opposition work. Resistance is a necessary part of shaping such communities, but some forms of resistance can be vital, creative, and forward-oriented rather than simply reactive. Some of the women’s stories shared through this study show how imaginative and effective some of their oppositional campaigns and postures of resistance have been. However, I was looking for evidence of activities that go beyond being primarily “anti,” that illustrate being *able to respond*, as part of *responsible/response-able communities* in the process of change. Would it not be “irresponsible” of “neo-colonies” to repeat colonizing patterns or make only superficial changes that, in reality, re-colonize their own people? Responsible/response-able communities would need to integrate and translate de-colonizing theory and feminist praxis into improved, liberated lives.

The narratives of Filipino women activists cited here, particularly those located in the Philippines, provide a view of paradigm changes in “feminist democratic politics” (Stone-Mediatore, 2003,

158-159), changes that re-interpret and re-structure our world through the awareness achieved by responsible communities that transform themselves continually. Transmitting women's stories based on their daily lives and uncovering the meanings assigned to them is an important methodology that allows us to acknowledge and develop alternative interpretations that may help change the way we find solutions in the world. These transformations in the midst of struggle are "genuine" because they represent people's needs and desire for change, rather than the "artificial" and superficial changes that are often achieved by reforming existing policies and structures, with results that maintain the interests of the ruling classes. Democratic and collective struggles produce communities that have no alternative but to be transformative of themselves and their contexts, but it is not in the interest of status quo structures that maintain hierarchies of power to allow them to "transform." It is, however, imperative for marginalized communities to continue to strive for change, as it is in the struggle itself that social structures and processes change. The struggles continue in a "spiraling" process towards what might be a "genuine" democracy and liberation, which can be glimpsed in the present. Grassroots communities like these experience transformation because their very survival requires that society change, and social change is for them an immediate, practical concern as well as a long-term ideological one.

When women oppose dominant paradigms, they transform themselves and others; when they and their communities are transformed, they assert themselves politically and advance their movement. How do women's experiences assert their praxis from "below," from the "margins" of dominant discourse and action? How can their praxis help us include yet go beyond mere opposition (or act simultaneously with it) and, through present struggles, live the future transformations growing from women's contributions? How can women's transnational praxis reach feminist understandings of action and solidarity beyond familiar physical boundaries and

mentally constructed borders, while surviving “in the belly of the beast,” that is, within the domain of imperialist/neo-colonial/neo-liberal domination?

In re-conceptualizing feminist solidarity across borders, Mohanty (2003) shows the importance of feminist analysis of the relationship between capital, labor, and gender, and how these have transcended the borders of nation-states (139-149). Ironically, as hierarchies, ideologies, exploitations, and recolonizations of class, gender, and race are maintained through the global economy, “cross-border feminist solidarity” becomes more possible (140). Thus this study looks at the creation of a responsible and response-able cross-border community of empowered, Filipino women who live in different communities. Understanding their struggles and achievements requires interpretation of history, ideology, praxis, and consciousness (140) and needs to be shared cross-culturally and transnationally.

I am also hypothesizing that in order to achieve social transformation, transnational communities must be recognized and strengthened by all women’s movements struggling against capitalist globalization intra-nationally and inter-nationally. Transnational communities of Filipinos are seeing connections not experienced on this scale by Filipinos before. These new configurations of community produce responses that are more organized, theorized, and assertive (i.e., “response-able”) than ever before. They are also accountable communities (i.e., “responsible”), with positive outcomes to share as well as problems to solve.

In summary, as a feminist and de-colonizing project rooted in specific national and transnational issues in the context of capitalist globalization, this study aims to promulgate a *socially transformative feminist activism* as well as engaging critically with it. The latter is seen not only as an ethnic- or racial-specific experience (which it is), but also as an example of trans-national relations which demand a type of systemic race-class-gender intersectional analysis, in order to

further transnational solidarity. It provides examples of a Majority World (non-western) feminism emerging under new, global experiences of exploitation, provoking action. Feminist praxis in the Philippine context provides a perspective that may show that feminism does not necessarily start with or focus on women's issues per se, nor fragment theory from practice, but that issues of concern to women are inseparable from national and global issues of colonial exploitation, economic violence, and systemic poverty.

Some of the women interviewed, and many of those they work for and with, have economic priorities for survival; gender analysis or women's issues (especially vis-a-vis the patriarchy) may not initially take centre stage for them. I began this study by wondering how leftist Filipino women's activism engages with economic and class analyses, and how this activism contributes to the understanding of Majority World or transnational feminism. I wanted to discover how some women in a specific national struggle interact with or address particular women's issues, such as family violence, reproductive rights, sexual trafficking, and domestic roles, within their national project. How far is women's liberation integral to national transformation? While some of those interviewed are publicly engaged in national debates and even official negotiations, they are all involved in women's groups, and for some that is their primary focus. My hypothesis is that their activism reaches a point where women's concerns and national concerns are inseparable. I expected them to share my view that it is through collective action-reflection praxis that community struggles and transformative actions can be better understood, by these women and through them by other women. Further to this assumption, does their experience show that reflection leading to transformative action and transformed communities can only happen in a community, collectively? And must all community sectors, including men, always be involved, or can women working together make a difference? The dialectics<sup>12</sup> of this relationship between

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<sup>12</sup> While the term "dialectics" is associated with Hegelian and Marxist analysis, it is also a "mainstream" idea I first encountered in theological studies. The "dialectics" of the "immanent and transcendent" God

women's concerns and "national struggle" pervades this study, as a theory to be tested against the realities lived by women in their daily battles for themselves, their families, their community, and their nation. Women in poor and devalued nations have few options, if they wish to improve the lives of their children, other than engaging in political activism for social change. This commitment, however, is certainly not without tensions and disappointments, continuities and discontinuities, congruencies and contradictions, as well as triumphs and challenges.

One of the important areas of discontinuity for this particular group relates to perceptions of the role of women in nation-building. Having hypothesized that they assert the integrated nature of women's liberation and national issues, the women also struggle, in varying degrees and stages of their own empowerment, for a place as women within a national change movement they actively promote. They often strive fiercely for the liberation of all Filipinos, yet need to liberate themselves from multiple oppressions in their own families, organizations, and coalitions in different sites.

Many scholars have explored gender, society, and nation as topographies for understanding women's roles within nation-states (Mills, 1996; Kaplan et al., 1999; Probyn, 1999; Bannerji et al., 2001; Dhuruvarajan and Vickers, 2002); others delve into more specific contradictions of gender,

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led to theological tensions over whether the "church" recognizes "Jesus" or "God" in each living person or as a divine, transcendent Being. Liberation theology stepped outside of this binary frame and embraced the knowledge of the transcendent God as actually in living people today. The provocation of dialectical methods, deployed against dominant binary constructions, is enormous. Six Jesuit university professors working with the urban poor and peasants were murdered along with their housekeeper and her daughter in El Salvador in 1989 for this theology lived in the daily struggle of the poor. The current Roman Catholic Pope threatened and facilitated the removal of priests espousing these dialectics, such as the Boff brothers in Brazil, T. Belasuriya in Sri Lanka, H. Kung in Switzerland, J. Schillebeeckx of the Netherlands, and many others in the 1980s and 90s. The term is used in this study to challenge the assumptions behind the theory that women's issues of oppression and liberation are in a contradictory or competitive relationship with the liberation of an entire nation in the Filipino case; both women's and the nation's concerns are integrated aspirations for genuine democracy and freedom within a just and lasting peace process.



race, and class within national politics and social revolutions (McClintock, 1997; Perez, 1999; Stasiulis, 1999; Bannerji et al. 2001). Although many male scholars analyze the “nation” in relation to imperialism, colonialism, and “Third World” post-colonialism, direct engagement with gender oppression within or alongside national struggles is rare or altogether absent in their work. This is evident even among those who acknowledge women’s need for social and economic independence and contributions to social or armed revolutions (Fanon, 1963; Lewis [W.E.B. Dubois], 1995; Dirlik, 1997; Jameson, 1998; Forgacs [Antonio Gramsci], 2000; Viswanathan [Said], 2002). For example, Anne McClintock (1997) and Rey Chow (1998) both reveal Franz Fanon’s understanding of women’s situation as reflecting traditional masculinist thinking and the patriarchal construction of gender difference; he acknowledges his lack of knowledge of women, and only “mentions”, without specifying, women’s roles in achieving revolution or their issues in nation-building. McClintock clearly shows how, for most male theorists, women remained largely restricted to domestic space and are “constructed as symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency (90).” The gendered discourse of “national liberation” at the time of (de)colonization, based on male theories, needed to be replaced by a feminist theory challenging gendered power relations within “national liberation” movements (Mills, 1996; Kaplan et al., 1999; Perez, 1999, Stasiulis, 1999; McClintock, 1995, 1999; Grewal and Kaplan, 2000; Bannerji et al., 2001; Brenner, 2003; Lewis and Mills, 2003). In the Philippine context, women-specific efforts and hopes of women’s liberation within nationalist struggles have been highlighted and explored by scholars and activists, especially those involved in the fight against the Marcos dictatorship (Angeles, 1989; Taguiwalo, 1992, 1993; Aguilar, 1998; Rosca, 2001, 2003).

Since race-gender-class dominance has been a tool used by those who command imperialist projects to subdue entire “native” or national populations, both men and women are involved in many forms of anti-imperialist struggles. However, Spivak’s critical notion of the “subaltern”

points out an enormous irony in our attempts, as subalterns, to understand the relationship between the subaltern and imperialism. She notes, "No perspective *critical* of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self" (1985/2003, 315). Defining oneself or one's movement within an imperialist frame is bound to be infiltrated by many blind spots. Just as one begins to critique "liberation", for instance, in terms of capitalism and militarization, one might suddenly find oneself falling directly into imperialist and masculinist paradigms, even as one opposes such terminologies and definitions from the "subaltern" space. Feminist analyses may assist in escaping this dilemma. If the very notions of "democracy" and "liberation" fall prey to "dominant" male nationalist ideas, then women activists have much to be vigilant about in their "differential consciousness" and praxis. By interrogating gender power within subaltern groups, Chow (1994/2003), McClintock (1996, 1999), and others question the construction and understanding of the "native" in former European and US colonies as primarily identified with maintaining white male identity in the large imperialist enterprise. The native male may be feminized as the White Man's Other, but nevertheless maintain a gendered hierarchy within the native context. Thus women engaged in "national liberation" movements must continue to seek to liberate women from women-specific forms of oppression. If the men in liberation movements do not identify women's issues as vital to national freedom for all, they allow women to fall into the "limbo of male afterthought" (McClintock, 1999, 95). If women espouse "national liberation" without giving prominence to removing gender discrimination, they do the same. I surmise, from examining the theories and practices of women's participation in nation-building, that the outmoded Judeo-Christian metaphor of women stemming from Adam's rib could be usefully replaced by the ancient, indigenous Philippine creation myth that depicts both male and female emerging simultaneously and together from one bamboo stalk.

Women's participation under patriarchal modes of interpretation has been associated with sexuality, marriage, motherhood, and the male-led family as national metaphor (Probyn, 1999).

As McClintock states:

If nationalism is not transformed by an analysis of gender power, the nation-state will remain a repository of male hopes, male aspiration, and male privilege...In a national revolution, both women and men should be empowered to decide which traditions are outmoded, which should be transformed, and which should be preserved...nowhere has a national or socialist revolution brought a full feminist revolution in its train. If women have come to do men's work, men have not come to share women's work. Nowhere has feminism in its own right been allowed to be more than the maid-servant to nationalism (1999, 109).

The women in this study provide examples of this model, but also of a search for alternatives.

Women of colour and indigenous scholars have a vital contribution to make to these analyses because of the multiple subject positions, multiple oppressions, and multiple identities they experience. Mohanty (1995) notes the complex relationalities within systems of domination (colonialism, imperialism, racism, capitalism) which do not have identical effects on women in Majority World contexts. Furthermore, these effects may even reveal contradictory subject positions. Jill Vickers (2002) has classified and analyzed the complex relationships of feminism to many types of nationalisms from many national contexts (247-272). "Feminist nationalism" becomes, rather than a contradiction in terms, an ongoing struggle to understand the meshing of "women's activism in nationalist movements with feminist activism" (259). Majority World women activists and theorists are in constant interaction with each other and with western feminists on women-specific and nationalist issues that may or may not integrate feminism into nationalism. Daiva Stasiulis (1999) posits that scripts of relational positionality can destabilize organizational strategies, and asks how anyone can organize politically if everyone belongs to multiple potentially conflicting groups (194). In the case of Filipino women forced to work abroad, they are women of colour at work (race, class, gender), remain marginalized women "at home" (class, gender), yet may themselves employ servants or caregivers, as they occupy shifting positions in

the system of class stratification. "Feminist nationalism," as seen by these women activists, comes into clearer focus through multiple lenses.

McClintock cites the "Statement on the Emancipation of Women" by the National Executive of the African National Congress in May 2, 1990:

"...the emancipation of women [is] not a by-product of a struggle for democracy, national liberation or socialism. It has to be addressed within our own organisation, the mass democratic movement and in the society as a whole (1999, 108)."

Through this study, this group of Filipino women activists inform us of the national and transnational feminism(s) they are in the process of carving out from their lived, relational, (trans)nationalist realities. The twelve women interviewed are actively situated in response-able communities in different geographical locations. Their activism aims to ensure systemic, non-symbolic, feminist participation, to avoid repeating colonial or neo-colonial gendered representations of women's subordination in the national democracy project itself. At the same time, they are also part of responsible communities that democratize their own governance by conscious interrogation of their own tendencies to dominate others or each other. They examine the class and other stratifications that exist among themselves as leaders, as well in their relation to those for whom they advocate. Whether the feminist issues they are fighting for, and the actions that ensue, are indeed part of the structural core of a national struggle, is a question this study can begin to explore. Their experiences can add to our understanding of a particular group of women's participation in national-building, in the current context of massive migration, globalization, and transnational communities in the making.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Drawing from a new ethnography, we are challenged to celebrate the polyphonic nature of critical discourse, to... hear one another "speak in tongues," bear witness, and patiently wait for revelation.  
bell hooks (1990, 133)

Third space feminism allows a look to the past through the present always already marked by the coming of that which is still left unsaid, unthought...it is in the maneuvering through time to retool and remake subjectivities neglected and ignored that third space feminism claims new histories.  
Emma Perez (1999, 127)

#### Methodological Discussions

The methods chosen for this study are motivated, firstly, by a commitment to amplifying marginalized voices, and secondly, by practical issues raised when the women whose knowledge is being sought are dispersed in different parts of the world. As feminist research, the starting point is the stories of women, and I aim to use "de-colonizing" feminist methods, such as action-reflection processes. The philosophical foundations of a feminist methodology drawing on women's experiences and deploying qualitative analysis to examine themes from their narratives are summarized by Shari Stone-Mediatore (2003). She lays out the reasons for regarding storytelling as a crucial doorway to understanding the global realities of marginalized communities, as well as assessing a global responsibility to tell and hear such stories in critical juxtaposition with dominant discourse. Public storytelling is important for the communities themselves, because when stories are shared they can name their own issues, reflect openly, and act responsibly. This method ideally becomes inclusive of the experiences of as many participants as possible, and issues and actions are therefore not left to be decided and expressed only by a few. Stone-Mediatore's explanation and justification are reinforced by the de-colonizing methodologies developed in indigenous (Maori) research through the work of

Tuhiwai-Smith (2002) and Smith (2004, 2006), discussed in Chapter 2. Such de-colonizing methods related to people's day-to-day struggles are necessary to acknowledge and convey personal and collective journeys and contribute to building and recording community history. This community-based effort to document the struggle is necessary alongside, or even before, social change processes. I have also applied my own previous knowledge and experience of popular education methods derived from the work of Paolo Freire (1993, 2004) in relating stories from women with marginal experiences. This Freirean action-reflection methodology is experience-based and seeks transformation in the structures of society that oppress the poor. Structural social change is incorporated into the "methodology of the oppressed"; with action-reflection as a necessary step in a community's process of change, which is immediate and concrete. This socially transformative education is clearly present in the communities where the women interviewed live and work. They begin with lived experience, and what they call "assessment" and "education" are reflective processes that raise their experience to the level of critical consciousness and theory, producing analyses which in turn inform their future actions (see further analysis in Chapter 6, "Effective Actions"). The method is implicit in this study, beginning with my role as facilitator for the group of women interviewed (as explained in Chapter 1). The interviews and the analysis are both a reflection and action that become part of processes of change for the women and the researcher.

"Counter-narratives," such as those that rose out of black women's struggles in the United States and Canada in the 1970s and 1980s and developed in the ensuing strands of critical race theory, have greatly influenced attitudes to marginal women's perspectives (hooks, 1981, 1990; Lorde, 1983; Hill-Collins, 1991; Bannerji, 1993; Brand, 1993). The Freirean method does not aim to construct or instigate counter-narratives or even alternative narratives per se. It wishes to deepen and extend existing narratives so that we can ask questions about "why" and "how," whether they concern historical, social, or economic issues. For example, in the

Philippine situation, the government has constructed an official story as to why Filipinos are leaving the country in droves. It does not mention the context of poverty in its press releases, but admits to the essential contribution of overseas workers' remittances that keep the nation economically afloat. Government officials call the workers "modern heroes." This discourse prompted a community-based documentary calling women migrant domestic workers "modern heroes, modern slaves."<sup>1</sup> This film was not produced first and foremost to create a counter-narrative to the government's, but rather to question the limited extent to which the migrants' story is told and the causes of this migration exposed. By the film, their story is revealed to the Filipinos themselves as well as to the world at large.

The stories of the women in this study are heard as "assertion" narratives rather than counter-narratives, as they tell of women's resistance and empowerment in spite of the ongoing need to "counter" dominant discourses. While counter-narratives oppose existing beliefs and solutions to social needs and problems, I propose that assertion narratives put forward transformative ways of being and doing things. These narratives belong to that area of transnational feminist discourse that builds on standpoint theory from the perspective of Majority World women. Sherene Razack (1993) examines the relationship between women's storytelling and social change as "opposition to established knowledge" (100), while Stone-Mediatore (2003) delves deeper into the role of storytelling as demonstrating "knowledges of resistance" which impact transnational feminism and can influence global politics. (For further discussion of Stone-Mediatore's theory, see below, "Use of Marginal Experience Narratives.")

Since this study aims to be an example of feminist research from the standpoint of Majority World experience, it is important to clarify the role of "counter-narratives," or "oppositions" to

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<sup>1</sup> *Modern Heroes, Modern Slaves* was a collaboration between community activists and film directors in 1997 to bring out the issues raised by the emerging and growing impact of the Live-In Caregiver Program on the Filipino community in the Philippines and in Canada.

dominant discourse, and the reasons for their presence or absence in feminist research. Many counter-positions tend to be based on binary models such as those found in empirical science (prove or disprove), academic debates (pros and cons), legal adversarial models (plaintiff vs. defendant), theological positions (belief or non-belief), and similar dichotomies in other domains. George Bush's infamous binary ultimatum, "if you are not with us, you're against us," when exercised in policy, has resulted in untold chaos in the daily lives of countless people. Such a binary opposition excludes "grey area" life experiences and principles, or any more subtle in-between positions.

Binaries may be useful or necessary at times and in themselves are not impediments to including the perspectives of those who are not in dominant positions. Patricia Hill-Collins (1991), following bell hooks' (1981) reflections on dualistic thinking, sees binaries as being "intrinsically unstable" (162). They are so because they necessitate a relationship where one of the pair subordinates the other, excluding a relationship of equality or simply difference. As with physical structures, a three- or four-point base with equal contributing capacities would be far more stable than two-pointed or two-legged supports that are inadequate to hold up a given edifice. Triangular buttresses, especially those attached to a foundational wall, will hold large or heavy weights, such as platforms or stairs, with far more stability than two opposite poles underneath such structures. With today's global complexities, a more stable way to analyze an individual's or an entire community's story would favor a non-dualistic, equal-though-different, multi-layered approach. Research methodology that has the active participation of members of the community being studied, with Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a significant example, can hope to handle the full, diverse weight, breadth, and depth of cross-cultures, intersectionality, multi-sectors, etc., as in transnational women's lives, providing a more appropriate approach.



This study tries not to succumb to more familiar counter-discourses or processes. It aims rather to approach and deal with the historical, cultural, and political complexities of particular communities (immense platforms and staircases) in multiple and diverse ways (non-polar buttresses) that struggle towards, and lean strongly up against, an even more foundational wall of "unity." The method tries to avoid oppositional or controversial polarities, seeking out commonalities in order to investigate women activists' desire to achieve and build on unity. It aims to use an additive, non-confrontational, positive research model parallel to the women's own seeking of unity as a method of social transformation, within communities they live in and know well. By adopting a facilitative approach that brings out common themes in working towards social transformation, I hope to contribute to the diversity of knowledge production by conveying marginalized stories as valuable in their own right, in the context of the women's own communities, alongside and outside dominant discourse. Tuhiwai-Smith notes that

community action research or emancipatory research... seek to make a positive difference in the conditions or lives of people ...these approaches not only enable communities but also enable indigenous researchers to work within their own communities. Community action approaches assume that people know and can reflect on their own lives, have questions and priorities of their own, have skills and sensitivities which can enhance (or undermine) any community-based projects (2002, 127).

Knowledge here is produced from and privilege is given to marginalized experiences. I, the researcher, am also striving for awareness of signs of my own colonization and de-colonization. I am not an outsider, or an un-involved observer (see below, "Social Locations"). As a feminist researcher and an active member of a particular community, I am trying to do research within or related to my own location. I am bound by the principles of ethical community action research as well as the protocols of academic feminist analyses. I strive to integrate both these areas for myself, not to create yet another demarcation between myself and the other women or within my own self. The participant-observer posture is a consciously adopted position from which I

am able to lend support, question, challenge, and reflect on what the women have narrated, and I am myself changed by this experience. As a member of a community of Filipino women activists, I act and reflect with the women. In studying their experiences my action-reflection is not only engaged with this community (particularly the women from Vancouver, BC), but can be considered in continuity or harmony with it, as I explore with them answers to the research questions posed. The process of action undertaken by the women and myself was in the narrating, the listening, and the subsequent analyzing of interviews -- they from their perspectives, I from mine. They listened and observed me as I listened and observed them. Such a methodology is de-colonizing and feminist when it seeks unity for the purpose of bringing about positive changes in the lives of women, including this researcher.

Tuhiwai-Smith (2002) and Smith (2004, 2006) illustrate de-colonizing methodologies from indigenous Maori experiences. Tuhiwai-Smith describes the methods used in twenty-five indigenous projects, indicating that those arose from community practices that existed before they were tagged "research methods." Storytelling is one of these methods. Oral histories are integral to indigenous research and are handed down across generations within the communities. As Tuhiwai-Smith states, "Intrinsic in story telling is a focus on dialogue and conversations amongst ourselves as indigenous people, to ourselves and for ourselves." (145) She explains that themes drawn from stories "can be used to invoke a set of shared understandings and histories." Storytelling "by, to, and for" the community thus has a critical relationship to community transformation. These stories and their narration bring forth a common history and shared memories as well as leading to creative actions for a common purpose. Furthermore, she names "celebrating survival" (or what the Filipino women term "struggle and resistance") as a particularly important aspect of the methodology.

While non-indigenous research has been intent on documenting the demise and cultural assimilation of indigenous peoples, celebrating survival accentuates not so much our demise but the degree to which

indigenous peoples and communities have successfully retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity. The approach is reflected sometimes in story form, sometimes in popular music and sometimes as an event in which artists and story tellers come together to celebrate collectively a sense of life, diversity and connectedness. Events and accounts which focus on the positive are important not just because they speak to our survival, but because they celebrate our resistances at an ordinary human level and they affirm our identities as indigenous women and men. (2002, 145)

While terms like “survival” and “resistance” may have completely different meanings for Filipino women than they do for the Maori, as individuals and as communities, their common stories of struggle for a dignified life and autonomy are points of solidarity. For both communities, the quality of their lives, and their lives themselves, are at stake as they attempt to de-colonize themselves and control their own context. Both acknowledge the responsibility of utilizing storytelling and collective sharing as dialectical, interactive processes necessary for ongoing de-colonization and positive social transformation.

### **Use of Marginal Experience Narratives**

The narrative forms, structures, and rhetoric characteristic of oral-based traditions and forms of storytelling have long been studied, as in the work of Catherine Kohler Reissman (1993) among many others. Narrative forms and structures are recognized as influencing those who tell about their experiences, as well as those who hear them, and as affecting the truth value assigned to personal stories. In this study, the elicitation of fragments of stories, commentaries, and reflections through interactive interviews brings about different results, in terms of process and product, than would the telling of extended, uninterrupted life histories. The question and answer form allowed me to guide the topics addressed, and to engage in dialogue with the speakers. I was able to share my reaction and interpretation with them. Both the teller's and the listener's interpretations of what was being asked and told were part of a narrative process guided by the focus of the research, and reflect the theoretical framework described in Chapter 2. Mary Jo Maynes (1989) considers narrative form not as a set of rules governed by genre, nor

a structure or model, but rather as a fluid process, reflecting the mutual creation of a story that transforms itself and the participants. She discusses how narratives reveal the process of self-interpretation shaped by cultural and historical contexts, as well as by gender, thereby continuously creating new forms, noting an interplay of context, narrative form, and interpretation. Interpreting narrative forms attends to and depends on cultural models, power relations, and individual imagination. Most significantly, self-interpretation is articulated in the narrative form one chooses (103-117). With the use of broad questions, the women had some opportunity to choose how they were to respond to them, which stories they would tell and how. The definition and my use of "narrative" in this context are necessarily derived from the perspective of marginalized experiences. The method of eliciting narratives through interviews, and from these extracting women's claims, is a narrative process involving the women interviewed and myself together. The question and answer form allowed the women to convey their own individual interpretations of their own experiences, while my theoretical frame and my own experience contributed to the reconstruction and retelling of the common themes that emerged.

While I asked the women direct questions about certain areas, these often became conversations and opportunities for the women to tell their own "stories." Their responses were not oral life histories, in the sense that the narratives were not about their entire chronological personal journeys, but were about their activism. This focus evoked deeply private and openly public stories and reflections, both of which were relevant to the study. In politicized marginal experiences, there is the added layer that what is private and personal is integrated with what is public and political; neither is readily distinguishable because these women, whose lives are grounded in community action, live what they say and say what they live. The interview was not designed to elicit a performative "story-telling" style, but rather a dialogue to bring out parts of their lives that reveal what they live, what they know, and what they wish to change in their own

lives and in their local, national, and transnational contexts. The interview style was oral and casual, balancing the pre-determined areas of the research questions with the spontaneous responses that the women themselves formulated within the prescribed, broad parameters. The interview, while scripted from my point of view, was a process that was natural and acceptable in the cultural context of the women, including myself, familiar with oral exchanges of stories. I brought to the process what I have learned from gatherings and group sharing which were occasions for hearing and telling stories and analyzing them. For example, I had experienced "focus groups" and "forums", both in the Philippines and in Vancouver, as spaces where women "tell their stories" in contexts that can be psychologically supportive and healing. Such gatherings also provide a useful means to bring out critical social and political issues from marginalized perspectives. The sharing of stories goes beyond being simply a research method, as the women see it as an indicator of community praxis. "Policy engagement" with dominant discourse is deliberated only after these stories have been told and analyzed by the group. The sharing of stories and personal experiences orally in a group becomes a way to assert the importance of topics that arise out of women's experiences, rather than as echoes (whether positive or negative) of issues defined by dominant agendas. Tuhiwai-Smith assumes the role of story-telling and sharing as a prime methodology in community action research and community forums.

Sharing is a responsibility of research...For indigenous researchers, sharing is about demystifying knowledge and information and speaking in plain terms to the community. Community gatherings provide a very daunting forum in which to speak about research. Oral presentations conform to cultural protocols and expectations. Often the audience may need to be involved emotionally with laughter, deep reflection, sadness, anger, challenges and debate (2002,161).

While Stone-Mediatore provides a feminist perspective on marginal experience narratives, Tuhiwai-Smith and other indigenous scholars and writers relate storytelling to community sharing and research, extending the significance of oral narratives. Elizabeth Isaac (2000) investigates the development of a class/colonial consciousness within the framework of

historical materialism through her analysis of group consciousness as well as of the deeper “subjective expression of consciousness located in narratives.” She discovered that what was expressed in the narratives “fit badly with the central concerns proposed by the framework” (90) and directly addresses oral narratives as a subjective, contextualized site of resistance. When asserted from the margins, the use of life stories (whether extensive or short anecdotal fragments) can rupture dominant beliefs, including those held by academics sympathetic to community concerns or who, like myself and indigenous researchers, are part of the community itself. This was a danger I was conscious about detecting. To avoid pre-determined outcomes or my own thinking or perspective dominating what I selected from what the women said, I kept the questions broad and related to their experiences. I extracted stories and examples from them when, perhaps due to my own questions or comments, they were being theoretical and intellectually abstract. I was aware, as the women appeared to also be aware, that narratives become more than a source of data to analyze; they also serve the functions of resistance to dominant assumptions and assertion of indigenous and marginalized knowledge as the starting point of a social analysis process. Narratives provide knowledge content as well as a preferred mode of communication for marginalized subjects. Isaac (89-101) places great weight on knowledge systems possessed by indigenous peoples as the starting point for meaningful social analysis. Brought forward through oral history, particularly in the case of intergenerational relations, she notes “the importance of relationships in the process of learning and for providing the ‘container’ for the legacy of knowledge” (95). I felt that the already congenial relationship I had with the women interviewed was validated through oral narratives exchanged in “conversation.” The wisdom the women possessed was being transmitted through a narrative methodology, within their own theorizing discourse and my theoretical framework.

The fragments of individual stories and commentaries that will be cited in Part II of this study were selected by me, to bring out the women’s knowledge and critical awareness, as well as to

serve as starting points and illustrations for my comparative analysis. Collecting various comments and examples became a method for constructing a composite picture and collective narrative of the Philippine situation today, from the point of view of this group of women as well as that of my theoretical frame. The variation in their contexts was subsumed under what emerged as a consistent story-line about a particular transnational community with shared values and experiences. While the type and scale of some of their hardships continued to surprise me, what struck me forcibly, in their anecdotes and commentaries about a globalized Philippine situation, was the intense commitment the women expressed (including through nonverbal aspects of narration not readily describable in the transcriptions), as they described their involvement as activists at the expense of a comfortable life, if not at the risk of their lives. For this reason, I have called some fragments or more extensive stories "assertion narratives." Assertion narratives include, but also go beyond, stories of historical and current resistance. They go farther than acts of storytelling in order to have "voice," and are in themselves manifestations of action for social change. Citing Giroux and Scholle, Isaac (2000) evokes the idea that human agency involves intentionality and consciousness, that power is never one-dimensional, since domination provokes resistance, and resistance expresses hope for social transformation. She states that "for resistance to be politically significant it must be more than defensive: it must be able to foster a solidarity of interests and alliances that have the potential to effect change" (91). Whether resistance includes proactive social change in its definition or justification or not, assertion narratives make it clear that these stories, or fragments of them, go beyond opposition and validate the praxis of the women as described and analyzed in these interviews.

Thus, stories of marginalized experiences are often told as politically conscious acts of resistance. As global political and economic policies directly impact on our daily lives, themes arise from such narratives that contest and re-interpret the present social order and balance of

world forces. Through telling stories, narrators can resist socially constructed hierarchies, negative identity formations, and inferior status in ruling relations. They can put forward alternative histories of experience and empowering images of resistance and agency, and thereby re-claim their own version of the “truth” about their existence. Stone-Mediatore describes the critical role of narration in political thinking, based on Hannah Arendt’s phenomenology of the political world: the public role of narration is historically and community-rooted, and the exchange of stories transforms other people’s accounts of struggle into a resource for one’s own critical knowledge (2003, 9-12). My role in this process as listener and interpreter meant that I had not only to hear stories of struggle as illustrations of each person’s unique experience, but to allow them to actively re-shape my own thinking from my privileged social, political, and economic context, thereby allowing my own transformation to occur. Stories like these do not simply recount or represent what happens, they make it happen.

Stone-Mediatore connects personal stories to standpoint theory (162-191). She proposes that we further extend standpoint thinking to *enlarged thought*, which “does not automatically valorize every narrative from the standpoint of the oppressed... [but] value[s] precisely those narratives that grapple with those aspects of oppressed and exploited lives that standpoint theorists find powerful” (184). Her notion of enlarged thought appears to resist the oppressed/non-oppressed binary because it does not just compare one perspective with another, but points towards the analysis needed to understand such narrated experiences. However, the “enlargement” still appears to emanate from dominant expectations that the narratives of the “oppressed” (those who can analyze their oppression) can be included in the mainstream discourse: such accounts are valuable because they serve to analyze systemic oppression and can assist dominant groups to understand how oppression functions. Yet these narratives from the “oppressed” also tell strong tales of assertion and self-reliance, invoking models of resistance and democracy emerging from struggle and from unpredicted victories.



They provide models of being and doing, offering varying paradigmatic frames still waiting to be experienced and shared transnationally. The ambiguous social contradictions that marginal stories bring out are still often heard simply as critiques of the dominant “standpoint,” and not necessarily as representing a valid alternative viewpoint. The value of “enlarged thought” is to direct us “to test our biases by actively considering the standpoint of others (189).” This “standard” of enlarged thought relates “standpoint thinking to the joint epistemic and ethical values of self-reflexivity, public accountability, and open-mindedness (190), in order “to sustain democratic communities in which all of us actively participate in narrating, criticizing, and re-narrating our identity and projects” (191).

The difficulty with this explanation is that the “enlarged thought” still appears to very subtly expand from and make reference to the need of the dominant “centre” to improve its understanding, valuable as that would be. From the perspectives of the women in this study, their struggle and their communities are constantly changing. The urgency of telling and analyzing their contextually and historically unique stories for themselves and their communities leaves them no time to expand the stories to appeal to the thought of others who do not understand. Rather, they directly desire and assume solidarity from others and hope that others are also doing the same. These efforts can then enable us to build on each other’s knowledge and praxis for mutual liberation in a world of interconnected globalized and transnational oppression. Thus, in this study, the stories told are viewed as beyond the standpoint theory model. They continually make reference to globalized contexts that go beyond local analyses and narrow ideologies. Since each local/national struggle recognizes its connection to global politics, the stories are not merely a sharing of diverse experiences, even of diverse contexts, but ultimately point to the urgency of global liberation. This study posits that transnational stories and connections, particularly transnational feminism, may be one way to glimpse, re-configure, and live changing liberation strategies amidst the chaos of poverty and war.

In her chapter on "Telling the Truth after Postmodernism" (1999, 96-130), Dorothy Smith elaborates her use of the map as metaphor when "reading a map in an actual situation of finding one's way is a distinctive kind of dialogue" (125). Smith acknowledges the limitations of a map-reader's own map and her use of it. "The map 'tells' her what features of the world to find and recognize as expressions of the relations it draws, *but she has to look outside the map to find them* [her italics]" (125). While referring and referencing are vital to finding our way, Smith acknowledges this aspect as "problematic." "Referring is always a local achievement of some actual occasion or sequence of occasions. As such it is always problematic (125)." While Stone-Mediatore moves across borders and privileges marginalized narratives, Smith ventures to look elsewhere while remaining grounded in her own topography. This study focuses on "looking outside the map" as a vital part of the process of finding our way to conveying some knowledge about ourselves – to ourselves and also to others. What this means is that while this group of women describe their work within global capitalism in concrete and specific situations, they also step out of this smaller map, this frame of immediate resistance and opposition to specific policies and forces. They include looking at the bigger picture, the more comprehensive and complex cartographies of layers of histories and contexts that produce their realities as women and residents not only of the Majority World but of the world. What Mohanty calls "communities of resistance" (47) belong to what I see as the smaller map that would need to be navigated and analyzed within and alongside a bigger map of "imagined communities" (46). Marginal experience stories of imagined futures and transformations are thus important terrains outside the usually accepted maps of discourse and action.

The public exposure of personal narratives and the storytelling process provide "critical and community-accountable modes of reasoning" and allow communities to make responsible judgments (Stone-Mediatore, 2003, 48). These stories can provide a deeper understanding of

these Filipino women's methods of social action and contributions to social change. The impact of their stories can go beyond the Philippine particularity to help us examine theorizing processes in relation to activism, to recognize struggles shared globally in comparable sites, mostly in the "margins," and to engage with the long-term projects of women from all parts of the world committed to transforming their societies.

### **Recruitment of Participants <sup>2</sup>**

There were four major considerations in the selection of participants and in the structuring of the interviews. These were: (a) the use of marginal experience narratives (Stone-Mediatore, 2003) as a source for understanding these women's activism, and how individual accounts, taken together, constitute a community narrative; (b) the differences and similarities across their transnational locations in different parts of the world; (c) the social locations of the women in relation to myself as the researcher: how far they would be able to be candid with me, and whether our relationship would justify considering their narration as open, reliable, and representative (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2002); and (d) whether they see themselves as activists who bring grassroots issues important to women to the national agenda.

Twelve women were selected, six from the Philippines and three each from Vancouver (BC, Canada) and the Netherlands. They were chosen for the variety of perspectives they brought as they come from different sectors where they have been and continue to be active.

GABRIELA, a national coalition of women's organizations in the Philippines (see Chapter 1), facilitated the selection of the women for the first set of six interviews in the Philippines, where the first interviews took place over a period of one month (July-August, 2004) in Manila.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1, Certificate of Approval, Behavioural Research Ethics Board

<sup>3</sup> Five other women in the Philippines were also interviewed, but I selected these six for this study because I felt they spanned some important groups of women in the Philippine context represented within

About four months later, the three women from the Netherlands were interviewed over a period of two weeks. These women are living in exile in the Netherlands for political reasons; two of them are working as activists on national (Philippine) activities abroad and one of them is living there as an immigrant and active in advocating for the rights of Filipino women in the Netherlands. All three work with other Filipino women immigrants and migrant workers within the Dutch context. The connections in the Netherlands were facilitated by the Philippine Women Centre of BC through some volunteers who had attended conferences in the past with Filipinos in the Netherlands. The third and last set of three interviews was with activist women at the PWC in Vancouver living in the Canadian context, the group to which I myself belong. They were interviewed six months later over a period of three months. The first woman was an immigrant who helped found the PWC, a women's organization concerned with Filipino women's issues in Canada as well as in the Philippines. The two other women provided the opportunity to gain the perspectives of young "second generation" Filipino women born abroad, one of whom has resided for an extended period in the Philippines. I hoped that between them these twelve women's stories would provide insight into the national struggle within the Philippines and abroad, from a range of perspectives.

The geographical parameters of the transnational community represented in this study are marked by the Philippines itself, Canada (my current home, where there are activist Filipino women's organizations), and the Netherlands, where a number of former refugees (some of whom are now Dutch citizens) and current exiles reside. The Netherlands is an essential location because it is where many political Filipino women can continue their work for social

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the GABRIELA coalition: urban poor, rural poor, youth, academics, government employees, and migrant workers.

transformation in the Philippines.<sup>4</sup> They (and those in Canada) experience directly the transnational nature of Filipino struggle and resistance in opposing current global policies; they propose socially transformative processes and structures that educate, organize, and mobilize Filipinos in the Philippines and abroad. Their activism ranges from attempting to change the situation of Filipinos locally in the Netherlands, to being, in a few cases, representatives on the national peace panel for talks currently underway in Europe or the Philippines, facilitated by the Norwegian government. The women interviewed are identified below, using pseudonyms:

**Figure 3** **Participants**

<b>Country, Location</b>	<b>Personal Data</b>	<b>Organization or Community Sector</b>
<b>The Philippines</b> Ayo, "UP" (urban poor)	Married, children, 50s. No university degree	<i>Samakana</i> , urban poor women's organization
Inday, "RP" (rural poor)	Married, 40s. University degree	<i>Amihan</i> , peasant women's organization
Fely, "A" (academia)	Single, 50s, one child. Advanced degree	Professor, University of the Philippines, teachers' union
Marita, "G" (government)	Single, 40s, children. University degree	Parliamentarian, Philippine Congress
Leslie, "Y" (youth)	Single, 20s. University degree	GABRIELA Youth (national coalition of women's organizations)
Tess, "MO" (migrant organization)	Married, 30s, child, born in Canada. University degree	<i>Migrante</i> , Filipino migrant workers' international organization
<b>The Netherlands</b> Veronica, "N1", Utrecht (international office)	Married, 40s, children. University degree	National Democratic Front Information Office
Patty, "N2", Utrecht (negotiating panel)	Married, 50s, one child, lawyer. University degree	Joint Monitoring Committee and Peace Talks Panel with Philippine government

<sup>4</sup> Many political exiles went to the Netherlands because a number of progressive priests posted in the Philippines during the martial law years were from the Netherlands and Ireland. When these priests returned to Europe after their Philippine assignment they started support and solidarity work with the Filipino people, and the Netherlands was one of those European countries where solidarity groups (under the leadership and influence of these returned priests) were strongest. When Filipinos went to Europe in the mid 1970s to do international work, it was the group in Utrecht in the Netherlands that offered the best prospects for short and long term work. Subsequent Filipino exiles were then streamed into the Netherlands.

<b>Country, Location</b>	<b>Personal Data</b>	<b>Organization or Community Sector</b>
Chona, "N3", Amsterdam (women's org.)	Married, 50s, children. Nurse. University degree	<i>Pinay sa Holland</i> , Filipino women's organization
<b>Canada</b> Darla, "V1", Vancouver (women's org.)	Married, 50s, children. Nurse. University degree	Philippine Women Centre of BC, National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada (NAPWC)
Marilyn, "V2", Vancouver (women's org.)	Married, 30s, children. Lawyer. University degree	Philippine Women Centre of BC, NAPWC
Michelle, "V3", Vancouver (women's org.)	Single, 30s, children. University degree	Philippine Women Centre of BC

### **Interview Process**

The interviews were conducted under various, unpredictable circumstances. While the appointed times were readily kept, it was as if the physical spaces in the Philippines reflected the women's daily struggles. With sweltering heat outside, I interviewed indoors where the electric fan or air conditioner would be turned on. We would be sitting near the air conditioner, for example, in order to stay cool. We would then carry on with the interview and ignore the sound of the motor or the sudden freezing room temperature. After one such interview, we then moved to the kitchen where a feast of *paella* had been prepared to celebrate a woman's birthday. In one situation, loud crashing sounds came from monsoon raindrops hitting the roof made of galvanized metal sheets, and part of my recording became inaudible. (Because of this, I had to rely on my written notes when re-telling Fely's background story.) In another place, either the electric outlet where my tape recorder was plugged in was broken or there was an interruption in the electricity that I had not noticed, until the battery (which was then activated) in my recorder started to die. I later had to transcribe that interview through halting, fading voices. Mosquitoes and flies were intermittent but reliably present. The interview with Tess coincided with the release of an OFW (Overseas Foreign Worker) from captivity in Iraq. The activities

related to making posters, food preparation, discussions, watching the latest TV news bulletin, and movement of people in and out of the interview room became not only the relevant backdrop for the interview, but the actual living struggle for migrant workers by Tess's organization. Throughout this period of interviews in the Philippines I participated in street demonstrations and an international women's conference where I witnessed the women "in action." This gave me the opportunity to weave my thoughts in and out of the academic lens I carried and the activism I was experiencing in the heat, the shouts, the sweat, the smells, and the rain upon my body.

In the Netherlands, the interviews took place in one of the women's Amsterdam apartment. There was a concurrent conference underway when I was there, so there was a constant stream of visitors who needed to eat or sleep in the apartment. One interview was interrupted by the woman's having to deal with organizational matters regarding housing, transportation, and conference arrangements. Finding relative quiet in the apartment, I interviewed one woman on the bed in the bedroom. The smells of food cooking and conversations of people arriving from all over the world for the conference floated in. By contrast, in Vancouver, I interviewed the women in a quiet office with little or no noise or interruption. We had tea and cookies after the interviews.

In order to allow space for the women themselves to speak, the research methodology chosen for this study was qualitative individual in-depth oral interviews, enabling the sharing of a number of Filipino activist women's life-histories and stories. This methodology allows the women interviewed to reveal their world view and what they perceive as necessary to change the Philippine situation. In-depth oral narratives, solicited through one-to-one interviews, can provide an opportunity for Majority World women to problematize, if not oppose, dominant discourse. Such narratives do not prove or disprove what is currently known about Majority

World women, whether seen erroneously as a homogeneous whole or in their different communities. These women do not compare their stories to western discourse, nor do they replace it with their own discourse. They not only reveal in detail their identities as individuals and as members of a particular group of women, but they delve into the complex relationships and contexts where they and other women find themselves completely immersed, carrying with them their colonial and current histories. Their narratives contribute to a better understanding of a group of politicized women located in a nation heavily laden with a colonial past and a transnational, global neo-colonial present. In telling their life histories, and thereby community stories, they convey their experiences from their own frame of reference, which in this study is shared by the listener. The telling and listening do not try to counter erroneous understandings of Filipino women and their activism, but do counter the subtle “re-colonization” process experienced by marginalized subjects. By narrating their stories predominantly from their own experience, the women practice a de-colonizing, empowering process of viewing the world in reference to themselves and not to those they have to “counter.” By preferring this method, I too am choosing a perspective that counters the racialized one that often dominates even western feminist discourses (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2002, 42-50).

The stories of my own changing consciousness and the development of my own activism will be woven into the stories of the women in this study: this method entails a form of participation that includes me, the researcher, as part of the “researched.” This allows the subject-object, researcher-researched, interviewer-interviewed, participant-observer, private-public dichotomies to be reduced as much as possible. My stories as an active Filipino woman involved in political struggle become part of the collection of stories of other Filipino women transported and transplanted into transnational spaces, while still remaining connected to Filipino women and the Filipino struggle in the Philippines. In this way, my own story becomes part of the changing, dynamic, community narrative that is Philippine history today. In another way, the interview



material and the interpretation from the women and from me become a kind of “focus” group mediated through distance and time by different modalities of communication. I experienced my role as “facilitating” a “conversation” among women with common struggles in a transnational space. While narratives were told to me face-to-face by the individuals in individualized settings, the women were aware of a consciously shared collective space through me. My role in “facilitating” the exchange of individual narratives by members of distant but connected communities made it possible for their anecdotes, commentaries, and reflections to come together to form a community narrative. The Philippine Women Centre of BC utilizes Participatory Action Research (PAR), often through focus groups, in its community-based research. This would have been an ideal way to communicate with the women I interviewed. However, transnational communication was mediated by my doing the traveling and I had to recognize the difficulty of organizing focus groups in these circumstances.<sup>5</sup>

### **Social Locations**

Before undertaking this study, I thought that my social location in relation to the women being interviewed would raise methodological, if not ethical, issues about how our relative social locations and their revelation would play out. Before accepting to participate in the study, the participants checked out my credibility as a reliable advocate of Filipino women, and for some, of social activism. This was not so much a *condition* they required (I believe they recognized that this study was/is not a power-over activity from an individual outside their community), but rather a *principle* consistent with the collectivity and reciprocity of the women’s own methods of engagement and study (see Part II). Having done this, they were then not so much interested in

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<sup>5</sup> Although many of the women I interviewed were gathered at an international conference in Manila, it was unmanageable to even entertain the idea of bringing a focus group together at such a conference. My facilitator/researcher role was an inadequate second best to prolonged or ongoing storytelling among women gathered collectively, and it was the only means available at that time. However, I believed that each of the women, closely related to their community, brought collective stories to the interview that they gathered and had reflected upon over a long period of time.

my social location as in the relevance of my participation in these interviews to their present struggle, in particular contexts.

The facilitation of two collective organizations, in my approaching of the women, was a cornerstone that supported the authenticity and integrity of these interviews. This ensured a space of trust and confidentiality so that the stories by and about the women were shared openly and freely with me. Providing me with this privileged space was also a concrete commitment for the women, because of the risks they run daily in their advocacy and militancy work. Some women had been imprisoned by the Marcos regime twenty-five to thirty years ago, others have been arrested more recently in violent dispersals of peaceful protests, and a few still live in exile at present for political reasons.

The trust and solidarity dimensions of the interviews did not make me the “other” or “outsider,” nor was I epistemically privileged. My social privilege as coming now from a northern, G8 country could have created another layer of discursive power and hierarchy. However, it was more likely that I would be seen as a Filipino activist first (or simultaneously), otherwise the chances of their agreeing to be interviewed by me would have been slight. I was just as much a “subject” of their political storytelling (activism for national social change and for women) as they were “subjects” of my academic project, regardless and in spite of any differences in professional status or class. Rather than simply recognizing the valuable insider/outsider frame provided by Hill-Collins (1986), I found myself moving out of that binary hierarchy regarding individuals and into the stories of communities in social transformation in which we all participate.

Marjorie Mbilinyi (1989) elaborates on narrator and interpreter relations in conveying personal narratives from her experience in a Tanzanian context. She asserts that democratic relations

need to exist between the two, especially when oppositional voices (like those interviewed in this study) challenge dominant ideologies of the state and ideological and theoretical objectives are inherent in their narratives. Issues of whose voice and whose authorship is authoritative, and the power differences between researcher and participant, need to be continuously negotiated, knowing that each has her own motives and purposes. Details surrounding the interview process, the format, or ownership of the product (“intellectual property rights”) can be problematic, and the need for vigilance over this relationship is clear. In this case, the relationship was collaborative since I was a known participant in political action, while the activist participants themselves also theorized, shared their analyses, interpreted the interview or commented on the research process itself. What was critical was the integrity of the exchange, as an integral part of the interviews for a collaborative project. Aside from my academic research agenda, I experienced the interviews as active, transparent political engagement with the women.

Once in this space, I experienced a mutual sense of respect in the equal valuing of the work of reciprocal benefit that we were engaged in, the interview itself. The research questions were open-ended enough to enable relatively informal storytelling, making possible the revelation of anecdotes of their struggle for national change and women’s liberation, as well as reflection on the stories. In this study, it was imperative that the dialectical process between “the one-who-studies” and “those-she-studies” should produce dual reflections and lead to a mutual and reciprocal process of change. I have been changed by the women’s stories, just as they may have been changed by my participation, as activist and researcher, in their praxis-focused, activist lives. The impact of this study and the changes it might foster in the communities themselves are future-oriented (see Chapter 7).

As evidence of this collaborative, democratic relationship, the final question was what they would suggest regarding changes to this study. Most replied that they could not think of anything to add or change. The responses were not critiques of the interview process or of the content of the study. Many said the interview was comprehensive and that they were able to say what they wished while realizing there was so much more to say. What was a common "concern" was the *accessibility* of the outcome of the study, which they all wanted to be as broad as possible. The distribution of its contents, who has access to the data, and the form in which the study will be presented were emphasized. More importantly, their comments reflected the desire that if the contents of the study were accessible, other Filipinos and non-Filipinos may take part in the national Filipino struggle. The assumption was not that the study *might* contribute to the long-term women's liberation/national struggle, but how to ensure that it *does*. Leslie, a member of a women students' organization, said:

I have no specific comments, but I'm just thinking that...because of course the outlook would be...are you planning to have like a more popular [form]?

When I asked her if there were any ideas she felt were left out, she replied with laughter, "Can that be possible?" Marita, a participant from the women's political party, asked:

Will you present this to the Filipino community? Maybe through your study you can help us find people or groups who would be willing to, let's say, because they believe, they were awakened, they got interested in the work that they do, maybe they could help us in a lot of ways by linking....another practical thing is that maybe through your work...the study...could pave the way for a support group for women who may be embroiled in different fields, different areas of work, but leading to this liberation.

Fely, a participant from the university in the Philippines, said the important thing is the audience. She compared the potential impact on readers from academe with that on grassroots communities, on Filipinos and others:

If that dissertation will result into one or two professors also embracing solidarity work to the Philippines, I'd think, you'd done a successful job...the research will result in materials that will be made accessible to

other communities...and will move them into action to support the movement here [the Philippines] and also make them think of how to strengthen their own movement...it can be material that can be used...to reach out to more people or to share with other groups abroad, then the impact will be multiplied.

A suggestion from another women's party member looks to the future, long-term struggle:

We also have to get the perspective of the underground struggle...You should not only interview the leaders. You should interview the ordinary people, ordinary members of our organization...get the young ones...the young women...what they think.

When asked to comment on the study at the end of the interview, one woman, Ayo, stated (in Tagalog):

I hope that this becomes an inspiration to whoever reads it because women's struggle is ongoing here in the Philippines and in my opinion, we are growing stronger as women and continuing in our solidarity.

The women interviewed themselves indicated their awareness of limitation in the range of participants. I agreed with them that "ordinary" women somewhat removed from leadership could also have been interviewed. I did not particularly seek "leaders," but I did speak to women with in-depth knowledge and experience in women's and national movements. A few of the women urged me to "be sure" to talk to the youth, the ordinary worker, or a member of a poor community. In my time in the Philippines during these interviews, I spoke with many women and attended gatherings in marginal communities where they discussed urgent issues such as housing, wages, or health. Some of the information I gleaned from them is incorporated into Part II of this study. Several, like the young woman cited above, urged me to produce a parallel "popular" form of this study, so that more women could have access to the information. These reactions encourage me to explore future ways of giving back to the participants, acknowledging our collaboration, in order to contribute to their work with women in grassroots communities.

## **Lines of Inquiry**

The questions that formed the basis for the interviews (see Appendix 2) reflect three major areas of inquiry, based on the research questions and hypotheses discussed earlier (in Chapter

I). I followed three main lines of inquiry, focused on:

- a) Elucidating the reasons for the development and constancy of these women's activism, in spite of obstacles, and their perception of the relationship between national change and women's issues;
- b) Seeking examples of feminist praxis embedded in communities that are conscious of working for local transformations, as they also strive for national and global change;
- c) Assessing the transnational dimensions of their work, as perceived by them.

### ***(a) Development of Activism***

The women interviewed are all socially active in their own communities, and largely share a particular political ideology related to the history of nationalism and feminism in the Philippines (as indicated, for those in the Philippines, by their recruitment for this project through GABRIELA). Hearing about their initial engagement in political activism was an important starting point, especially in view of the age differences represented. I wanted to find out the following information:

- Are there common issues that these Filipino women all consider essential to their motivation and to their activism?
- To what extent does their activism stem from their personal experiences and events that have directly or indirectly affected their lives and those of others around them?
- In their particular context, how do national issues intersect with gender issues, and personal considerations interact with political or collective ones?

**(b) Praxis**

- What are their specific intentions, strategies, actions, and outcomes within their respective contexts?
- How do they assess their success and perceive the obstacles they face?
- How is women's praxis demonstrated in the context of local, national, and global struggle(s)?
- How is their praxis similar in their respective contexts, or different?

**(c) Transnational Issues**

- What is the relationship between the issues and actions of women in the context of the Philippines and as Filipino women living abroad? What effect do their national and/or transnational locations have on these issues and actions?
- What connections exist and are maintained between those in the Philippines and those abroad, and how necessary are such connections to their activism?

**Interview Questions.** The information gathered emerged from the stories told and comments offered in response to direct questions, which they did not see ahead of time (see Appendix 2). While I already knew the women from Vancouver from having worked with them, I had little information about their specific personal backgrounds. I knew even less about the other women in the Philippines and in the Netherlands, although some of them are relatively public figures on the political stage. As an introduction, I began by asking a first set of general, open-ended questions about their current work, how they first became involved in the activism that has led to the work they are now doing, and what some of the significant stories were that they would like to share. Chapter 4, "Common Beginnings," is based on the data from their stories, which brought out the historical context of the time of their involvement. This originated, for the older women, in student and worker activism in the 1980s Marcos era; the younger women spoke of

more recent struggles that led to their on-going involvement, but they were also very aware of the historical context of leftist activism in the Philippines.

The second set of questions focused on their particular community setting or the “sector” of women for whom they are advocates. In the Philippines these included urban poor neighborhoods and workers or unemployed women, rural areas and peasant or agricultural workers, university students and academia, while one woman is a member of Congress representing women’s issues. In the Netherlands, two women are also publicly engaged in political organizations negotiating with the Philippine government, but they are also advocates, like the third woman there, for undocumented migrant workers. Those in Canada are all involved in a centre well known for its political activities, and they also represent migrant domestic workers. There was considerable overlap in their answers to questions about the issues they are addressing and the kinds of change they are working towards, as Filipinos living abroad. In discussing their successes and the barriers they encounter, as experienced community activists they all appeared confident in expressing what they, as individuals or as representatives of an organization, thought of the effect their work has had on their respective communities.

In the third set of questions the women were asked to think about their work specifically as women concerned with women’s issues, while the fourth set was intended to encourage them to describe in detail how their community organizing illustrates “democratic governance.” In analyzing their responses, it became apparent that their reactions to this topic were a continuation of their previous reflections on women-centred issues, as governance procedures and goals were for them inseparable from what they see as *feminist praxis*. The information was therefore organized under that heading, combining attention to women’s issues with their particular values and actions as women in each specific context. This reflection contributed to a



better understanding of the relationship, for them, between the liberation of women and that of the nation, and of short-term pragmatic goals in relation to a long-term vision for social transformation. Their responses to these questions are conveyed in Chapter 5, which looks at the tensions they and the women they represent experience in combining multiple roles as homemakers, workers, and activists, and in Chapter 6, on community based feminist praxis.

The fifth and last set of questions focused on their perspective on Filipino women's transnational realities, whether as activists at home or as part of a mass exodus to other countries. Their answers explored both practical realities and theoretical discussions of globalization policies, reflecting their different locations and experiences. They raised the difficulties of cross-cultural and transnational communication in terms of generational shifts as well as geographical distance. I had to revise some of my overly optimistic assumptions about the ease of transnational collaboration, but its central importance to Filipino women was confirmed. Their responses to these questions will be summarized in Chapter 7.

The interviews ended with, "What, if any, short-term and/or long-term vision do you carry that makes you feel your efforts are worthwhile?" Their answers allowed me to assess how they see the potential for social transformation in the Philippines in relation to immediate and long-term goals there and elsewhere. We closed with a request for them to add any other comments on topics not covered by the interview questions, what advice they had for this study, and what might have been left out. As mentioned previously, a few of them commented on how to make this information accessible to grassroots Filipino women, emphasizing the need for a popular way to present these academic findings to a non-academic audience.

While there were moments when the interviews became conversational, mostly the participants responded to the questions systematically and in order. They had questions for the researcher

only at the very end when they were invited to comment on the project. They posed very few follow-up questions, as they appeared to understand the purpose of the study well and hoped that their shared stories would be a vital contribution to conveying the feminist, activist perspectives of some Filipino women living today's transnational realities and seeking to increase their own and others' understanding of their situations and motivation.

**Data Analysis.** The twelve one-and-a-half hour-long interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed through a coding system (see Appendix 3). As a group facilitator in many aspects of my work life, I readily "heard" all the comments, both on the tapes and in the written transcriptions. I recalled well the tone and tenor of the one-on-one personal interviews. I coded each comment for its content. Every time there was what I deemed to be new content, I entered another code. When I finished coding the twelve interviews, I created a form with all the codes. Details and patterns that emerged or overlapped were identified and reassigned where necessary.<sup>6</sup> Some of the codes reflected details of women's experiences (food, housing, wages, domestic work) while others were themes and concepts (gender, feudal attitudes, politics). While the coding form included all codes from all the interviews, the individual coding often showed many blank entries.<sup>7</sup> Some codes were discarded when the comments fell under more specific ones.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, the coding system came out of the women's comments rather than from my own specific prior knowledge and assumptions (however valid). The data were then organized into Tables that allowed me to cluster ideas from which to extract themes

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<sup>6</sup> For example, although the topic was on general and specific women's issues (W-iss) some of these issues were specific to women's migration (W-mig), or while economics (Econ) was being discussed, this was closely tied to family needs (Fam).

<sup>7</sup> For example, food and housing codes were blank for the woman working with youth in the Philippines, while these were frequent for the woman working with the urban poor.

<sup>8</sup> For example, what I initially coded as "disenfranchisement" as a concept or initial interpretation became re-coded as particular and common experiences of women.

based on what the women were contributing, and to consolidate the theorizing that emerged as knowledge production by the women and also by myself.

It was not possible to conduct oral follow-up interviews with the women in the Philippines and the Netherlands because of the distance and expense of phone calls. Written follow-up was considered but not undertaken because writing is quite a different style of discourse. (I had interviewed one woman from the United States by e-mail with the same set of questions, but this process felt quite different from the oral exchanges I had had with the other women and I chose not to pursue written exchanges, and did not include the interview in the study.) The data used is therefore only from the audiotapes and transcripts. The detailed analysis of the interviews has not yet been shared with the participants. The women in Canada have heard presentations of some of the results at various regional and national conferences on Philippine topics. It is my intention to share their transcript and the final study with all the participants and, after receiving their feedback, to explore with some of them the possibility of producing an accessible form of the women's stories to share with their communities.

Part II of this study will convey the women's responses to these lines of inquiry. The theoretical framework and methodological concerns described in Part I are to be kept in mind as background to my reception of their accounts. It is my hope that the discussion in Part II can do justice to the women's contribution to elucidating, if not answering, some of the questions posed in this study.

## **PART II**

### **ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA**

The central question of this topic is not whether women should be involved in social transformation movements; they have been, they are and they will be, directly or indirectly. For the simple reason that they live within societies. Rather we should direct our inquiry into first, whether the nature of women's participation in social transformation movements is the same as that of men; and second, whether a specific dialectic crucial to the eradication of women's oppression can evolve out of women's participation in social transformation movements. These two questions have dogged women's involvement in all kinds of progressive organizations and movements, from trade unions to the epochal struggle for the establishment of socialism.

Ninotchka Rosca (GABRIELA Network, Oct. 2001)

## CHAPTER 4

### COMMON BEGINNINGS, COMMON STRUGGLES

#### Introducing the Participants

Since all the women in this study see their activism as directly related to the situation in the Philippines, wherever they actually live and work now, I will begin by introducing the six women interviewed in the Philippines. They are all currently based in Manila, since most of them are involved in national or international organizations. They are all also still to some degree directly connected to grassroots communities, helping to organize women within women's organizations and as part of larger coalitions. Some have become well known by speaking out at rallies, opposing government policies, and developing in-depth analyses of the impact of economic globalization on Filipinos, with particular attention to women. These six participants belong to or represent a range of sectors: the urban poor<sup>1</sup>, rural peasants, academics, government officials, youth (students), and a transnational migrant organization. Their assigned pseudonyms will be accompanied by the initials that represent these communities or sectors, when this seems to be a useful reminder: *Ayo*, short for *Rosario* ("UP," Urban Poor), *Inday*, short for *Linda* ("RP," Rural Poor), *Fely*, short for *Felicia* ("A," Academia), *Marita* ("G," Government), *Leslie* ("Y," Youth), and *Tess*, short for *Teresa* ("MO," Migrants Organization).<sup>2</sup> This sample represents several different categories of women with particular concerns, but they are also united by common issues, interests, and strategies for action, based on a shared ideology. While they all raised both economic and gender issues, their focus varied. For urban poor women, for example, housing

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *urban poor* and *rural poor* were used by the women themselves to label these sectors.

<sup>2</sup> I also interviewed other women who are active in the political process in rural and urban areas, as workers concerned with contractualization and union affairs. Although their ideas contributed to my understanding of Philippine women's issues, they are not directly cited in this study because I felt the sectors where they lived and worked were represented, though certainly not completely, by the women selected for in-depth interviews.

is an immediate priority, whereas women students are more concerned about raising awareness of gender oppression on campus. Some of these women work mainly locally (with the urban and rural poor in specific locations), but they have national connections, while the youth organization discussed is national and the migrant organization is transnational.

Of the six women living abroad who were interviewed, three were in the Netherlands (*Veronica*, N1, *Patty*, N2, *Chona*, short for *Asuncion*, N3), and three in Canada (*Darla*, V1, *Michelle*, V2, *Marilyn*, V3). Several of them left or were exiled during the turmoil of the 1970s and '80s. *Chona* (N3) and *Darla* (V1) left the Philippines voluntarily and entered the host countries as immigrants, while *Veronica* (N1) and *Patty* (N2) went to the Netherlands as exiles and now reside there permanently. *Marilyn* (V2) and *Michelle* (V3) are second-generation Filipino-Canadian women who studied and volunteered (respectively) in the Philippines for extended periods and now live in Canada.

At the time of the interviews, eight of the twelve women were in their forties and fifties, and four (two in the Philippines and two in Canada) were in their late twenties or thirties. Eleven of the twelve became involved in political activities in their youth, as single women, at periods ranging from high school until shortly after graduation from college or university. Only one of the women, *Ayo* (the woman in the urban poor women's organization), became active later in adulthood, after having her family. The older women were all involved in anti-Marcos activities, but two of the women in the Philippines were too young to have participated directly. These are *Leslie* (the youngest), whose work centers on the university and involves opposing the policies of the current Philippine president, and *Tess*, who works in a migrant organization in the Philippines. *Tess* grew up in Canada, where her parents migrated for socio-economic rather than obviously political reasons. Both of them were nevertheless aware that the issues they struggle with are symptoms of conditions similar to those that provoked the protests of the

1970s in which the older women participated. The two other young women interviewed in Vancouver (Marilyn V2 and Michelle V3) were both born in Canada to Filipino parents who were professionals and migrated because of the Marcos dictatorship. The parents continued their anti-Marcos activism in Canada, with the result that their daughters grew up knowing about this part of Philippine history and wanted to experience life in the Philippines.

In terms of social class and education, all the women except for Ayo (in the Philippines) have university degrees and comfortable “middle or upper-middle class” lives, with a few of them describing “upper-class” privileges. Their high level of education is both a cause and a symptom of their relatively high social and economic status. In some cases this contrasts with the lives of the women they are working with and trying to represent. Apart from Indy, who has chosen to work among rural peasants and workers, they all live in urban areas: Manila in the Philippines and large urban centers in the Netherlands and Canada. Ayo, who had little formal education, became knowledgeable as a leader and spokesperson for poor urban women. The rest, though university-educated, have challenged their own class privileges and taken steps to become aware of issues affecting other sectors of society. Their stories provide examples of their attempts to overcome class barriers, including, in some cases, their own forced down-classing through migration.

One recurring theme that emerged as all the women narrated their early political involvement was their growing awareness of the deep problems of Philippine society, and recognition of collective organizing as essential in reacting to government oppression and mismanagement. None of the older women regret or have abandoned their initial youthful radicalization. Both older and younger women have thought about the parallels between the emergence of leftist political resistance in the Marcos and the post-Marcos eras (or its absence in some cases), and about the relationship between a national agenda and women's liberation. They are all familiar

with a range of feminist ideas from the west. For some, gender discrimination was noticed first, for others economic oppression, but they all see the two areas as ultimately merging. Many struggled with identifying and defining feminism according to their own experiences as Filipino women engaged in political struggle. For all of them, greater understanding of women's and national issues was followed by, or simultaneous with, direct actions such as public protest activities or working in community-based projects. Some have remained committed to community level work, while others have become politicians and national leaders. Gender discrimination, class oppression, and the social and economic effects of dictatorship and globalization appear to be inextricably entwined in their lives, whether they live in the Philippines, the Netherlands, or Canada.

### **Common Beginnings**

The history of the women's movement in the Philippines (as outlined in Chapter 1) provides the context for the early and ongoing activism of most of the older women interviewed in this study. Their stories of their present participation in the national liberation movement stem from their politicization and activism over the past three decades. Together, the reflections and analyses of the older women, regardless of their age range, provide a picture of dramatic social transformation in the Philippines, while the younger women see themselves as carrying on the legacy of the work of leftist Filipino women since the 1970s.

My own story intertwines with many of the women's accounts, as they spoke of the era before and after Martial Law was declared by the elected second-term president, Ferdinand Marcos, in 1972. Regarded by many as a US-backed dictator, he was later ousted in an unprecedented mass movement in 1986. Some of the women in this study were in those protests in the '70s and became instrumental in the formation of women's organizations still active today. These



experiences of the '70s and '80s play a prominent role in much of what is still understood as the "women's movement" in the Philippines today.

I was in high school when social and political unrest was rapidly growing among the students. By the time I was in the first year of college, in a privileged, "bourgeois" private girls' school, some of my classmates from middle and upper social classes were signing up to join the underground student movement. I was on the brink of being politically involved myself when I went to the United States to continue my second year of university. I arrived in Chicago in 1968, the week of demonstrations at the Democratic National Convention and their ensuing violent dispersal by the Chicago police. Unrest in the Philippines was paralleled by US campus protests in the '70s against the Vietnam War. Decades later, my father revealed that he sent me to study with my sister in the US because he felt that had I not left, I would have joined the student movement. Hypothetical as this was, I can agree today that the heightened awareness of the injustices in Philippine society that I had already witnessed, even growing up in a privileged class in Manila, was going to lead to my personal transformation and active political participation. From his perspective, his fears were justified, but removal to another continent did not cut me off from concerns with what was happening at home.

All of the older women except Ayo (UP) talked about their growing awareness of the political realities of the Philippine situation while still in their youth. From the time they confronted and contributed to ousting a dictator to end a dictatorial regime, to their present political involvement and role in the national liberation movement as women, they have been shaping their understanding of their relationship to the current State, and seeking alternatives. The reasons for their early involvement were similar politically, because of the anti-Marcos, anti-dictatorship mass movements of the '70s. Three of the women were imprisoned during the Marcos era. Two of them (Inday, RP, and Fely, A) have remained in the Philippines, while one (Patty N2) is in

exile in the Netherlands. Although they were not arrested as student activists during the Marcos years, Marita (G) and four other Congress representatives were recently under virtual house arrest (in 2007, see Marita's story, below).

The older women all talked about their first involvement in social activism, looking back at those times with their consciousness of today, mediated by years of active resistance, struggle, risks, and results. Incomplete as any narrator's recollections must be, they were able to compare their understanding and awareness of their experiences then with their present perspective, in relation to their current actions and analyses. Their narratives of the beginnings of their involvement were not simply chronological lists of events, but situated those events as part of their development as individuals engaged in an on-going collective process of making history through social transformation.

For most of them, their youth was marked by the experience of living under a dictatorial government that exerted a type of oppression not directly known by Filipinos before. It can be surmised that their direct opposition to the Marcos dictatorship shaped their future relationship to the state, as they experienced state violence while still discovering and developing their own potential as activists determined to change society. These women's relationship to the nation/nation-state changed dramatically, as they took active roles in toppling a dictator, escaping oppression, and showing leadership in social change processes. The problems with the "Philippine nation" came into focus, as many women witnessed and analyzed the direct impact of the national government and globalization on their daily lives. The fact that the dictator was toppled left them with a confidence that results can be achieved, against all odds. Their on-going praxis was greatly influenced by these early confrontations, which led to their present-day activism against oppressive policies and state repression from the current government.

Another common reason for their early involvement was the assumption that the inequalities in Philippine society (that are now forcing so many Filipinos to work abroad) can only be eradicated through radical structural changes. While for most their struggles began in the Marcos era, their actions today recognize the long-term process of change they are still carrying out. None of the women interviewed expounded on the short-term motivations or frustrations of their work, in the past or the present. Rather, they see their “beginnings” and their present commitment as part of a historical continuity going back to earlier struggles against colonialism, within a revolutionary tradition. For most of those who were directly involved in “changing society” in the ‘70s, their struggles now, whether for the nation or for women, are part of a continuing fight to move forward in the changing context of more recent history.

The work today of ordinary women is for the liberation of Filipinos, given that women are half of the Philippine population. (Ayo, UP)

So you have to go to the roots again, and again the roots can be understood only in understanding also the historical development of Philippine society. (Fely, A)

For the younger women, this sense of history as movement and resistance to injustice simply continues, and is extended to Filipinos living abroad. Two younger women in this study, Leslie and Tess, situate themselves in relation to the parallel development of the women’s movement and the national social democracy movement, as they describe their political awakening and current participation in the twenty-first century. As Tess explained,

....Filipino women in the Philippines and overseas are all hit by the basic problems of Philippine society...they share the same roots of exploitation and oppression...we are part of this one movement – this national democratic movement whose aim is the national liberation of the Filipino people.

The strong link between the older women and the younger ones was described by Fely:

...the movement continues to be strong. It remains a vital and dynamic movement. I’m sure you will have the opportunity to talk to young women, a different generation who have embraced the same goals that I embraced when

I was their age. And more so secondary school students. You should talk to this second-year high school [student]...she's a young girl, she heads the League of Filipino Students in High School right now...so it's a continuity again of generations, so that's an important success because that means we're doing something right. A movement without the youth would be a dying movement.

Although I was not able to follow her advice to talk to high school students in the Philippines, I was able to interview younger women who are carrying on the work of the previous generation, crossing geographical barriers as well as generational ones. Having been born and raised in Canada, Michelle and Marilyn did not themselves initially have the same direct proximity to the women's movement in the Philippines. The beginnings of their political engagement came from hearing about their parents' growing political awareness and involvement in Philippine issues, even while living abroad. Their exposure to Philippine issues in Canada, as well as time spent working and studying in the Philippines, allowed them to see their activities abroad as linked to the issues in the Philippines, and the importance of their role in continuing Filipino women's political work abroad. The women interviewed for this study represent a range of ages and geographical locations, but are mostly well educated. This was conveyed not only by their knowledge of Philippine history, but also by their use of language in the interviews.

### **Class Differences Related to Education and Language**

As mentioned earlier, of the women presently living in the Philippines, all but one (Inday, who works in rural areas) are geographically located in Metro Manila, and the women in the Netherlands and Canada also live in urban areas. Apart from Ayo, they all share a "middle or upper-middle class" upbringing, with a few of them coming from the landowner class, in Manila or elsewhere. One can assume that they were educated in Roman Catholic schools where English was spoken, and all but Ayo had a university education, which automatically gives them high social status. Most went to university in the greater Manila region, while three of them studied in their home region, the Visayan provinces (south of Luzon where Manila is situated).

Being from Manila generally carries a higher status than being from the “provinces,” which are often associated with the less sophisticated lives (or “ways of life”) of poor peasant farmers or farm workers. Many rich families in Manila obtain their wealth from landownership and peasant tenancy in agricultural areas, while others have profitable businesses or well paid professional situations. These women, apart for Ayo (who works with the urban poor), belong to the twenty percent of the population that constitute the privileged classes.

While land ownership, urban addresses, and a wealthy lifestyle reflect upper-class status, education may blur class lines to a limited extent. In the Philippines a university degree indicates a higher status, not only because of the achievement it represents, but also because it shows that a family can afford higher education, regardless of the source of income or choice of program. More expensive, private (usually Catholic) colleges are often located, like the well known state university, in prime areas of the city, enclosed by high fences and sometimes with armed guards. A degree from them opens doors to higher social strata. Degrees from “other” colleges or universities are ranked according to the social class of the students who attend them, which in turn depends on whether tuition fees are high or low. For example, a degree from a Jesuit university would be associated with being “upper-middle” or “high” class, while a degree from a university in a crowded, working-class area of the city would be considered “lower” class (for poorer students because of its location, student body, and lower tuition fees). Being lower class implies that aside from having little or no formal education, families have no house or land ownership, while being middle class is associated with having a college degree, even if it is from a working-class university, and the family may own a modest parcel of land in the provinces.

The dispersal of Filipinos abroad contributes to the blurring of class distinctions. When women considered at home to belong to the middle class are assigned a certain social status as

nannies in Canada, they cross class lines downwards. Those from a lower class background at home may experience the reverse, as the children they leave behind and support from abroad may be able to attend private Catholic girls' and boys' colleges with high tuition fees and therefore rise in social status. My father exemplifies, through his education, the crossing of well delineated class lines in the Philippines, since in spite of humble origins he married my mother, who belonged to the landowner class in a province in Tagalog-speaking Luzon, north of Manila. Initially he was not accepted by her family, as the son of parents who were schoolteachers and raised ten children in a modest house on a small piece of land which they did own. I remember noticing as a child that my mother's family lived in a large house beside other large properties on a main street leading to the nearby town church and municipal buildings, while my father's family lived in a small house a few streets away. However, when he excelled in his studies at the state university in Manila, my mother's family could not but recognize his upward social mobility, especially when he succeeded in his profession as an engineer, at the same time that some of my mother's siblings mismanaged their inherited wealth.

I learned from the intersecting of class lines within my own family of the heartache and humiliation suffered along the way, as in many cases in the Philippines when a poor family has "richer" relatives (however small this differential is). At the same time, I witnessed how education can potentially bring equality to citizens in economic and social terms. I have since learned, however, that overcoming personal challenges is quite a different matter from dismantling the systemic barriers that keep eighty percent of Filipinos from emerging from generations of poverty and indentured slavery. The women interviewed describe this difference in both personal and systemic terms. They all chose, in their youth (or early adulthood in Ayo's case) to attempt to cross, and even abandon, class lines. Later, some suspended their career plans, giving up the social standing or financial advantage that they could have attained. Others continued to work as high-salaried professionals while advocating for marginalized people.

Most were cognizant (then and even more so today), that they had to work themselves, and immerse themselves in the lives of the poor, if they were to interrogate their class origins, acquire credibility in marginalized communities, and actualize their hope for a more egalitarian society. Today they emphasize the on-going importance of their community-based political activities, as well as practicing their professions as nurse (Chona, Darla), university professor (Fely), legislator (Marita), lawyer (Marilyn), student (Leslie), or as community organizer or volunteer (Ayo, Inday, Tess, Michelle), or representative involved in international negotiations (Veronica, Patty).

Speaking English is an obvious marker of class status in the Philippines, as well as a legacy of colonialism. Given the presence of more than eighty major dialects or languages still spoken in the Philippines today, there is also the issue of the dominance of Tagalog, the language of Luzon. The largest of over 7,000 islands and the most central part of the country, in the past Luzon had vast rice fields and thereby held the nation's wealth and political power. (This situation is changing, as the Philippines, once a major rice exporter, now imports rice from other Southeast Asian countries). Filipinos are obliged to speak either in English, as is often the case, or Tagalog, when they are unable to understand each other's regional dialects or languages. In the interview with Chona (N3), she used English because I do not understand her first language, Visayan (which is spoken in the Visayas, a region south of Luzon comprised of many islands), and she was not comfortable in Tagalog.

In the Philippines, two participants (Ayo and Inday, the ones working with the urban poor and rural-peasants) interacted in Tagalog throughout the interview (all translations are mine). The three women from university and government settings (Fely, Marita, and Leslie) spoke in English, as did the woman in a migrant workers' organization (Tess), who moved to Canada as a young child and grew up here. This woman learned to speak Tagalog fluently when she went

to the Philippines to work and later to live there. The language chosen was significant, because it reflects the level of education reached and resulting class status, but may also be the result of a political choice. Education in English is a costly endeavour for Filipino families, and the education budget, always low, continues to decrease. The result is that formal education is often reserved for more affluent families or those who have made extraordinary sacrifices, such as overseas migrant workers who send remittances for their children's education. For those able to attend school for a limited time, Tagalog (or the dominant regional dialect) is often the language of instruction in the earlier grades in rural and poor urban communities,<sup>3</sup> where little English is spoken. Students in private schools and in higher education learn to speak English fluently, as it is the language of instruction in these settings, and in some cases prepares them to live or study in North America. Jacqueline Siapno (1995), in analyzing a novel, *Dekada '70*, written by an urban poor woman, Lualhati Bautista, elaborates on the language hierarchy dominated by English and Tagalog in relation to other regional dialects and languages. She succinctly notes the perspective of the upper class who "curse in Spanish, speak to each other in English, and give orders to their servants in Tagalog" (222). Several of those interviewed chose to speak in Tagalog, although they can speak English, illustrating the class consciousness that emerged from their individual experiences of becoming involved in political action. This discussion of language is relevant both to how the interviews were conducted, and what some of the women conveyed about changes in their own language use, as they have attempted to cross class barriers.

Their stories impart, both explicitly and implicitly, a good deal of information about the role of their class background in their early and later activism. In this Chapter, I will extract details from

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<sup>3</sup> The roots of colonial education under the US and the use of English are explored in depth by the historian Renato Constantino in *Miseducation of the Filipino* (Quezon City: Malaya Books, 1966), pp. 177-192.



their “beginning” stories, starting with those in the Philippines. I will begin with the one who originally had the least class status. Her experience was the reverse of that of most of the others, in that her own experience of poverty and oppression led to political awareness, self-education, and a leadership role, whereas the others had to learn to acknowledge their privileged status in order to work with those in greater need.

## **Women Living in the Philippines**

### ***The Story of a Woman in an Urban Poor Women’s Organization: Ayo (UP)***

Ayo, who spoke in Tagalog, began as a housewife, a mother, and an urban poor woman with little formal education. She had few opportunities to develop herself personally because of her domestic duties and lack of support from her husband. She is now a member of a large urban poor women’s organization, SAMAKANA. She mentioned that her political awareness was first raised when she became involved with GABRIELA, the national umbrella women’s organization described earlier, after an organizer came to her community and talked to her about the problems they were facing.

I began in 1990...with the women, under GABRIELA. I began here, in the beginning of my involvement in the women’s organization...of course the organizer used to come and see me at home and ask me what the problems of the community [were] and I shared these with her.

Her situation reflected the challenges faced by housewives with little time or freedom, and the need for organizers from outside to go out into the community to consult women, rather than expecting them to be able to attend meetings.

Ayo later got a factory job and was able to attend workshops that raised her awareness about the reasons for problems in the community. She still considers herself an urban poor woman like those she represents, and spoke passionately about the issues facing workers in factories. The themes she raised were straightforward: unemployment or subsistence wages, and

substandard housing. Other issues related to food, hunger, children's education, health and social services, stemmed from these principal elements of the grave lack of jobs and consequent loss of incomes, making better living conditions inaccessible. She described the intense struggle for affordable housing that caused her to become more politically engaged:

I became more aware at that time...because we were working on the housing project...although I hadn't gone into the housing project yet because what we were doing was, fighting for it. The housing [project] was only in Phase 1 and Phase 2...and wasn't (called) the housing project yet. The struggle was intense...many of our ranks died in the fighting.<sup>4</sup>

Because housing is still one of the immediate, urgent needs of urban poor families, she cites in particular the government's startlingly inept handling of the dire situation.<sup>5</sup> She evoked one particular example of the government's inappropriate attempts to provide housing, with disastrous results since the community was not consulted.

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<sup>4</sup> *Original:* Sa bahagi ko nga eh, medyo namulat-mulat ako noong mga panahong 'yon. Kasi yong ginawa naming, eh, *housing project* 'yan. Pero hindi pa ako nakpasok sa *housing project* dahil and ginawa naming, lumaban kami. Ang *housing* pa lang ditto sa *Phase 1* at *Phase 4* at *Phase 2*...hindi pa 'yan *housing project*, kasi matindi ang...maraming namatay sa amin, nakapaglaban kami. Talagang matindi talaga and pagkalaban doon sa lugar na 'yon.

<sup>5</sup> These interviews in the Philippines took place during the typhoon season. Shortly after this interview, there was a storm and flooding, and I went to one urban poor community, located in the heart of Manila. The community worker who accompanied our group told us how the house she had just moved into because of lower rent was completely flooded that morning, with her furniture and appliances floating off the floor. She said the odors from overflowing pipes and sewers were overpowering. When we arrived in that particular community, some lanes were flooded and we could not cross them. In 2004, the community was a complex of 27 buildings which housed 30,000 people. There was one very large water tank for the entire place. There were 1,644 units and each unit had a space of 8 meters by 12 meters. Two families of 3-4 people were assigned to each unit. The monthly rent was P (pesos) 2,500 and P 750 for "re-locatees" who were people whose previous residences had been demolished. There was an electricity bill of about P200/month. There were two kinds of re-locatees: those who had jobs and those who did not. The latter are people who had come to the city looking for work and, because there was no work and/or no housing, often "squatted" on government or privately owned land. When the government or private owners needed the land, often to develop it as part of the urban sprawl, the often makeshift houses put up by the urban poor were demolished and the residents left homeless. Some of them sought housing in these subsidized government buildings. Although these units were considered "temporary" housing, many who could pay the rent had lived there for up to ten years and considered it permanent. In this particular community, there was a slaughterhouse adjacent to some of the buildings. The problems named at a meeting by the women in one section of this housing complex included: drugs, rape, incest, spousal assault, and sexual violation, especially of girls. They also spoke of problems with evictions (when unable to pay rent) and unaffordable coffins for the deaths that occur.

For example, [the government] was going to sell the land to the people, who in the end could not avail themselves of the program. So they created a housing project...and said it was their priority [to provide people with housing]. But what we wanted was, before they started the project, that they would have consulted the garbage workers, laundry women, and ask, "How much do you earn in one day?" They should then base the house payments on the wages, especially those with very low wages...or who have no work...they shouldn't have the same [criteria] of payment for the laundry woman as for professionals.<sup>6</sup>

The housing the government planned to provide was to cost P180,000 as a downpayment and 25 years amortization. To be eligible one had to be a member of the SSS (Social Security System), which means one has a job with security. As Ayo stated, clearly this was not a housing project for garbage collectors, washerwomen, vendors, or those with intermittent employment, who were the main residents of the poor urban building complexes. Another aspect of this plan was to assist people who could not keep up payments to "return to the countryside ("balik probinsya")." This appeared as the government's ultimate solution to overcrowding in the cities: it would subsidize such moves back to the country for the urban poor, ostensibly for them to have more land, adequate housing, and better lives. In reality, in the countryside there is no land to till or other jobs, and the places to which the urban poor are reallocated are often isolated and far away from jobs, schools, hospitals, or markets. The change in location entails no improvement in quality of life, so people return to the city once again to try to survive on garbage collection. Ayo described their lack of basic survival necessities:

Here with the urban poor...in the community...there are children who go to school in the morning and sometimes they just drink coffee just to have something in their tummies before going to school. Work, food, social services are everything...to have electricity, water, education, and

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<sup>6</sup> *Original:* Paghalimbawa, ibe-benta mo ang lupa na 'yan na bi-bigyan mo sa mamamayan, eh, hindi ka naman maka-avail doon. Kaya gina nilang *housing project...priority* daw ng gobyerno. Pero and gusto naming sana, bago i-proyekto 'yan ng gobyerno, kinin-sulta lahat noong mga nag-babasura...mga labandera, konsulta, "Magkano ba ang kinkita n'yo sa loob ng isang araw?" Yong pinakamababa nilang kita, doon ibabatay yong pambayad doon sa bahay....mayroon diyan bilang trabaho ng isan manggagawa...huwag nilang ipantay doon ang bayad ng isan maglalabanderang 'yan doon sa talagang propesyonal.

of course, the right to advance and develop as citizens of the Philippines.<sup>7</sup>

Her initial interest in learning more about the issues facing workers, especially women factory workers, led her to join the union at her factory and eventually to become a union official, which enabled her to acquire further education on the rights of workers. She gained the confidence to be outspoken and to speak in front of large groups. With others she walked the picket line when they had a strike which lasted almost three years. In the midst of this strike, she was approached by the owner's daughter who asked her how much money it would take to persuade her to leave the union. Ayo recalled the following dialogue:

Owner's daughter: Don't you have children, aren't they studying, don't you need this money?

Ayo: My rights and principles are not for sale. I will defend them. These are all I have left and I cannot give them to you because they are mine.

Owner's daughter: You're really bold...you're brave.

Ayo: Yes, M'am, because this is all I have left. You have exploited my wages, my benefits, these have all gone to you. This is all I have left and I will not give it to you. It is mine to keep.<sup>8</sup>

Owner's daughter: ...really brave...you're really strong!

Ayo: Yes, M'am.

This dialogue took place in Tagalog (rather than English), indicating Ayo's social standing, and her use of the deferential third person made it clear to the factory owner that she was aware of their assigned social positions. She followed this "rule" of subservience, yet managed at the

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<sup>7</sup> *Original: Dito sa urban poor...pag-magpunta ka sa community na yong mga batang pumapasok ng umag, sa i-school, king minsan nagsasabao na lang ng kape para lamang may laman ang tiyan pagpasok. Trabaho, pagkain, serbisyong panlipunan kompleto na 'yan, nan diyan na ang koryente, tubig, tapos edukasyon, tapos siyempre yong karapatang pagtaas bilang mamamayan ng Pilipinas.*

<sup>8</sup> She used the respectful word *ho* along with the plural pronoun *you*. The plural pronoun when used for an individual is a respectful form, reinforced by the additional *ho*, as one might add 'sir' or 'm'am'. *Ho* is a linguistic marker and does not have its own definition as 'sir' or 'madam' would. However, in this context, the plural *you* could also have meant the owners, their family. "Talaga, m'am, eto na lang ho ang natitira sa akin. Pinagsamantalahan n'yo na ako sa sahod, sa mga benepisyo, napunta na lahat sa inyo. Ito na lang ho ang natitira ko hindi ko na ho ibibigay sa inyo. Sa sarili ko na 'to." (Really, m'am, this is all I have left. You [this person or her family/owners] have taken advantage of my wages, benefits [lack of], everything has gone your [likely, the family/owner's] way. This is the only thing left to me and I will not give it to you [the woman, the family/owners].) This "feudal" relationship is so entrenched that it would be highly unusual and extreme for an employee or domestic worker to use any other form of address with their employers, regardless of the circumstances.

same time to assert a strong opinion, obviously not expected by the elite woman she was addressing. With little formal schooling but strong community education behind her, Ayo's public self-assertion disrupted prescribed class lines, defying the feudal social hierarchy and winning the owner's daughter's grudging respect.

Ayo also related how the managers confronted the union officers one by one in order to intimidate them. She realized the need to be strong-spirited and strong-willed, not to give in. Others fell prey to being bribed and eventually left the union executive. In her case, she was not going to betray what she and her group had started.

I was with them on the picket line... for two years and ten months we were together. These are my experiences as a worker. So when the topic is about workers, I ask myself, who am I among them? I also have a worker's blood having been a worker for four years and that's why I am quick to be in solidarity with workers.<sup>9</sup>

Speaking for the poorest sectors of women in cities, Ayo saw women-specific issues and those of workers in general as often inseparable, rather than sequential or separate categories for understanding women's or the nation's stagnation. Debates around whether the nation has to be liberated "first," and then women will be liberated, or the reverse, do not seem very relevant to the experience of these poor urban women. Someone in their family has to be gainfully employed before any of their problems can be addressed. Ayo's priority is therefore workers' rights, and she focuses on women because she is aware of their roles within their families and communities, as well as at the factory. For her, work and home are inextricably linked:

There is a link between the workplace and the community because workers go home to the community and the workers themselves *are* the urban poor. So the problems at work are related to the problems in the community because for sure when you go home to the community, it means that the issues you are fighting for are still there in having a secure home. Meanwhile when you're at

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<sup>9</sup> *Original: Kasama ko sila sa picket line ng two years and ten months kami sa picket line. 'Yon yung mga karanasan ko bilang manggagawa, no. Kaya pag may usapin ng manggagawa sabi ko, sabi ko, ano ako doon, mayroon din akong dugo naging manggagawa kung apat na taon, kaya mabilis din ako makapagkwan...sa nangyayari sa pagawaan.*

work, you're concerned about getting a higher salary and job security so you don't lose your job. That's it.<sup>10</sup>

Much of what Ayo said was echoed in the story told by Inday, who also began by working with the urban poor but is now an organizer for a rural peasants' association.

***The Story of a Woman in a Rural Poor Peasant Women's Organization: Inday (RP)***

Although she was proficient in English, Inday spoke in Tagalog throughout the interview. I surmised that she did so because she now lives and works with rural people who are not fluent in English, and by mastering rural Tagalog she acknowledges the importance of communicating with farmers, rural labourers, or fisherfolk, for whom English is considered the language of the colonizers or the elite. It seemed to me that she was giving me this message, as I tried to interact with her in Tagalog, only to reveal my lack of fluency owing to years of living abroad (though had I remained in the Philippines, the same result would be likely because of my social class). Unlike Ayo, who is most comfortable in Tagalog, Inday is consciously blurring class lines when, as an educated, former urban community worker, she chooses to speak only Tagalog to everyone.

Inday's activism started when she was an urban student under Martial Law and went underground. It was common during the 1970s and '80s for students to oppose the Marcos regime by leaving the cities to work with peasants in the rural areas. Unlike Ayo, who remained among those considered "working class" like herself, Inday went from what can be considered a

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<sup>10</sup> *Original:* Yong tagakaugnay noon doon sa paggawaan at sa komunidad dahil sa mga manggagawa ay umuuwi talaga 'yan sa *community*, kasi mga *urban poor* itong mga maggagawang ito. Kaya nakakaugnay ang problema sa paggawaan tapos doon sa komunidad dahil siyempre pag-umuwi ka sa *community*, ibig sabihin nandoon pa rin yong gusto mong ipaglaban, yong katiyakan doon sa paninirahan. Pagsatrabaho ka naman, yong pagtaas siyempre ng *salary* mo at katiyakan mo rin satrabaho na hindi ka mapatanggal sa hanap-buhay mo. Yon.

"higher status" urban life with education to a "lower status" life in rural areas among those with little or no formal education. While in the countryside she worked alongside Lorena Barros, a prominent activist mentioned earlier, who was killed for her opposition to the Marcos regime, and was herself imprisoned twice, for six months each time, in 1973 and in 1977:

... when I was single during Marcos' time, during Martial Law, I became a political prisoner...1973...1977 [Q: And why were you imprisoned?...]because during that time of Martial Law, I was part of the student movement which was being targeted. That's when I started, but we were already underground at that time [Q: Were you in the rural area at that time?] ...in the rural area, yes... with Lorena Barros.

In 1980, Inday became a community-based organizer for the same urban poor women's organization that Ayo was involved with, returning to the urban setting after time spent in rural communities and working with another well known leader, Nelia Sancho:

I was an organizer for SAMAKANA in 1980, when SAMAKANA started. (Q: When SAMAKANA was organized, you were one of the founders?). The founder then was Nelia Sancho. I was in prison with Nelia Sancho and Linda Co who were pioneers in PAI (Parents' Alternative Incorporated), which they started in October 1980.... I was imprisoned in 1980.

On her release, Inday served as a teacher's aide for the PAI, an organization that looks after the psycho-social well-being and post- traumatic stress condition of activists and their families.

I became a teacher's aide at PAI because they contacted me in January, 1981, and they offered me work at PAI. At that time my children were small and I wasn't clear what political work to do, so I said, at least here I can help the children of fellow activists, because the children of political detainees were our beneficiaries, so taking care of the children of fellow activists helped and counted as political work. So until 1984 I was at PAI. When PAI shifted and became community-based, we reached out to do training in different regions. I stayed there until I did organizing work for SAMAKANA in the urban poor areas, so that's where I was.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Original:* 1995 sa AH ako pero bago pa akong nagging AH, nagging *organizer* din ako ng SMK noong 1980, yung pagsisimula ng SMK, 1983, 1984 ako...pero bago pa rin n'yan, noong dalaga pa ako, noong panahon ni Marcos, noong Martial Law nagging *political prisoner* din ako...[anong year yon]...1970..1977 [at ba't kayo kinulong]...noong panahong kasing 'yon, Martial Law yon eh, bahagi noong naugnayan ako bilang estudyante, kailangan labanan yoon. Tapos doon ako nagsimula...pero ano na 'yon, underground

While her early commitment to caring for children (her own and then those of political detainees) might be considered in the realm of “women’s work,” Inday did not see this as conflicting with her political commitment, but as a necessary part of it. She later focused on issues specific to women peasant farmers and workers, and went to jail again for her involvement. In 1995, she joined a rural peasant women’s federation, Amihan. Like the urban poor women’s organization, it is part of GABRIELA, and she has remained active there until the present.

...we survived because of the peasants. Of course [they wondered] how was [all our work] helping in the struggle. Some of them wondered why women were part of this struggle under these conditions [hunger, the elements] but we raised their awareness of the need for everyone to resist and act, helping each other together.<sup>12</sup>

Inday’s movement back and forth between urban and rural settings reflects the political upheavals of her generation, and her time spent in prison conveys the risks women activists take and the effect on their families. She is now middle-aged and has occupied leadership roles for a number of years. Her activism, which crosses urban/rural divides as well as class barriers, illustrates the shifting relationships that have to be negotiated in order to build solidarity and

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na ‘yon yoong panahon na ‘yon. [Eh sa *rural* ba kayo noon?] ...*rural* ...oo, noong panahon na ‘yon...si Lorena Barros.

[Q: Noong nag-organize ng SMK, una kayo sa mga founders...]

Bali ang founder kasi noon, sina Nelia Sancho. Pagkatapos ko kasing makulong noong 1980, 1981, nagging teacher aide ako sa PAI, kasi nakasama ko sa kalungan sina Nelia Sancho at saka si Linda Ko, na mga ano sila, mga *pioneer* sa PAI, itinagtag nila ito noong 1980, Oct 1980. Jan. 1981 noong na-contact nila ako, inalok nila ako na mag-trabaho sa PAI. Kasi dahil noon, maliliit young mga anak ko at kung baga, walang malinaw din akong *political work*, so sabi, at least dito, makatulong ako doon sa mga anak ng mga kasama, kasi mga anak ng mga *political detainee* ang aming *beneficiary*, yong pag-aalaga na lang sa mga anak ng mga kasama, eh, makatulong at bilang *political work*. So hanggang 1984, ako noong ano sa PAI. Noong nag-*shift* ang PAI sa *community base* na lang, i-*reach out* na lang naming mag-*training* sa iba’t ibang mga *region*. Doon na ako...at dahil may pangangailangan na ng organizing sa SMK, mga urban poor area...so doon na ako.

<sup>12</sup> *Original*:...nabubuhay kami dahil sa masa. Tapos, siyempre, kung papaano talaga itutulong yong pakikipaglaban. Yon nag-aano sila, bakit kailangan kaming babae sumama pa siyempre sa ganoong kalagayan pero yon kailangang ipatanaw na kailangang kumilos na ang lahat, magtulong-tulong.



work effectively where the need is greatest. As an educated middle-class woman activist, by working in solidarity with peasants she felt able to advance her political goals as well as theirs, while remaining active in women's organizations. She was struck by the way peasant farmers and fisherfolk (a term which includes both men and women) question the impact, if any, of women's participation in the collective political struggle. I wondered whether they may in fact have been questioning more specifically the role of women like her coming from the cities with their privileged education and economic advantages. Inday acknowledged the contribution of both rural and urban women in efforts to improve the lives of rural people. She believed that it was possible to find common ground when urban women, of different ages, went to join peasant communities, and peasant organizations accepted their support.

Inday's work intersects with Ayo's when government reallocation of urban poor people to the countryside adds to those already struggling to survive there. While housing is the biggest need in the cities, in the rural areas it is land, as Inday explained:

For now, the primary thing is the land. You see, it is landlessness that is really the big problem among peasants and then when you add globalization then the land problem becomes even more intense. Then, after not having land, the major problem is the high cost of agricultural production, the expense of production, and the really low market price when they buy from us. We peasant farmers say that we cannot set the price for our products. We cannot say how much is our share, how much a kilo of *palay* [unhusked rice] is worth. The trader can or the buyers, they are the ones who set the price of our products. Then there is the high payment because of usury. Because of the large production expenses, we have to take out these loans. It is extreme [the interest rates] and different from province to province. They differ in their interest rates, the private lenders are really high because it's very rare that a peasant farmer can get a loan from the bank because you need collateral...and being tenant farmers...you cannot use your tools as collateral or your pots or your machete.

It is significant that Inday uses the term "we peasant farmers", indicating her own identification with them. She shows detailed, firsthand knowledge of their problems, especially of the ways in which they are prevented from making a decent living. Even some Filipinos living abroad exploit them by offering unfair loans:

...they say that if you borrow five Pesos, you return ten, something like that. There are different stories from the regions, that if you borrow 1,000 Pesos, you pay back P1,000 and in addition you will give two sacks of *palay* or in some cases, you pay back three or even up to four sacks of *palay*. [Q: It is the lender who sets the rate of payment?] Yes. [Q:Is there no law against that?] You see, these are personal loans from rich farmers, or those who have been abroad and have some money to loan out, or those who have a store. Sometimes they will tell the farmers, the coconut growers, that the loans are interest-free. But when we look into it, it's true, there is no interest, for example someone with a store will loan you any amount you want. Then when it comes time to harvest the copra (coconut fiber), you have to sell to him and he sets the price per kilo of copra. So that's how they make money on your loan, the interest is taken from the price of the copra which is much lower than the market value.<sup>13</sup>

Ayo and Inday are both middle-aged women activists who have dedicated their lives to the struggle to improve basic living conditions for the poor, in both urban and rural areas. Their analysis of the situation for women in particular is based on daily confrontation with the

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<sup>13</sup> *Original:* Sa ngayon, *primary* pa rin yong lupa. Kasi, yong *landlessness* talaga, ito ang malaking problema ng mga magsasaka tapos naidagdag pa nga yong globalizacion so lalo ng tumindi yoong problema sa lupa. So bukod pa doon, kasi, yong *major* na problema eh ang kawalaan ng lupa tapos yong mataas na presyo ng produksyon, gastos sa produksyon tapos napakamura naman na binibili sa amin yong mga produkto. Sabi nga namin, ang mga magsasaka, hindi sila puwedeng magtakda kung magkano ang kanilang produkto. Hindi sila ang nakakapagsabi, magkano ang aming, magkano itong, isang kilong palay, kung hindi yong mga *trader*, o kaya yong mga namimili, ito ang nagtatakda kung magkano ang presyo ng aming produkto. Bukod pa, yong mataas na yon isura, yong *usury*. Dahil, kailangan namin ang malaking gastos sa *production*, so kailangan mangutang kami. Grave ang ano...iba't-iba sa bawat probinsya. Nagiibat-iba yong tawag sa pagpapautang, na ang lalaki ng interes...[private lenders o banco]...mga private lenders kasi bihira naman ang magsasaka na makakautang sa banko dahil kailangan mo ng collateral. Hindi mo naman puwedeng...hindi ka naman...kung ikaw ay tenant lang...hindi ka...hindi mo puwedeng i-collateral yong gamit mo...hindi naman puwede yoong mga kaldero mo o yong itak mo, eh collateral mo.

Kaya ang utang talaga, sa mga ano, mga 5-6...kasi yong 20% yon...ang interes, 90% per month yata yon. Kasi sinasabi pagnangutang ka ng 5 piso, ibabalik mo sampu...parang ganoon. Meron pa nga yong mga ibat-ibang kuwento noong mga ano sa region, mangutang ng isang libong piso, ang ibabayd mo, bukod sa...magbabayad ka na ng isang libong piso, magbibigay ka pa ng palay, ng dalawang sakong palay. Meron naman na mangungutang ka ng isang libo, pag...produkto ang ibabalik mo, minsan tatlo hanggang apat na sakong palay ang ipapalit. [Mga lender ang nagsasabi nyan.] Oo. [Ano --walang batas kontra dyan.] Kasi mga personal ano na yon, na kung sino lang yong mayayaman magsasaka o kaya kung may naka-abroad, yong may mga kaunting pera, yong mga may tindahan ganoon. Halimbawa, minsan nga sasabihin yon sa mga magsasaka, sa mga nagninyog, sabi, eh wala namang interes ang utang, eh, sabi nila. Pero pag-noong inungkat namin, yon pala, wala nga, halimbawa mangungutang ka sa tindahan nila, lahat ipapautang sa iyo. Pero pagnag-kopra ka, sa kanya mo ibebenta at siya ang magtatakda kung magkano ang kilo ng iyong...ng kopra. Doon pala bumabawi doon sa utang tapos babawasin na yong...babawasin na yong lahat ng utang mo. So yong interes noon, ay doon sa itinakda nila kung magkano yong presyo noong iyong ano, na masbababa sa existing na ano...[market]...value.

economic hardships poor women face, wherever they are located. They shared the idea that work with women has to start with practical projects that will affect them the most, like access to basic services such as housing, education, health care, or burial costs.<sup>14</sup> Fely, a third woman from the same generation still active in the Philippines, took a different path, becoming a university professor and a prominent spokesperson, who links her activism to research and teaching in more formal settings.

### ***The Story of a Woman in the Academy: Fely (A)***

Fely was a student in the state university in Quezon City in the late '60s, when she became part of the widespread student movement mentioned by Inday. She was one of the founding members of MAKIBAKA, the first women's organization to focus on women's emancipation, which started in May 1970. Like Inday, in the period after Martial Law was declared in 1972 she became politically active. In the 1980s, like Inday, she was imprisoned: in Fely's case for three years and seven months. She was tortured, gave birth to a child while in captivity (an experience that will be recounted in more detail in Chapter 5), and was finally released in 1986 when Marcos was toppled. She related details about other academics who lost their lives:

So you have Maria Lorena Barros...she was a cum laude student from UP [University of the Philippines] in Anthropology, a poet, a very good writer. She died during the Marcos dictatorship...you have Puri Pedro, a Social Work graduate also of the University of the Philippines, who was arrested, tortured to death. You have so many unnamed women from the peasantry and workers who have sacrificed not only their time, but their very lives to pursue the ideal that they believed in.

Fely returned to the university and undertook research in social work with a focus on women. She is currently a Professor of Women's Studies, a union president, a member of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers, of GABRIELA, and of the Center for Women's Research. Her many

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<sup>14</sup> In one of the poorest communities in Manila that I observed, the women had established a pharmacy where medicine was sold at affordable prices. This community also had education sessions: on that day they were explaining the need to have access to medicines. They chose a time during the day when the women had finished their household chores and were able to attend the meeting.

publications and conference presentations have made an important contribution to feminist analysis of the situation of women in the Philippines, and to the connections between research and grassroots activism. In our interview, Fely described her participation as a student in the “First Quarter Storm” (FQS) movement of the 1970s, the series of widespread protests in Metro Manila against the Marcos government described earlier in Chapter One. Her direct involvement led to organizing among students, youth, workers, and farmers. The students also organized in the provinces and integrated their efforts with groups of workers, peasants, and young people there. Like Inday, Fely was present during attempts to suppress student demonstrations, particularly in Manila and Quezon City (the context that played an important part in the story of Marita, below). At a conference presentation in Vancouver in November, 2005, celebrating the thirty-fifth anniversary of the FQS, Fely recalled a painful memory.

The widespread use of truncheons and tear-gas against young university students to break up the January 26, 1970, demonstration in front of Congress led to an indignation march on January 30 to the presidential palace which ended in the deaths of four students.

She also remembered that a women’s bureau was already part of the radical youth organization, Kabataang Makabayan (KM), formed in the 1960s. This was created in response to information about the strides made by women in other countries where there had been major upheavals and social revolutions. She also noted at this conference that

...even with the rise in the number of women members and the existence of a women’s bureau within the youth organizations, theoretical and concrete practical work related to women’s issues was limited. For example, the celebration of March 8 as International Women’s Day would not be commemorated until 1971.

In recalling her own political awakening, Fely analyzed the reasons for poverty and disempowerment of Filipinos in general and women in particular as directly related to the historical development of Philippine society. She sees the current situation as equally oppressive because of priorities imposed by globalisation. Her position as president of a union

representing government employees makes her aware that the middle class, as well as the poor, resent the lack of adequate remuneration for their work, and that gender is definitely a factor.

...right now, as government employees, we're working for a 3,000 [pesos] across the board salary increase. And remember, women comprise the majority of government employees, over 52% of government employees as a whole, and if you include the public school teachers, 81%...no, 82% of public school teachers are women. So the issue of a 3,000 across-the-board salary increase is an important issue, considering how difficult life is now, for even the middle class. But it doesn't stop there. The question is why can't the government give us 3,000 across the board. They're saying there's not enough money...the budget deficit...but if you look at the budget allocation ...annually you have from 27-40% allocated automatically for debt repayment. So, it's a question again of priorities and it's a question of calling the shots in terms of the politics of the country. Why is paying the obligation to foreign creditors more important than ensuring the well-being of the citizens of this country?

Her analysis of the government's current economic policies, particularly its present budget, shows that the economic and democratic rights of Filipinos are likely to continue to be violated, since progress is not possible under the current political and economic restraints.

As a Women's Studies professor, Fely has a sophisticated analysis of gender issues in relation to national ones in the Philippine context. In her youth, she took a leadership role in MAKIBAKA, which evolved from a loose coalition of mixed groups into a distinct all-women youth organization. In spite of her academic life and interests, Fely knows that women's immediate, material needs have to be addressed as a priority.

It's necessity – not yet the realm of freedom to be myself, you know, to be who I can be. It's a question of where do we get the next meal? Where do I get the money so that my child can continue to go to school? How can we have a house of our own? So...it's really basic questions. For many Filipino women, it's really a question of survival. And then you look into the reason why, why they cannot have a life free from the daily struggle of surviving...not even a life of leisure, just a life where they're assured of three meals a day, the education of their children, access to health services, just the basic. Why is it not possible?

Today she still believes that coalition building among women activists, who espouse women's liberation in the context of national liberation, continues to be the path to women's emancipation in the Philippines. She has remained within the ranks of women activists in various roles, mostly in women's organizations. In doing so, she brings a more direct and conscious "feminist" perspective into the movement that differs somewhat from the national emphasis described by Leslie (see below) through her work in GABRIELA Youth. Yet Fely continues to work for national objectives as well as women-specific ones, and is engaged in transnational debates. GABRIELA, as explained earlier (see Chapter I) established a political party that can elect representatives to Parliament, and the next participant, Marita, is one of those elected. About ten years younger than the three women discussed so far, she is nevertheless very closely connected to their experiences.

### ***The Story of a Woman in Government : Marita (G)***

Marita explained how she had always been interested in politics as a youth, even when she was enrolled in a private Roman Catholic girls' high school. While she was in her second year there Martial Law was declared, and in 1972 she saw many demonstrations, becoming aware of the social ferment, not only in the Philippines but internationally. She read widely and was immersed in the critical thinking of the time. As a typical middle-class student, she thought that she could do little to change the situation, and was tempted by the idea of being a "kind of bohemian or a bum." She thought she might eventually be a lawyer, but with the advent of Martial Law she realized that the law is not always relevant to social justice, and decided instead to study economics. She chose to enter the state university, partly because of her desire to become an activist, but also in order to live a "bohemian" life after the sheltered environment of a girls' college. Her courses in economics proved to be boring, and she went to many parties, until her first experience of a violent demonstration.

I wasn't joining any organization because the organizations at the time were traditional organizations like sororities, academic organizations. But I wanted to be an activist so ...I don't want to join your organizations! I was mostly doing things on my own until this case of Alex Magno [chuckle], who is now with the government and ...was one of the leaders at the time. Alex Magno... was with other student activists who were arrested and imprisoned. There was this big mobilization on the UP [University of the Philippines] campus. So the first time I saw this march, I said, oh...[this is for me...] ...yeah, [laughter] this is for me [laughter]. So on my own, I went there [laughter]. I went there and participated. And then it was the first time I experienced police brutality because the marchers were dispersed. .. I had this idea that demonstrations like this can be peaceful, so I joined the demonstration thinking that it was a peaceful demonstration, that ... it was very valid. But it was violently dispersed and that was the first time I experienced police brutality. That was also the first time in my life that I cursed. I said *putang-ina* [son of a bitch]. And then... it had an imprint in me. Second, I learned that this violence did not come from the students but from the State. And these things I knew without anyone telling me, because... remember at the time I was not organized....there was no processing of my experiences at the time. ..

Other young people from less privileged families were probably much more familiar with various forms of state violence and much less surprised at what happened. Marita's shock at being victimized shows how sheltered and protected she had previously been, as does her memory of using for the first time a curse associated with the poor, working classes.<sup>15</sup> She commented herself on her lack of any political analysis at that time, and admitted that her main concerns remained relatively frivolous.

I was not organized, so I didn't have, you know, a venue to process this experience. So I continued on with my bourgeois existence [chuckle] after that. But I was on my own again, going to the forum, going to cultural events that are, shall we say...protest cultural activities...until I had [chuckle] a case in the dormitory, you know feminist in the sense that...I was about to be expelled from the dorm because....there were many anti-establishment...at that time, di ba [isn't it]. So I was sort of some kind of anti-establishment, even when I was young [laughter]. So the matron expelled me...she said, because you are breaking the [rules]. I asserted my right to self-expression for my clothes...and things like this...it's so natural for me to talk about those things at that time. And then she said, before...I can allow you again to come here, to be admitted,

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<sup>15</sup> This is another example of Siapno's (1995, 222) note that "the elite curse in Spanish, talk to each other in English, and give orders to their servants in Tagalog" while the poor talk to each other in Tagalog. In this case, "puta," the Spanish word for *prostitute*, has become very much part of the vernacular, joined with the Malay, "ina," for *mother*.

you have to bring your parents here. And I said, no, I am an independent person, we were raised in an independent way, I am not going to bring my parents here. So I went to the Dean of Students. ...Armando Malay at the time, the father-in-law of Satur Ocampo [chuckle], and he said, oh you know, you should allow her to stay. We should allow them to stay because you know these are...kids and ...so [we were] allowed entry. So ....they won this little case [to wear mini-skirts] the struggle for self-expression, at the time. In other words, that started others voicing out their dissatisfaction.

Already, Marita was rebellious and determined not to give in to unreasonable rules, but her focus was on the freedom to choose her clothes, rather than the more serious problems of the underprivileged that Ayo was becoming involved with at that time. Channeling this youthful rebellious energy into conscious political action appears to have started for Marita only after her direct experience of state violence. Her first experience of activism occurred right in the dorm, where she was recruited to help organize other students against Martial Law.

Siguro [Maybe], they smelled, what is happening in the dorm? These were the officers and activists in the Sampaguita dorm. So they talked to me [chuckle]. Perhaps they thought, who is this person? [Laughter] Is she an activist? So, one time they talked to me and they said, oh if you will transfer...because I was supposed to transfer, after that year, to Sampaguita, this other dorm...we will put you in...our council...we will put you in our slate to run for the council of the dorm. So they put me in their slate and I transferred to Sampaguita. So that was the start of my formal, you know, um...[to be] an activist. And then we won, our slate won in that election. So I was active in the dorm council and there I became active in the struggles of the students...because there was Martial Law. So we had the right to...organize...to put up a paper...we were protesting against all the repressive measures. And then we were going out already. So we were helping demonstrations against Martial Law, these lightning demonstrations. ..in the streets, with all these things, all these tear gas, cannon, so that deepened my involvement.

In order to further disengage herself from her bourgeois background and satisfy her curiosity about others, Marita went on her own initiative to an urban poor area and told the residents that she was interested in their situation and wanted to learn from them.

On my own I also wanted to see an urban poor area here, so I went to Tondo... just on my own [chuckle]. It was kinda...Yeah, brave. So I went there and...I just introduced myself with this Sonta organization in Tondo and then said I was interested about the situation, if I can...you know, learn from them. And then ...they were very kind when I got there. So they just opened their homes to me and I appreciated the urban poor. You know, these were not structured things that I had this program for integration. It was nothing like that. I was very interested, coming from a bourgeois background. I wanted really to see



how it is...what is this poverty that we are talking about. That is why I went there. Until it's really...it's a very deep understanding. Also because I think it was something self... a self... what do you call this...it was something I wanted to do. I was motivated to learn – to learn. Everything just continued all...in this movement.

Her initial attempt at getting to know the people of Tondo, though courageous, may appear somewhat individualistic and possibly condescending, both in her confident approach and the prioritizing of her need to know over their possible reactions. The fact that people opened their homes to her may not only have been an indication of their openness and hospitality, but also a forced reaction to her higher status: refusing her entry might have been unthinkable under those circumstances. Yet by wanting to know for herself, “what is this poverty that we are talking about,” Marita became motivated to learn and gained “a very deep understanding” which has since allowed her to continue what she is doing up to the present, including lobbying for the urban poor. At that time, although she acknowledges them as a source of her learning, it was a one-way process of her taking knowledge from them.<sup>16</sup> Later, she gained perspective and grounded her work in women’s organizations and grassroots communities, where learning is more reciprocal and actions are generated through mutual consultation. Currently she is one of two elected representatives in the Philippine Congress from the first and only women’s party, advocating for the issues, rights, and interests of women.

Marita emphasized the class differences that activists from educated, privileged classes struggle to overcome in solidarity work with those less privileged. Unlike Ayo, who had little formal education and developed her activism for her own survival as a factory worker, Marita could have chosen to continue to live an easy, protected life. While Inday chose to work with

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<sup>16</sup> I recall a panel I attended on aboriginal rights a number of years ago, as my own political awareness on the subject was growing. A First Nations woman on the panel lamented that she is starting to refuse to tell her heart-wrenching story repeatedly in order for others to learn and improve themselves. She felt this benefited others at the expense of her (and other indigenous people) having to re-visit the tragic history of her people and re-traumatize herself in the telling of her story.

peasants in rural areas, to extend her own political experience beyond urban life, Marita elected to go to a very poor urban neighborhood to learn about poverty. That Inday and Marita had a “choice” of where and how to develop politically, indicates the greater freedom available to those with economic and social opportunities. Class tensions in the Philippines are glaring; and for activists solidarity work is challenging. In order to live out their political beliefs, Inday and Marita both put their bodies into spaces where they had not been before, taking considerable risks. Ayo, on the other hand, became politically involved when her job was on the line, although her activism put her marriage in danger (see Chapter 6). For all of the women discussed so far, the historical backdrop of Martial Law under the Marcos regime was fertile ground for growing political awareness and participation.

### **Postscript to Marita's Story**

After this interview with Marita, a significant turn of events in Philippine politics affected her directly. On February 24, 2006, the current President, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, declared a State of Emergency, considered by many as a de facto declaration of Martial Law. The text of her declaration parallels almost word-for-word the Martial Law declared by Ferdinand Marcos in 1972 (See Appendix 5). Congressman Crispin Beltran of Anakpawis, a workers' and peasants' party, was arrested the day after and imprisoned at Camp Crame (the same military prison where he was placed under the Marcos dictatorship). Sedition and rebellion charges laid against him by Marcos, and removed after the Marcos government fell, were once again revived. He was moved to the Philippine Heart Center for a blood pressure condition and remained in detention there for seventeen months. On July 12, 2007, under international pressure from governments and NGOs, the Macapagal-Arroyo government released

Congressman Beltran after charges were dismissed by the Supreme Court.<sup>17</sup> Marita and four other representatives (the Batasan Five<sup>18</sup>) of women's, workers', and peasants' parties, along with forty-one leaders of mass organizations, were issued warrants of arrest by the Philippine National Police (PNP), endorsed by the Department of Justice (DoJ). As long as the five representatives remained in the "Batasan" (Congress) they had immunity from arrest, but the moment they stepped out they would be arrested. They remained there for seventy days under the protective custody of the House of Representatives. While there, they continued to work, sponsoring and debating bills, releasing press statements, preparing and fighting for their legal case. When new information was presented by the DoJ, amending the charges of sedition and rebellion against the Batasan Five, the case was dismissed by Judge Jenny Lind Aldecoa Delorino in the Makati Regional Trial Court as unsubstantiated. Following this ruling, they were able to leave the House of Representatives on May 8, 2006. A mere one week following this dismissal, new charges of "sedition and rebellion" were issued, once again by the PNP and endorsed by the DoJ. On May 13, 2006, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* reported that they "were accused of conspiring in a failed plot to overthrow President Macapagal-Arroyo using an assault force of rebel soldiers and communist guerrillas." Their defense against these charges went before the courts and the case was summarily dismissed more than a year later on June 1, 2007.

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<sup>17</sup> On May 20, 2008, shortly after a trip to meet with Canadian parliamentarians in Ottawa, Crispin Beltran died in the Philippines after a fall while fixing the roof of his house.

<sup>18</sup> Teodoro Casino, Satur Ocampo, and Joel Virador are elected representatives of *Bayan Muna* (Nation First), a workers' party; Rafael Mariano, a representative of *Anakpawis* (literally, children of or children who 'sweat,' or 'toiling masses'), a peasants' and workers' party; and Congresswoman Liza Maza of the GABRIELA party. (In this case it is impossible to fully anonymize the participant).

Marita's success as a parliamentarian has undoubtedly been influenced by her class background. While such leadership is not exclusive to members of the elite,<sup>19</sup> the skills she brings to Congress are a result of the training and resources afforded by higher education, particularly among the privileged class. In order to become an effective activist and politician working to represent those of different class origins from her own, she has found certain ways of educating herself. Awareness of her class origin and its impact on her work with women, and her ability to change her understanding, appear to be significant elements of her activist journey. The next participant, Leslie, is much younger, still in her twenties, but as for Marita, Inday, and Fely her activism began at university, where at the time of the interview she was still a student. Like Marita, she was working for a branch of GABRIELA.

***The Story of a Woman in a Women's Youth (Student) Organization: Leslie (Y)***

Speaking in English, Leslie described her political awakening in terms that recalled the others' stories, yet differences emerge in comparing the historical and social contexts of the Marcos and post-Marcos student movements. For one thing, GABRIELA, the alliance of women's organizations, more recently developed coalitions among young women addressing gender and women-specific concerns across social and class lines. Poor urban and rural women of the previous generation experienced gender-based and class-based violence as commonplace in their communities as a direct result of economic conditions, and very few had the opportunity to participate in higher education. Leslie, in contrast, spoke about women-specific issues in more

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<sup>19</sup> For higher education, some members of the elite attend the University of the Philippines which has students with diverse backgrounds, however, most enroll in smaller private Catholic universities or go abroad. Crispin Beltran was an exception, being of humble origins educated outside of large urban settings. He later studied engineering at Far Eastern University in Manila, known for enrolling students from the working class. In Philippine history, most members of Congress have come from wealthy landowning families, educated in private Catholic schools, and involved in amassing political power. Flora Baniga Belinan, the third candidate for Gabriela Women's Party in the 2008 elections, is another exception, having been a domestic worker in Hong Kong for twelve years. Before that she was a community organizer in Baguio City in the northern Cordillera region and held positions representing the interests of OFWs and indigenous people. Under the party list system there were insufficient votes to elect Flora, but two other candidates of the women's party, were successful.

recent times in relation to youth from a fairly broad spectrum of society who manage to find the resources to study in universities. Young women who are able to undertake higher studies nowadays learn about how global and local economics affect the Philippine nation as a whole and the different sectors of Filipino society. They are privileged in having access to education, but Leslie pointed out that many university-educated young women lack awareness and do not understand their oppression as systemic and gender-based.

In fact, for young women students, exposure to feminist theory can often open the door to understanding the relationship of gender oppression to the national oppression of all Filipinos, but may leave them unsatisfied. Leslie described her own experience of finding academic feminism insufficient, in addressing the situation of Filipino women:

...1998, I was an undergraduate student here in UP [University of the Philippines] Diliman. I was majoring in Political Science and I was in my last year in college...and...I'd been reading about feminism, about women's sexuality...about women, etc. but then came to a point when I was asking myself, beyond what I read, beyond what I see in the news,...what effects can I have...*parang* [like] how could I get myself involved, because I didn't feel like it's enough for me to just read and be informed. I also have to act on the situation, I have to be part of something really concrete. So that's when I decided to join GABRIELA Youth. It was also a point when..I'm not saying that I read enough or read much, but I think from what I was reading then I knew that it's not the kind of feminism [that would] really answer the needs, specific needs, of Filipino women. Like there was something more, it's not enough that we deal with the woman question only, if we do not connect it to the larger context of Philippine society. So that's why I joined GABRIELA Youth and not any other organization.

Her comments reflect the complex tensions and connections between “feminism” and the broader movement for political and social change in the Philippines. The organization she joined and still belongs to addresses the problems and demands of students and espouses the interests of young women in particular in the university setting. She and others have campaigned to increase the university budget, for the right of young women to education, and to create and maintain programs that educate and disseminate information about policies that support women's rights. They also address specific concerns about violence against women

and sexual harassment on and off campus. Their actions have been largely educational, to raise women's consciousness about their rights, including the right to freedom from harassment.

When we talk to many students, specially the lower track...I mean, the first-year students and the second-year students, they don't even know what harassment is. They don't know that if you get cat calls from men, or if you are verbally attacked by someone, that is part of sexual harassment and under the law<sup>20</sup> it is...a crime, or you could file an administrative case against that person. They don't know that.

Leslie considered sexual harassment rampant in the university and one of the most common forms of sexual violence against women. She believes that stereotypes of women and their roles still need to be exposed and dismantled, so that students may become engaged in opposing anti-woman social policies. She described a university event where they showed a film, "In the Time of the Butterflies," to be followed by a discussion about the women's movement and the tyrannical state of the Dominican Republic, which they hoped to link to the Philippine situation. Their poster quoted Lorena Barros, the young woman activist martyred during the Marcos regime already mentioned, as saying, "Women are not only for the bed or for the kitchen. We have an important role to fulfill in society ("Mga babae hindi lang pang-kama or pang-kusina. May mahalagang papel na ginagampan sa lipunan"). To their surprise, fifty to sixty students came when they were expecting only around twenty.

We'd like to believe that it's [the quote in the poster] that encouraged students to come. *Kasi* [because]...generally a Filipino woman has been raised to view herself as a future mother, as a future wife. If ...you see something that said that it is not your only role to be a mother, to be a wife...[this may raise your curiosity to come to the event].

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<sup>20</sup> Republic Act Number 7877 is an anti-sexual harassment law. Leslie (Y) stated, "...part of the law stipulates that every academic or work related institution should have their own policy on sexual harassment. So the University of the Philippines system was one of the first academic institutions to institute and implement a policy for implementing rules and regulations of the law. But years after, years since its implementation, [the] majority of the functions of the committee overseeing the policy haven't been met, especially the part that states they should disseminate information about it. In fact in the student handbook... it is not even stated that there is [an] anti-sexual harassment policy. The law, RA 7822 is attached or written in the handbook, but the policy saying that you actually file an administrative case [against sexual harassment] is not even written in the handbook." Leslie (Y), interview, 20 July 2004, Manila.

While Leslie and her youth organization's concerns are specifically focused on women's issues, they continue to learn about how women's and national issues overlap. Opportunities for raising awareness and education may start with women-specific struggles, and then broaden to learning how women's issues are related to patriarchy, colonization, or globalization that ultimately impact on both women and men.

Ah...I remember the time I had my orientation about GABRIELA Youth. I was asking ...I think she was the education officer of GABRIELA Youth at the time...I was asking her... "GABRIELA Youth is a feminist organization. So what kind of feminist are you?" And then she said, "We're not feminist." Tapos ano parang, [Then it was like] okay, so why? Kasi [because] back then I felt that I was still feminist so I asked her, "Is it okay if I join the organization, and I am a feminist, but I just don't know what type of feminist I am". [Her laughter.] Tapos 'yon, tapos eh, ayon, [Then, that was it...that was it] she discussed my [question], why you're not feminist...well, she said that GABRIELA Youth as an organization is not feminist because they believe that if you say you're feminist the primary consideration is the woman question and how to liberate women. And it could be quite blinding if you particularize on the woman question and the issues of women. So they made it quite clear to me that GABRIELA Youth is part of the women's movement but this women's movement is always contextualized within the bounds of the larger social movement.

This conversation confirms that the old debates about the relationship between women's liberation and national liberation are not over. The right of young women to free and accessible education was an important issue for Leslie, and she does consider herself a feminist, but like Ayo and other poor urban women, and Inday and rural communities, Leslie linked education to the national struggle of the Filipino people.

So most of what I do is education and propaganda work trying to educate women because...one of the pillars of our beliefs is that we have to educate the women and the people in order for them to be one in the struggle.

Women...have particular issues and a movement. A women's movement in particular has to address the specific issues and demands of women. But it is clear to us that the struggle of Filipino women should always be part of the broader movement for social change, because even if we analyze the roots of women's oppression, you will see that it is the same problems that keep the rest of the Filipino people oppressed and exploited – imperialism, capitalism, and feudalism. So, although we cater to the specific needs of the.... women's sector, we believe that these problems can only be addressed if the women's movement is kept part of the people's [national] movement. The women's

movement is part of the specific movement of women but it is not independent of the larger social movement.

In making these connections between gender and the comprehensive struggle, Leslie raised issues of economics, of poverty, and the need for job opportunities, and also mentioned the resistance of women students against the war in Iraq. She sees herself as part of a global context, and as a feminist who can draw on western theory and Third World feminist theories, while remaining aware of the specific Philippine situation.

I started out with the French type of feminism. Then I looked for something more, directly influencing society, and happened to come across "Third World feminism." Pero [But] the way Third World feminism would discuss women's oppression was multi-layered parang [as if] it denies the fact that these -- racism and all the other -isms -- can't be on the same plane. There has to be something more grand to bring about these types of oppression...whatever type of feminism I looked into there's always something that I feel is wrong...although there are points where they intersect. There [are] still things...that I don't quite agree with.

While Leslie is specifically involved with youth, she is connected to the larger women's movement composed of women of all ages. As Fely mentioned, unless the youth are involved, the women's movement is placed at risk. The role of age differences and need to transmit experience were mentioned by all these women in the context of working together effectively to change society, and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6 (see "Effective Actions"). Leslie showed her awareness of the existence of "feminisms" on a transnational scale, and the other young woman interviewed in the Philippines, Tess, is herself both Filipino and Canadian and works with an organization for migrant workers.

***The Story of a Woman in a Transnational Migrants' Organization: Tess (MO).***

Tess (MO) first became involved in political activism in a youth organization, and then in a women's organization in Vancouver, BC, where she grew up, having come as a young child with her parents who immigrated to Canada. Like overseas contract workers who leave the



Philippines for work abroad, such as the women who come to Canada today under the Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP), her family migrated because of socio-economic factors.

I was organized by a group of women from the Philippine Women's Centre, who were starting up a Filipino Canadian Youth Group. And so I was first interested in the issues of racism that we were discussing and then gradually, when the discussion started to touch on the socioeconomic and political conditions of the Philippines, and when they started to . . . or when I started to realize how the situation of my family, as immigrants, was similar to the situation of the caregivers who were coming to Canada, that was when I became even more involved and that was when I understood more fully the systemic reasons for why Filipinos are being forced to go abroad. So that was a little less than ten years ago. And I've been involved since then.

While in Vancouver, Tess participated in anti-racism work, including campaigns and protests initiated by Filipino youth in Vancouver, and was also part of an anti-APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) campaign in Vancouver in 1997. The education programs and public actions from January 1997 that led up to the anti-APEC rally in November, 1997, raised her awareness significantly.

So while we were out trying to raise the awareness of people in the community, my own awareness was raised and my commitment was even deepened. It was also very good because we were talking about APEC, which addresses the structural reasons or the systemic reasons for the oppression and exploitation of Third World countries like the Philippines, and it connected it with the situation of Canada and the US, so it was very good.

It was after this period that she went to the Philippines to integrate her activism in Canada within the framework of the national democratic movement in the Philippines. This framework led her to be an active member of a transnational/international organization for migrant workers worldwide. She remains in the Philippines, where she has now started a family, and still works in the migrant workers' organization up to the present time.

Tess is an example of some Filipino women activists focusing their work transnationally, because of what they see as the close connections between the problems that plague Filipino people wherever they live worldwide. Like the others, her political development started in her youth, but in her case, this channeling of youthful idealism and energy took her "back" to the

Philippines, leaving the country where she grew up. She could have stayed in Canada and continued working for the betterment of lives of Filipinos there, but chose instead to continue her activism in the Philippines. She has remained focused on migration issues, as they relate to her own personal and community experience in Canada. Tess provides an example of how transnational bodies cross “flexible” boundaries, being determined more and more by the needs and possible solutions of a globally dispersed community. This development can also be interpreted as the result of the globalization of labour that transcends national borders, and so drives activists like Tess to cross nation-state boundaries in order to address workers’ needs irrespective of location. The organization where Tess works aims to assist Filipino workers, both women and men, in the Philippines before they leave, when living and working abroad, and when they return to the Philippines whether temporarily or permanently. Having worked with migrant workers in Vancouver and knowing the origins of the tide of Filipino migration, she has chosen the Philippines as the setting of her current transnational activism. Her familiarity with the problems faced by migrant workers has made her very aware of the feminization of migration (discussed in Chapter 1) and the types of work available for women who go abroad.

Marita, the successful politician who has remained in the Philippines, linked transnational relations to the concept of the feminization of migration because a majority of migrant workers all over the world are women, and she sees addressing their situation as an integral part of transnational solidarity.

It [labor export policy of the Philippine government] is specific to women...there is a larger number of unemployment among women compared even to men, that's why this feminization of migration. So...on the other hand, the fact that we are of course in many, many countries also sort of links us all together. The fact also that migration has become...international...also links Filipinos with other migrants, who are also in other countries. So there is a natural solidarity, shall we say, among people, especially Third World women. Also...even...developed countries are also experiencing [similar problems]...even [in] terms of [lack or loss of] employment....This makes the struggle ...an international one.

While this migration begins in the Philippines, its critical significance is taken up in the accounts provided by the women living abroad, who illuminate the experiences of Filipino women in different settings.

### **Women Living Abroad**

The women living in the Netherlands and Canada recognized that women in the Philippines are faced with grave, immediate survival concerns. However, they too started from concrete issues in the lives of women, in this case those living abroad, whose problems are often just as serious. Many migrant women working in the Netherlands with no legal immigration status live in hiding, in poverty, with an uncertain future, while many women in Canada are trapped in the “four pillars” of the LCP<sup>21</sup> that keep them enslaved and in fear of deportation. These activists abroad described the importance of the advocacy work they do because of policies and conditions that impact negatively on women. Yet one of the women from Vancouver pointed out that advocacy is only a small part of the work, and there are many limitations and structural barriers. These require looking beyond one’s own feelings (of fulfillment or disappointment) in response to individual cases of advocacy work, and addressing one’s own situation. Two of the women in Vancouver emphasized the capacity of women activists to analyze their own dilemmas (self-advocacy, in a way) and, in doing so, to advance community organizing. The women abroad all tied their work with women, their feminist praxis, to the long-term, national struggle back in the Philippines.

“Living abroad” brings with it many personal and community connotations. The women in this study experience separation from families or loss of their livelihood and their homeland, just as

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<sup>21</sup> SIKLAB, a national organization of migrant workers in Canada, has analyzed the four critical aspects of the policies in the LCP they call the “four pillars:” temporary visa status, employment tied to one employer, mandatory live-in requirement, and the 24-month within 36 months contract.

many migrant workers do. At the same time, as activists, they study the impact of the massive displacement being experienced by the entire transnational community, oppose the policies that encourage it, and work to reduce or eliminate the problems it raises. The older women living abroad experienced displacement directly through exile or emigration, but even the two young women born and raised in Canada experience feelings of uprootedness. They expressed a longing to find their roots which motivated them to “return” to their parents’ homeland, reconnect personally, and feel part of the Filipino community. The enormity of the loss of family, culture, language, and one’s sense of history is expressed by Patty (N2):

My son was only a few months old and the biggest conflict within myself was, if I take this child with us abroad, I would be taking him out of his roots because he is a Filipino. This was a very major thing for me. And *sabi ko parang* [it is as if] it’s so unfair what I’m going to do to him. Because like [L. and I], we already had our roots in the Philippines so you can put us anywhere [Q: ...and your identity and everything...] ...yeah, and yet what I am going to do to this baby is I am going to take him out and I am going to raise him – I don’t know where -- because at that time it was so uncertain where we would even go. Is it fair for him what we were going to do? That was a major conflict in myself. At the same time, my mother offered to take care of the baby. *Nasabi siya* [she said okay] if you have to leave...we didn’t want to be arrested again. “*Sigue* [okay], you leave the country,” *sabi niya* [she said], “and I’ll take care of your child.” I didn’t want to leave my child with my mother because I said, I’ve seen so many children who have been separated from their parents and have suffered psychological problems. And I said, the only thing I can give this child is the security that he is with us and through thick and thin, we’ll be together. So these were...these were a mother’s feelings, and a mother’s conflicts. Then what we did as we raised him, we would tell him stories of the Philippines. So we saw the process within him also, first, trying to be part of his environment in the Netherlands, trying to think he was Dutch. And then gradually beginning to rise as Filipino and being proud of it. *Kaya parang ako man* [So for me], I see him now identifying...and he’s very happy every time he goes back to the Philippines and he *parang* [like] knows, he identifies as a Filipino when living in Holland...[Q: which is his reality...]...which is his reality. And like, he’s...of two worlds. It was only when that finally happened that I felt peace. *Na parang* [Like] ...I didn’t betray him or I didn’t rob him of something very precious.

Pratt (1997, 2003, 2006) has researched the impact of the Live-In Caregiver Program of Canada on Filipino youth who, after many years of separation from their mothers, are re-united with them in Vancouver. This separation points to the deep, psycho-emotional, and long-lasting

impact, first of their mothers' departure from the Philippines, then the unusual relationship they form through long distance phone calls and occasional visits if any, followed by their own displacement from the Philippines. Unlike Patty, many women migrant workers, because of the rules and regulations of the LCP, do not have the possibility of bringing their children with them.

The women interviewed abroad, in both the Netherlands and Canada, have their own perceptions of transnational space through their experiences of displacement. They understand the massive migration of Filipino women as worsening since the period when the Labor Export Policy was initiated in the Philippines, extending the political "women's sector" of the Philippines to include women abroad. "Transnational" in this sense does not imply the linking of discrete, though related, entities such as women's struggles from/in different nations. It represents specifically the transnational and diverse locations of Filipino women uniting (not merely linking) in the same struggle for Philippine sovereignty. Filipino women activists abroad also struggle for the rights and participation of their communities in their respective host countries.<sup>22</sup> These actions for change may initially appear local and unrelated to the struggle of women in the Philippines. For the second generation born abroad, like Michelle and Marilyn, Canada is as much their country of origin and site of struggle, even when they feel their identity is profoundly linked to the Philippines, and have undertaken some political actions there. Yet, because their marginalized experiences and analyses are bound by global capitalism, their struggle for change in various national locations ultimately addresses the very root causes that prevent the sovereignty and liberation from economic oppression of people in the Philippines.

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<sup>22</sup> At the time of writing, the National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada (NAPWC) has embarked on a three-year study of Filipino communities' participation in a multicultural Canada. The study looks first at the issues of Filipinos across Canada and hopes to conclude with policy engagement and recommendations where policy gaps and the need for changed and new policies exist. Preliminary findings from interviews and surveys from three regions point to the economic root causes and impacts of globalization and the understanding of why Filipinos are in Canada in such large numbers. These findings are related to the same issues addressed by activists in the Philippines in their call for national sovereignty and women's liberation.

The women interviewed in Vancouver have a close-up view of the transnational politicization of women who migrate primarily for economic reasons. They are involved in programs that address women's needs arising directly from their migration, ranging from responses to physical violence, to education about their situation within the transnational context of government economic and migration/ immigration policies (in Canada and the Philippines). The women activists in Vancouver attend conferences and courses in the Philippines, and two had lived there for extended periods to study and work. Many of the migrant women workers they support in their organization also try to travel to the Philippines regularly in order to see their families. On the other hand, two of those interviewed in the Netherlands are in political exile, and take considerable risks in returning to the Philippines, even when on official business with the Philippine government. At the same time, as residents of the Netherlands, all three women interviewed there also advocate for women working there illegally, with expired visitors' visas, who are in hiding and unable to return home to the Philippines. Their stories reveal the real dangers of defying governments, at home or abroad, and the frustrations of being in limbo in terms of citizenship.

### **Women Living In the Netherlands**

Two of the three women interviewed in the Netherlands live there in political exile from the Philippines. One (Veronica, N1) is a staff member of the organization that has been involved in peace negotiations with the Philippine government, which began at the time of Cory Aquino and continue under the present Macapagal-Arroyo presidency, and aim to end the fighting between government military and revolutionary forces.<sup>23</sup> The second woman (Patty, N2) is a member of

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<sup>23</sup> Rebel forces have been in existence since after World War II and the granting of independence in 1946, claiming to follow the tradition of national liberation struggles against Spain in 1896, the US in 1898, and the Japanese in 1942. In the the 1950s armed struggle was declared by the Communist Party of the Philippines (PKP) and engaged in by the People's Liberation Army (HMB), but this effort failed by

the panel involved in the actual negotiations representing the opposition group. The third (Chona, N3), a nurse who immigrated to the Netherlands, continues to work as a nurse, and is involved in a Filipino women's organization.

These women focused on the economic forces that drive women to migrate, as well as the political forces that brought two of the women into exile. The economic factors so directly palpable in the descriptions of women living in the Philippines were viewed in the Netherlands from the perspective of individuals having migrated as workers. Chona focused on women's issues as related to violence, labor and employment problems, and racism, naming these as the key issues of the work of the women's organization to which she belonged. The organization advocates for women who go there on tourist visas, as this is the only way they can enter the Netherlands legally. Once their visas expire, however, they have no option but to remain as undocumented migrant workers, since they cannot return home for the same reasons that made them leave in the first place, mainly economic pressures to support their families. Many of the women work clandestinely as domestic workers. At the time of these interviews, Dutch immigration had announced that random checks on proof of residency would be demanded of

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the mid-1950s for external and internal reasons (Sison, 2004). The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) emerged as the umbrella group of fourteen underground revolutionary organizations, including the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the National People's Army (NPA) currently engaged in armed combat with government troops. Before September 11, 2001, and the bombing of the towers in New York, the NDFP was the official negotiating body for the various revolutionary organizations to end the fighting and explore political options. The existence of the NDFP was considered by many to fall within the framework of the numerous UN General Assembly resolutions affirming a people's legal right to struggle for self-determination. The 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) declared that "the right to self-determination, a fundamental principle of human rights law, is an individual and collective right to freely determine political status and freely pursue economic, social and cultural development." The International Court of Justice recognizes this right as held by people rather than a right held by governments alone. After the US invasion of Iraq and the unleashing of the "war against terror" the CPP and NPA have been put on a "terrorist list" and Jose Maria Sison, the Chairperson of the CPP, is currently fighting in the courts to have his name removed from such a list. Members of the negotiating panel in exile in the Netherlands have been allowed to enter and stay in the Philippines under the protection of the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) during negotiations. This agreement has been constantly under threat during the Arroyo regime.

foreign workers, who could be stopped and checked at any time. Those who were going to be stopped were presumably "foreign-looking," non-white people, many of whom are Filipinos. Chona and the organization she belongs to have organized women to face the immediate problems of trying to remain in the Netherlands and avoiding being deported. Veronica also described the grave difficulties faced by undocumented Filipinos.

...for many of the women outside of the country [Philippines] their problems get subsumed under the bigger problem [which] is their being migrants here, their being undocumented... their being women becomes secondary. In fact, you can see that men who come here cannot get domestic work. It is the women... Before we had the *Purple Rose Campaign* on behalf of those being trafficked. But now most of the sex trafficking is more of Eastern Europeans since the fall of the [Berlin] wall. When it comes to our women, I think the bigger problem is the loss of their role. But...the women still help each other. But because of their loneliness, it is as if they tolerate so much, so we have to give women's orientation. How do we view such situations [of abuse]? Do we condemn it? Do we...what? How do we understand it? Personally, even if I am in a women's organization, I don't always see how to have a healthy... women's movement, as movement, as an organization, doing support work for the migrants, for the undocumented...but that is the opening, the women's question.

The situation of migrant workers is so desperate that Filipino men may envy women their ability to find menial, low-paid, illegal domestic work, and Filipino women may resent being displaced by Eastern Europeans in the sex trade. National solidarity among Filipinos and gender solidarity among women are difficult to maintain in such dire circumstances.

Veronica and Patty shared a particular perspective, as exiled women activists living abroad but actively engaged in peace negotiations with the Philippine government as well as in the problems facing Filipinos in the Netherlands. While they sometimes return to the Philippines for joint monitoring activities with representatives of the Philippine government, their direct participation in Philippine affairs is mostly from a distance. Both of them view Filipino migration from the perspective of political and economic forces that force people of all classes to leave their country, as Patty explained:

...when we first came to Europe [late '70s], there were not many Filipinos. It was only the start of the migration, the exodus. It was only the start and now



it's the hemorrhage na, it's talagang [really] hemorrhage na [already]. And in the beginning, I thought we were different from them in the sense that we had to leave the Philippines because of political reasons, not because of economic reasons. And as more and more came out, parang [it was like], then I realized, we are part of this whole phenomenon because there are also many who have come out for political reasons and not only for economic reasons. And that's also where I feel yong [like] I'm part of this whole phenomenon and parang [as if] it really saddens me because the Philippines is such a rich country, that there are no jobs and people are forced to leave their homeland.

These forces led them to continue to work on the larger issues affecting Filipinos at home, from their far-removed location and perspective abroad. They were both originally involved in the national democratic movement of the Philippines, which followed the tradition of resistance and struggle to address deep economic and social problems, as revealed and directly opposed during the Marcos years. Veronica sees the present situation as a continuation of that struggle for basic survival, accompanied by the dream of a better life:

I do all sorts of work...directly related to liberation because I do secretariat work for the peace negotiations...in the office of the NDF Information Office. [To me] the connection is very clear. ...there are two transformations...society and the individual; society because of the objective reality that [people] want transformation, of course to make their lives better. Then...the person... to have some extra while others [continue to] live with so little. [In the struggle] it's like we are all wanting for everything...at least we are all together in this until the time will come when we will have sufficient things, or even more than we need...to eat...[and have] the biggest...luxury in life, and that is time. Why do I say this...because the poor do not have control even of their time because their time is dedicated to survive, so he has no luxury to read...she doesn't have...not like the First World countries, where after work, there is time for my material needs, and even more, cultural needs...they can go to the museum...for one's own development. But for us, it is only survival. All our activities are for surviving.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Original: All sorts kasi...directly related sa liberation kasi nag se-secretariat work ako para sa peace negotiation...nasa opisina ng NDF Information Office. So lahat yan in terms of a...kitang-kita na directly related...malinaw yong connection...dalawang transformation 'yan, eh...lipunanat saka sa individual. Yung sa lipunan kasi doon sa objective reality nila, yong gusto nilang transformation, siyempre yung kabuhayan ng tao mapabuti. Tapos...ang tao...parang...mayroong nakakasobra...yong iba kulang na kulang. Sa simula parang lahat kulang pa rin...at least sabay-sabay tayong kulang hanggang dumating ang panahon sapat-sapat na hanggang sumobra yong ano...to eat...the biggest...yong pinakamalaking luxury sa buhay yong time. Bakit ko sinasabi...ang mahirap wala sa disposisyon ang kaniyang panahon kasi and kaniyang panahon kailangan niyang i-ukol sa pag-survive, so he has no luxury to read, wala siyang...di katulad sa First World countries, pagkatapos magtrabaho, naano nila itong ganitong oras is for*

Whether in exile or as immigrants, the women interviewed in the Netherlands addressed women-specific needs, both in the context of the Netherlands and in their connection to the situation in the Philippines. The two women directly involved in “big picture” negotiations with the Philippine government named the “woman question” as a challenge to be analyzed and addressed in relation to the national agenda, and Veronica (N1) commented on the tensions competing priorities can produce:

In the first place, even for us women, the women’s movement should have its own agenda, meaning that in our day-to-day struggle, we shouldn’t forget that we have an agenda that we are pushing and...we know will meet resistance even among our allies in the larger [national] movement...even among our ranks, among the women, [because] we do not all have the same awareness about the woman’s issue. That’s why it is the obligation of the women’s movement... that the women in the bigger struggle increase the awareness about the women’s question.<sup>25</sup>

The “woman question” usually refers to gender inequity based on the role of women in reproduction and production within a feudal, capitalist, and class-organized society. The connection of the “woman question” to today’s exploitation of overseas domestic workers is clear to the activists abroad. As women in the upper classes in Europe, North America, and elsewhere move into the public production areas of the capitalist enterprise, they do so, as I often hear migrant workers say, “on the backs of poor, brown women,” often confining Majority World women to domestic exploitation, less than minimum wages, and lower social status, abroad as well as at home. Yet the specific effects of globalization on women are not sufficiently acknowledged, even within

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*my material needs, lampas nito, cultural niya...nakakapunta siya sa museum...naano niya ang kaniyang development. Pero sa atin sa anong survival lang. Lahat ng pag-aano naka ano sa pag-survive.*

<sup>25</sup> *Original: In the first place, kahit sa atin mga kababaihan, yung women’s movement should have its own agenda, ibig sabihin, sa day-today struggle natin dapat hindi natin kinakalimutan na may agenda tayong pinu-push at yang agenda na ‘yan...alam natin may resistance kahit dun sa kasama natin sa malaking struggle so ibigibig sabihin among our ranks yung mga kababihan, kahit na tayo di lahat tayo pare-pareho ng awareness tungkol sa women’s question.*

progressive movements. These three women's stories all reflect how they have come to this conclusion.

***The Story of a Woman in Exile: Veronica (N1)***

As previously explained, Veronica, who belongs to the same generation as Marita, now works for the secretariat of the National Democratic Front (NDF) at their Information Office, and is involved in the peace negotiations between the NDF and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) negotiation teams. I was surprised that she spoke mostly in Tagalog, with a spattering of English, in spite of being well educated. She explained that she became involved in activist work in the Philippines when she was in high school in 1971, and participated in the tail-end of the students' movement before Martial Law was declared in 1972. She had already heard of the National Union of Students in the Philippines (NUSP), as representatives (nuns) came to her high school in 1970.

...I began...even before '71...I was still in high school...the NUSP, they were the moderates then. Then later, I got involved when I went to Manila...Martial Law... I became active and joined MAKIBAKA, which was a women's organization.

Later, when she went to Manila, she became involved (like Fely, the academic woman in the Philippines), in MAKIBAKA, the first women's movement formed within the national struggle.

As for Marita, her early experiences had to do with her increased awareness, having come from a relatively privileged background, following a protest rally.

...that was the beginning of my involvement, with a woman's organization... because I came from a "petit bourgeois" background, the first time I joined a SONA [State of the Nation Address rally], it was very memorable. That's where I saw...I could compare one's life coming from the middle class when you saw the...poor...that's where you saw the lives of those from the middle class.

Like Marita, Veronica emphasizes her own critical examination of her class background when, as a student, she first had contact with those from less privileged classes. As in the case of Inday, Veronica's choice of Tagalog to communicate may be part of her effort at breaking down

the class differential (see the earlier discussion of language use). Veronica is often dealing with economically marginalized migrant women. She felt that the immigration/ documentation issue is a critical one for Filipino women in the Netherlands, and a starting point for educating and orienting them to larger gender and class issues.

The issues that are being addressed are the changes in society...to liberate Filipinos from their current situation of being oppressed and being taken advantage of...but of course this is long range. In the meantime, and this is clear to us, the possibility of achieving this in our lifetime, but in the meantime, little by little, we do what we can today to change opinions, address the immediate needs in terms of welfare, rights and welfare, and these are together, the immediate and the long range. Even if you are working on the immediate, the long range objective is in the back of your mind...but it [the work] is the day-to-day.

She sees the connection with what she fought for in the Philippines to her work today even while living in the Netherlands.

I have always been of the opinion that our work abroad, because there are a lot of Filipinos here, [is that] you create...you change opinion about the struggle in the Philippines. I used to work in the late '70s to support work for the regions [even if] you were city-based. I see this as similar to the work abroad. It is to support work at home. Now the support work [for the Philippines] may take various or specific particularities, because [for example] the NDF information office is here in Holland and [my] work [there] is different from the work in the [Philippine] community.

Having an organization that does "support work" for migrants is important, but she asks, "What about building a women's movement?" She believes that women can be organized around this specific issue with the purpose of creating a healthy women's movement, and that grassroots women's organizing can play an important role in helping to build ties across geographical borders, as women recognize the common elements in their struggles.

### ***The Story of a Second Woman in Exile: Patty (N2)***

Patty, who is close in age to Ayo and Fely, spoke only in English for the interview, even though she speaks Tagalog fluently. Like Veronica, she lives in exile in the Netherlands and works in the National Democratic Front (NDF) office in Utrecht. As well as being a member of the NDF Negotiating Panel for peace talks with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP)

she is part of the Joint Monitoring Committee which oversees the compliance and violations by either party of the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL). She also serves as the international spokesperson for MAKIBAKA, the national women's organization previously discussed, and does secretariat work for the International Association of People's Lawyers. She mentioned the sugar workers strike in Negros as a turning point for her.

Oh god, it's such long story because I'm so old. [Both laugh.] I'll just briefly say that I got involved in the struggle of sugar workers and peasants, first in Cebu. They were not sugar workers, but more the struggles of the people...which helped politicalize me and then getting involved with the struggles of sugar workers and centres in Negros. And then with the declaration of Martial Law, I went underground and became more involved in the whole revolutionary movement and then got arrested, got imprisoned, then when I was released from prison. ...in-between, before Martial Law, at the start of Martial Law, I got married to L. and then when we were released from prison, he began to work with the Church Labor Center and I began to work for a...solidarity work for the sugar workers because I couldn't go back to Negros, so it was in Manila, and we had to go underground again, and then [we went] abroad to do international work...so, since late 1976, I had been...abroad. Like what I mentioned now, that's only what I am doing for the past so many years. But in the past, it was only helping to organize Filipinos, also helping build solidarity groups for the Philippines.

Patty, who was from an upper-class landowning family, first became politicized while living in the Visayas region, learning about and working for the struggle of sugar workers and peasants. Like Fely, under Martial Law in the early '70s she had to go underground because of her previous political activities, and became more involved in the larger national liberation movement. Like Inday and Fely she was arrested, imprisoned, and later released. For these women, imprisonment was a key test of the seriousness of their role in political struggle. Being held in prison put them in solidarity with other women arrested for political reasons and appears to have intensified their commitment and made them even more resolute in their subsequent involvement. Patty had links to the Church, through her husband, who worked with a Roman Catholic labor centre. She could not return to the Visayas for fear of re-arrest, and when the political situation worsened, she, her husband, and a newborn son went to the Netherlands in

1976. Patty is of a similar age to Darla (V2) in Canada, and shares with her and the younger women in Vancouver (Marilyn and Michelle) an on-going passionate determination to continue to address the systemic injustices in the Philippines from afar. Because of the distance and limited opportunities to return to the Philippines, she is increasingly involved with the cause of undocumented Filipino women in the the Netherlands. Over the years, she has focused on systemic problems at home and abroad through her participation in negotiations with various Philippine governments.

***The Story of an Immigrant Woman in a Women's Organization: Chona (N3)***

Like Veronica, Chona could speak Tagalog, but, as explained earlier, since her own preferred dialect/regional language (Visayan) was not shared by the interviewer she chose to respond in English. She appeared more at ease in Visayan when speaking to others. Once again, like most of the other women interviewed who are now in their late 40s or 50s, her initial politicization was aroused during the Marcos era. Like Patty, she was from the landowning upper class and witnessed the sugar workers' struggles.

Well, I was in high school during the Martial Law years ...we come from Negros Occidental, which has been described as the social volcano of the Philippines because of the situation of sugar workers...and my mom was working with the Christian Family Life something...office of the Bishop, of the diocese. And next to her office was the Social Action office. [A colleague here] was at that time the Social Action Director....we are also quite close family and working together. My mom became very involved in the struggle of the sugar workers in the office of the Social Action. And...so, she brought home this experience, this social experience to us as children....and also my own family come from the landed families so I grew up with the reality, seeing the reality of sugar workers in the haciendas. And I also witnessed the kind of situations and oppression that they experienced. So I grew up with that and here comes my mom with all this excitement about a better way of life and better social relations, better working relations for workers. And she brought that home to us with a lot of optimism as young children growing up. So, it became part of my own, how do you say, conscious re-molding, ganoon [like that]. And then, in high school as well, because...I was educated in a Catholic girls' school, so of course you get all this sort of social action kind of activities for young women and more exposure to the social realities of the time. And when I went to university in the University of the Philippines then I became

even more exposed to...this time the organized response [of] young people to the social problems in the Philippines.

In contrast to some of the other middle- or upper-class women interviewed, who came from urban backgrounds and had to find out how the poor lived, Chona grew up in a clearly class-structured rural environment where informal contact with the sugar workers was easy for her as a child although her family were their employers. Her intimate knowledge of their harsh conditions ultimately led her to side with them in conflicts with landowners like her grandparents. Like Patty, she had close links to the Church. Her remarks on her mother's attitude illustrate the role the Roman Catholic Church played in allowing upper-class women to appear to be in solidarity with the poor, whom their families were economically exploiting. This "do-gooder" charitable approach was not enough for Chona.

...my experience with families of sugar workers...in the hacienda, actually the hacienda of my grandparents, but we grew up there. So you know, as a young child, the children of the sugar workers were my friends. And you know when you're a child, you don't know about class borders. And then as you grow up you begin to realize that...there's a totally different social order to things. Then...like...you start questioning.

Her mother's desire to seek better social and working relations with the workers nevertheless influenced her later activism. In high school, she engaged in social action activities which exposed her to other social realities of the time, and by the time she went to the state university, she was ready to become part of the organized response of young people to the social and economic problems of the Philippines. Like Patty, her sympathy for the sugar workers turned into active support for their resistance.

Ah...the strike of the sugar workers in Victorias [Negros]. That was a big sugar milling company and...all the sugar workers went on strike, those who were working on the hacienda because of the poor working conditions. So that...stands in my memory of those times.

Now working as a nurse, Chona resides permanently in the Netherlands, actively organizing Filipino women who arrive as tourists, marry Dutch men, or remain as undocumented workers (mostly domestic). Marked like several of the others by her own experience of the Martial Law

years, although like Marita she was only in high school, Chona works, like Veronica and Patty who are somewhat older, towards similar national objectives from a transnational location.

### **Women Living in Canada: Vancouver, BC**

The women in Vancouver, BC, belong to a grassroots community women's organization that came into existence because of the growing need to address the hardships of Filipino women, most of whom came as nannies under Canada Immigration's Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP) initiated in 1993.<sup>26</sup> While struggling with day-to-day issues of women migrant workers in Canada as the basis of their grassroots organization, they also have a broader view from abroad of their on-going role in the Philippine democratic movement. From their overseas perspective the women in Vancouver named certain issues more readily as transnational. They focused on forced migration, the on-going need for "national liberation" in the Philippines, and the international struggle against (primarily US) imperialism. They also address these issues as members of Canadian society, and have been involved in a number of significant research projects related to the situation of Filipino women in Canada.<sup>27</sup> The women-specific issues they raised made this connectivity even more evident. Darla (V1) saw the direct relationship

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<sup>26</sup> In the 1970s, when the first wave of Filipino migration to Canada occurred, professionals, including many registered nurses, came to Canada from the Philippines to fill the shortage of skilled professionals in Canada's fast-growing economy. These women, including one of the women interviewed for this study, came as landed immigrants and went straight to nursing jobs. In the 1980s, a new policy allowed domestic workers as a category into Canada under the Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM), the precursor to the LCP. Professionally trained Filipino women began to enter in larger numbers at that time as nannies. Statistics Canada 2004 indicated that many Filipino immigrants and migrant workers are university graduates, and most have a minimum of two years post-secondary training or education. Of the foreign nannies in Canada, 95% are Filipino. Many are new graduates in nursing or are registered nurses in the Philippines. The Filipino Nurses Support Group (FNSG) in Vancouver advocates for nurses who are currently on the LCP program. Given Canada's nursing shortage, FNSG is campaigning for the permanent residence status and accreditation of Filipino nurses presently in Canada on temporary work visas under the LCP, to enable them to practice as professional nurses, just as Filipino women were able to do in the 1970s. See Cecilia Diocson, "Filipino Women in Canada's Live-In Caregiver Program," a draft report by the NAPWC to Status of Women Canada, February, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> See bibliography for publications by the Philippine Women Centre of BC.



between the migration of women and the circumstances in the Philippines, as well as the role of transnational women's organizations in the Philippines and abroad, while Michelle (V3) talked about the need for consistent advocacy and education for women who have migrated to become domestic workers in Canada. Marilyn (V2) emphasized the work needed with the women abroad to raise their consciousness about the structural and systemic reasons for their own problems and those in the Philippines.

All three women from Vancouver mentioned the multiple tasks with which working and activist women are now saddled, but which can also strengthen them. They elaborated that these involve not only the general economic demands and hardships women struggle to overcome, but also their changing role as breadwinners in the global market and as the majority in migration, even as their role as women in domestic settings continues. Achieving economic security for the family is now a woman's task. While Filipino men also continue to work abroad for their families, commonly as seafarers or construction workers, the opportunities for women to work in domestic, factory, technology, or outsourcing work globally have increased. Women are fast becoming the main labour source to satisfy the growing demands of the global market. Many accommodations are made by migrant women, in order to make a living and also hold the family together. Their children, husbands, parents, and extended families are also making sacrifices as women leave to work abroad. Initially, their number one priority is the survival of their own family (whether it is in the Philippines or in Canada) and a better future for them. Later, as they become involved in the local community, they realize that their concerns are shared and can be faced collectively, and some develop as leaders. Ultimately, they contribute to advancing the local community, while also learning from the past histories and stories of Filipino women, through formal information sharing and cross-generational communication.

As well as the problems of combining family life, work, and activism (also addressed by the women of the Philippines and the Netherlands), the women in Vancouver raised issues related to dual nationality and divided allegiance due to migration. All three highlighted the importance for them of knowing the history of women's work and the women's movement in the Philippines. They spoke of advancing women's work (whether paid work or not) "historically," seeing that what is being done today is consistent and continuous with the history of women's struggle and resistance. Darla explained her reasons for being an activist and her understanding of feminist praxis:

So what is this in our women's practice that is a living practice? I think the very fact that we do it everyday, we just don't wait until we're mobilizing. We do not look at it as a job. I think it's a very good example of women's practice. If you're organizing your family everyday, if you're going around and doing this work, why can you not do it as your social practice? Are women already liberated? So that's always the big question. Because if women are already liberated, then we don't have to do this...but women are not yet liberated. So why are you not continuing to do it? Why are we not practicing it? Why are we forgetting the work that the women [had] done even in the '60s and '70s? You know these are very recent history. We can go beyond that. But why is it that they [the women] are not practicing? It must be part of your life as a woman.

The experience of migration is seen by many women, including Darla, as a "historical accident;" as part of a larger movement of population. A Filipino family may have come to Canada pushed by different types of crisis in different decades, and populations here now include a generation of children of immigrants, whether professionals needed by Canada in the '60s-'70s or nannies pulled in in the '80s-'90s. Like the women in the Philippines and those in the Netherlands, Darla, the only woman interviewed in Vancouver of that generation, traces her development as an activist to her experiences in the Philippines. Having been born and raised in Canada, the other two women in Vancouver (Marilyn and Michelle) link their involvement to the complex cross-generational experiences of migration and transplantation.

***The Story of a Woman in a Women's Organization Abroad: Darla (V1)***

Darla, a trained nurse, came as an immigrant to Canada in 1984, as a qualified professional. Now in her 50s, her activism in the Philippines began when she was a second-year nursing student in 1971, at the height of the student movement. She was involved in demonstrations, including those in her nursing school, which was "very strict." The students were not allowed to leave the campus unless they had permission, could only go home once a month at certain times, and could only go out, within the city limits, during weekends. So when organizing, studying politics, or attending demonstrations, they had to "be creative on how to leave the dormitories." One of their campaigns in the 1970s was to protest against the strict regulations and policies of the gated school that demanded that the students be "ladylike." Like Marita, she describes a protest by women students against restrictions on what to wear. When not in nursing uniform, the students were not allowed to wear pants, and had to wear closed shoes and not sandals or "half-shoes." They sent a delegation to the principal and the teachers, who finally acquiesced, and immediately she and her small group wore "hipster" pants with big belts and buckles.

Q: So that first protest was purposeful, against those particular rules.

A: Yeah, against those rules. And we thought, oh yeah, we are really like liberated here. We achieved our freedom without the school knowing it [wearing what they wanted behind administrators' backs]. I personally was very rebellious in school. I had to go to other quarters, you know, other dormitories, especially the junior one, freshmen or freshwomen. So...I had to go there because we're the seniors, and do the organizing. And to do the organizing, I had to let them know, this is what's happening in school. We have to really fight against this kind of restriction and oppression. But we didn't really use the term 'oppression' at that time. You know, it's just, we see this authority and we have to go against their authority in school. So that was the whole idea there. Six of us, we're quite close because we're also in the same kind of group in our nursing duties and all that. We're quite tight. We're able to talk among each other. And this one particular person, she's more senior to us in age and she did not live in the dormitory. So she's the one bringing us news from outside, connecting with other activists outside. And she also got involved really more deep with the activism outside. So she's introducing these ideas, introducing us to these people and the leading activists in the city. So we really quite enjoyed it because, you know, you're...in the loop[as they say today]...we're not isolated from other members of our class; we immediately

defined ourselves to be part of this kind of elite group. They call themselves aristocrats and we call ourselves the strikers. And we just have to follow our own perspective at that time. And so sometimes [they] didn't want to be related to anything we do, and especially those aspiring for higher grades. We told them oh, it's fine if you want to have that interest, it's okay, you know. But this is about freedom, this is about the struggle that we can do, and resist, these oppressive teachers and institution.

Like Marita's stories about her early political involvement, Darla's experiences reflect some degree of ambivalence related to femininity (clothes, beauty) in the female students' youthful protests. Unwittingly, the fight for the right to wear whatever they wanted foreshadowed a future focus on the systemic oppression of women's bodies or the objectification of women as objects in the fashion industry. While they were still young, these early protests become more channeled towards political issues, including resisting the subjugation of women, and the "feminine" images and roles imposed on them. Darla describes how, later, the actions became more and more intense. Another student in her group became more involved with the "activism outside," which she brought into the nursing school, and the authorities were afraid that student activists (considered very "radical") would come to the school, hold rallies, and eventually "destroy the school." Also, many students in the '70s (including activists) dropped out of school. Unlike other members of their class, whom they labeled "elite," Darla and her classmates called themselves the "strikers" when they resisted and opposed their teachers and the institution, using a rhetoric associated with the working class. At one point, Darla organized the students to engage in a dialogue with the principal and the other instructors, disrupting classes for three days. Although isolated from other students elsewhere, they succeeded in having a special forum with the principal and instructors where they challenged authority and asserted their rights. As a consequence, Darla was "targeted" by the principal. In 1972, just before graduation, she was given 74% when the passing mark was 75%, told she could not graduate, and threatened with expulsion. They were unable to expel her because of her history of high grades, so the principal asked Darla to accompany her to Manila, thinking that in doing this she

could convince Darla to give up her activism. In the end Darla did graduate, and continued with her political activism.

However, Darla's early struggles resumed when she was again isolated and not given a job in a government hospital because of her activism, while other co-graduates had already obtained positions. Her experience speaks to the danger and risks of political activism, which can lead to exclusion on personal and professional levels. Finally, she had found a job as a staff nurse at a private hospital, when Martial Law was declared in 1972. Activists she knew were arrested and imprisoned. Some abandoned their political work, possibly because of their experience of prison or other personal challenges, while she continued. Speaking of another activist, she said:

Unfortunately, this woman did not continue her activism and her perspective about Filipino people's liberation...It's sad but at the same time, what can you do...[but] I still know of people who continue to be in the movement until now, still going strong. [Others] until now they're telling me, are you still the same? I said, what do you mean the same? I always ask them to define what they want, what do they mean when they tell me I'm "still the same." I said, no I'm not the same anymore. I started that way, but I advanced, so I'm not the same.

The reasons why some women continue their activism over the years, while others do not, are varied and complex. Personal circumstances and personality differences play a role, as sustaining one's personal commitment to political work is a daunting process that requires much sacrifice. As we will see later, these women described activities and other factors that help sustain them as activists, especially the positive aspects of working within a community context.

At present, Darla practices nursing while continuing as a volunteer at the women's organization in Montreal (PWC Quebec), as well as being Chairperson of the National Association of Philippine Women in Canada (NAPWC) formed in 2004. While they are one generation apart in age and experiences, Darla and Marilyn (V2) are leaders in the national organization of Filipino

women in Canada, with Marilyn having the additional role of participation in an international organization.

***The Story of a Woman Born Abroad: Marilyn (V2)***

When Marilyn, who is in her thirties, was growing up in a city in central Canada in the 1970s and '80s, her parents, although living in Canada as immigrants rather than exiles, were involved in the anti-Marcos movement. The expatriate Filipino community where she was living was in solidarity with the struggles in the Philippines, particularly the human rights issues prominent in the '80s. Even when Cory Aquino came to power, after Marcos was ousted by People Power I in 1986, discussion of what was happening in the Philippines continued to be brought up-to-date by visitors, increasing the awareness of Filipinos in Canada and other Canadians. When she was in high school, Marilyn saw and heard leaders from churches (mostly Roman Catholic and some Protestant) who were working in solidarity with peasants and workers, as well as many others from the Philippines who were sponsored by the Filipino community to interact with Filipinos abroad as well as with Canadians. Her parents, who became more openly political in Canada, invited these people to their home.

After Cory came to power in '86...I understood more...there was a whole tour in 1991 of peasant leaders from the Philippines [to Canada], and the people's theatre, PETA [Philippine Educational Theater Association] came...(and) the KMU [*Kilusang Mayo Uno / May First Movement*] human rights lawyers. So I had all those people in our house when we were in high school.

Later, in university, she took many history courses, including courses in imperialism, Third World de-colonization, etc. After graduating from Law School and before articling, although born in Canada, she said, "I'd like to go back to the Philippines". While there in 1992, she did an internship in the legal field with an NGO, attended the Human Rights Centre at the Jesuit university, and got married.

And then in university I started to think more about my identity as a Filipino-Canadian and tried to understand what was happening in the Philippines...but I think what happened was that [I was] trying to integrate the academic with my personal experience...but it was only really when I went [back to the Philippines]...I mean I knew all these things but I [was] not fully experiencing it.

While there she learned about the liberation struggle in the Philippines and the urban mass movements, which were confusing during the post-Marcos time because of splits and reconciliations. When she compares her experience with those who have returned or gone to the Philippines more recently, she felt that the national movement was not as strong then as it is now. She added that the women's coalition, on the other hand, was strong even at that time. She is currently practicing law and is a volunteer at the PWC and for the national association, particularly on legal matters and policy research. She is also on the board of an international organization whose members are advocating for the rights of peoples who seek their liberation and sovereignty.

Although born in Canada, Marilyn, like other children of immigrants, especially those of colour, continues to carry the identity/burden of being perceived as a "migrant" and bears the consequences of her parents' displacement. Speaking of the second generation, she said:

[Depending on which wave of immigration] ...when they come to the political work and try to understand...[they need to] lose that sense of privilege...that...I'm in a different place. Well, why are you in a different place? What is the historical thing that's happening there...in the end, you're still a migrant...a migrant-immigrant. You're still a worker, so you're located on the other side of the contradiction [marginalized worker/privileged North American].

Marilyn points out an underlying assumption common among Filipinos, that being born in North America, or having moved there (or even just working there), automatically puts one in a more "privileged" position than if one were in the Philippines. This idea, ingrained in many, gives credence and legitimacy to the personal desire to go abroad. Marilyn believes that transnational feminists need to dispell the "privileging" of migration, for individuals and for women in general,

and educate those who leave about the negative effects of economic and political policies that displace Filipino women from their families and their homeland.

She also explained that in some women's organizations in Canada new members come into the organization as "feminists right away," already conscious of women's issues at the grassroots or theoretical levels, but for many Filipino women it is the organization that brings them to gender analysis. Most of the other women in this study related how they came to a feminist understanding through experiences of oppression on grounds other than (or in addition to) those based on gender. As a Filipino woman born in Canada, Marilyn already knew a good deal about racial and gender-based discrimination, but felt she had to learn to understand what was going on in the Philippines through studying the nation's history and politics. Her subsequent firsthand experience in the Philippines confirmed her impression that she needed to analyze and assess women's problems there as not only, or immediately and obviously, gender-based.

...it's only when I began to really see the view with the people, then I realized that women's [problems]...I can be analyzed from a gender perspective...[but] it wasn't the starting point...this particular Majority World women's movement...it's a different starting point.

Her development as an activist deepened when she joined a youth organization that focused on experiences of racism in Canadian secondary schools and in the workplace, as well as the growing presence of second generation children of migrant workers and their socio-economic challenges.

### ***The Story of a Second Woman Born Abroad: Michelle (V3)***

Like Marilyn, Michelle was born and raised in Canada and is now in her thirties. In the Philippines, her parents were politically involved to the extent that middle-class professionals grew more vocal in their opposition to the Marcos regime and later became organized and more



visible in their protests. Although her parents came as independent immigrants in the late 1960s, they did so to escape the crises during this period of political upheaval. She first became politically involved when she was invited to attend a national conference in 1993 sponsored by a Filipino-Canadian youth group in a city in central Canada that was started by her sister who had spent two years in the Philippines. As a student, Michelle wanted to study Philippine history and was frustrated by the lack of resources to do so in her college.

Well, I'm from Winnipeg. It was through my sister because she ... became active when she graduated from college. She went to the Philippines and spent a year or two there. And then she came back to do her, what do you call it, her bar exams. She was contacted by some former kasamas [companions, fellow-activists] who live in Winnipeg and so they [approached] her to be an organizer and then she started a group with the youth, so that was the thing that she invited me to attend ...with the youth, a first national Filipino youth consultation, I think it was '93, I was still in college at the time. So that was the first event that I attended. And it really peaked my interest because at that time I was a history major in college and wanted to study Philippine history because ...I was also searching for my own identity but couldn't find anything in the school, because I took every kind of history that would be as close to Philippine history as I could get to, Asian history like China, India, Japan, then I took indigenous North American people's history, Latin American history, all these kinds of histories, but nothing about the Philippines. So when I went to the consultation, my interest was really peaked because I also heard R., that time he came to Toronto and gave a talk on Philippine history and that's the first time that I ever heard of the Philippine-American war, which was shocking for me 'cause I knew nothing about it and I was surprised that Filipinos were killed during that war, so that's when I started getting more interested... because at that time, I was also involved in feminist, so-called, whatever ... I was studying women's studies but it was also influenced too by bourgeois feminism ...we even studied things like Gloria Steinem, like what do you call it, little groups, or whatever, we're talking your personal making it the political.

Like Leslie in the Philippines, Michelle's experience of learning about western feminism seemed irrelevant to the issues she wanted to address:

In some ways it helped, but then on the other hand, we had no analysis like political analysis or understanding, so it just didn't go anywhere because we were just talking about scattered things. We had no analysis.

After she joined the youth group, they organized an action against a beauty pageant/ scholarship contest sponsored by a traditional religious group, a type of protest that had been

undertaken by women much earlier in the Philippines. Michelle began to question and critique the “traditional role of Filipino women” as hyper-feminine, and that, in turn, helped her to understand her own identity. After moving to Vancouver she became active in the formation and development of the Filipino-Canadian youth organization there. Later, she lived in the Philippines for four years, learned Tagalog, and worked as a researcher and writer for a community data research organization. At the time of the interview she had recently returned to Canada, and is now a community organizer. Although her parents live a comfortable middle-class life in Vancouver, she was herself struggling as an economically marginalized single mother, raising her two children in a collective Filipino community.<sup>28</sup>

...I ‘m also living in a collective, the co-op housing of the Philippine Women Centre, so that’s where some of the women stay, the ones who are transitional. So from that to deepening education, organizing them, and also other sectors, like the second generation (who are), like myself, facing the impact of the forced migration of our parents, within an identity crisis. So we’re trying to deepen our understanding of our history, and then connecting it to our own experience, and then devoting ourselves and our lives to serving the community so that we can also help organize and change the situation for Filipinos here in Canada, for my kids, for the next generation, future generation, and then tying it back to the Philippines too.

Michelle continues to serve as a volunteer for the community organization (PWC), advocating for the rights and welfare of migrant workers, particularly women on the LCP.

Like Marilyn’s, Michelle’s story reflects some of the struggles of women of Filipino heritage born abroad. Her need to define her identity as a Filipino woman is significant. Like Darla, she asserted her voice as a young student, grounded herself in community, and became instrumental in organizing that community, although the contexts of where they were born and the times under which they were raised were different.

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<sup>28</sup> Michelle has since moved from the collective to her parents’ basement suite. Undoubtedly, this change helps in her child care and housing needs. Another single mother, a former LCP migrant worker, is raising one child in the collective co-op housing. While fortunate to have this arrangement through the Philippine Women Centre, she does not have the same alternative to consider that Michelle has.

## Summary

In summary, evoking common beginnings and struggles in spite of their respective geographical locations and age or class differences, the women interviewed shared experiences of hardship and successful resistance. They all see themselves as advocates for those less privileged than themselves, especially women, and analyse the issues they are addressing in terms of current globalization policies as well as national history. For some of them, early discontent in their youth was due to local issues in the Philippines, but their understanding has expanded to include national and global perspectives. For the younger women who were already situated abroad, the expansion of their understanding was in the other direction, towards the national situation. The initial political awakening of all twelve women developed into different types of activism at local, national, and transnational levels. They have all made personal and collective sacrifices along the way, including prison and exile for some, and continue to take risks in the present.<sup>29</sup> They are still committed to action, because life for most Filipinos at home is not getting any better, and the mass migration of Filipino women does not offer solutions to long-term systemic problems, even if it may ensure short-term individual survival. They see that this diasporic phenomenon is causing new types of social problems, such as family separation and displacement, as well as ultimately perpetuating poverty at home and abroad. These women activists undertake the actions they deem necessary for future nation-building, while also responding to the urgent needs of the women with whom they live and work.

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<sup>29</sup> Some women may have been reluctant to reveal the full extent of their hardships, for reasons of personal reservation or modesty, including those who experienced imprisonment and torture or marriage break-up. For those abroad, as well as facing material problems there is the psychological sense of separation and loss of identity and history, which is not always easy to talk about.

They all raised issues related to gender and class, for themselves and for the women they work with from various sectors. They recognize that ideas from western feminism may or may not be useful or appropriate in the context of the Philippines or of migration, and their understanding of feminist praxis comes specifically from their perspective as leftist Filipino activist women. They see gender issues as relating to and inseparable from national tensions and problems, as women often carry the daily burden of economic survival as breadwinners, along with ongoing subordinate status as women. Fely (A) pointed to connections with women activists in social revolutions in other countries (Latin America, South Africa, and other parts of Asia) and others emphasized the need to sustain communication among transnational Filipino women as they share women-specific issues and struggles related to displacement. Their accounts of their initial and ongoing actions help us to understand their participation as women in a specific social change movement, and they all conveyed a strong sense of the history of the national struggle in the Philippines, and the strong role of women in it.

The women interviewed (except for Ayo) share similar backgrounds to my own in terms of education, language, religion, and financial means. As in other movements, many activist leaders come from the relatively privileged classes. Their educational preparation, material security, and social confidence have given them a level of empowerment and recognition not often available to poor women too preoccupied with basic survival to become full-time activists and leaders. Most of these women have attempted to engage in solidarity work across class lines, as they have reconfigured their values and attitudes towards the less privileged. They struggle to acknowledge this, and some have chosen to renounce economic and physical security. Ayo (UP)'s story highlights the opposite, upward socio-economic struggle of a marginalized woman, empowered through raised awareness and community education, made available to her through the work of women in the privileged category. She also is aware of the need to work in solidarity with women of other social classes towards achieving their common

objectives, to improve the social and economic status of women and remove gender-based discrimination. In the Philippines as elsewhere, the complex intersections of gender and class are apparent, but these are compounded by race and colonial history in the Philippines and racialized hierarchies in the host countries. Tracing the intersections of class, gender, and race will continue in the next chapter, which will look more closely at tensions between a traditional model of domestic femininity that still governs most Filipino women's lives, including these activists', and the outspoken independence actually demonstrated by them.

In the quotation from Ninotchka Rosca, of *GABRIELA*, cited at the epigraph to Part II, she poses two central questions that are illuminated by these women's stories. First, "whether the nature of women's participation in social transformation movements is the same as that of men," and second, "whether a specific dialectic crucial to the eradication of women's oppression can evolve out of women's participation in social movements." Chapter 5 will focus on the first question, looking at the ways in which these women's activism is marked and affected by their lives as women, negotiating their commitment to family and the domestic sphere while engaging in public political activities. Chapter 6 will discuss the ways in which their social and political engagement illustrates a feminist praxis that aims to eliminate women's oppression by deploying strategies that evolve from their situation as women, and provide a model for any community activism. This analysis seeks to answer Rosca's second question, as a dialectic evolves between the experience of oppression and the struggle against it, using tools that derive from that oppression.

## CHAPTER 5

### DOMESTICITY AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Subjugation, for women from colonized parts of the world, occurs on two intersecting levels: that of the individual and personal level of “private” domestic life (sexuality, reproduction, sustaining the family as wives and mothers, perpetuating a traditional economic and political model of femininity); and that of public subordination, as the colonized, like women, are inferiorized (feminized) through material exploitation and deprivation of autonomy. An internalized colonization often continues to exist, and conscious resistance to being “recolonized” by neocolonial economics may be accompanied by a lack of recognition of on-going gendered roles, or resistance to abandoning them. Some of the women interviewed started their empowerment when they began to question their own roles in domestic situations. Their changing awareness led them to link domestic oppression with overarching systemic social and economic practices that perpetuate women’s roles as being manifested primarily, if not solely, in the home. For many of them the private space of the home has become a significant site for politicization and activism, often enabled through collective organizing that eventually takes them out into public arenas.

The women in this study balance complex aspects of their lives as wives and mothers, community work and activism, and making a living as students or women with careers. Except for Leslie, a student in the Philippines who is single, all the women are married or have/had partners, and ten of them have had children (from one to three). They also all have full-time jobs or studies. About half of them [Ayo (UP), Inday (RP), Tess (MO), Veronica (N1), Chona (N3) and Michelle (V3)] are full-time community organizers or political staff persons, whether paid or as volunteers. The rest [Fely (A), Marita (G), Patty (N2), Darla (V1), and Marilyn (V2)],

in addition to their activist contributions, have professional employment. Leslie is a full-time student in political science. Regardless of these women's social status or economic class, they are subject to the traditional model of being a "good woman" devoted first and foremost to her family. One thing they all have in common is the tension they experience when negotiating and prioritizing their time and physical presence vis-à-vis their families, employment, and political commitment. However, rather than seeing this situation in terms of coping by "juggling" or "multi-tasking," they have sought opportunities to confront spouses and other family members, insisting on the importance of becoming politicized and empowered. Raising awareness and changing attitudes begins in the home, as politics become personal and the personal becomes political.

### **In the Philippines**

Raising many women's awareness...that's what we really want, that they become more conscious, especially the urban poor, because the majority of urban poor women are just at home. (Ayo, UP)<sup>1</sup>

The women from the Philippines stressed the importance of raising awareness and getting access to education in order to raise awareness in other women, even if this kind of connection is seen by the women they work with as conflicting with their family duties. Inday (RP) expressed the view that women will not act until they are aware of systemic issues, and once they are aware they will want to mobilize others. Ayo (UP) talked of her own experience:

Later...they would invite me to study but because I was a mother it became hard for me to attend the studies, I couldn't leave the house because my children were waiting for me. I did it, in my desire to learn, particularly I wanted to learn about the rights of workers.

When I stopped [work], the first thing I wanted to learn were my rights as a woman. It was hard for me as a mother to leave the house because I have five children. Of course I am the caregiver for them all everyday because my husband was working. What I did just so I could attend the study

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<sup>1</sup> *Original:* Pagmulat ng maraming kabababihan... 'yon ang talagang gusto naming, na mamulat ang mga kababaihan, lalong-lalo na sa *urban poor*. Kasi ang karamihan ng babae sa *urban poor* nasa bahay lang 'yan.

sessions was to escape, isn't that "cute"? Escaping. What I used to do was when my husband left around 7 o'clock because he had to be at work by 8 o'clock, I would prepare everything my children needed for school and then I would join the study sessions. I would tell my neighbour to take care of my children...or if my sister was there, I would ask my sister. That is what I used to do.

And when I got to the sessions, even before we started, I would tell the resource person giving the session right away that I had to go home at 4 o'clock because my husband returns at 5 o'clock and so he wouldn't find out that I had left the house. That is how I balanced my time.<sup>2</sup>

As this account illustrates, many women can only leave their children if another woman – in this case a friend or relative – agrees to take on the extra work of minding them. Men do not have this problem, as only women are expected to be available for children.

Ayo saw women-specific issues (as defined by poor urban women in meetings with them and based on the experience of community organizers) as including not only child care but the physical and sexual abuse of children (especially girls) by men, and violence against women in and beyond the home. Such violence is often related to inadequate space for housing, lack of sustainable jobs, and the scarcity of food and other resources. The mere fact that women with

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<sup>2</sup> *Original:* Ah...nagumpisa ako noon 1990...sa *women*, sa ilalim ng GABRIELA. Nagumpisa ako dito, sa umpisa ng aking pag-involve dito sa organisasyon ng kababaihan...siyempre pinupuntahan ako ng organizer sa bahay at tinatanong ako kung ano ang problema ng community at bunabahagi ko naman doon sa organizer. Tapos...inibitahan nila ako sa pag-aaral pero bilang nanay naging mahirap sa akin yong pagdalo ng mga pag-aaral, yong paglabas ng bahay dahil naghihintay yong aking mga anak. Ang aking gingawa sa kagustuhan ko na matuto...una pa nga ang particular na gusto ko noong karapatan ng mga manggagawa.

Noong natigil na ako, yon ang una kong gusting matutuhan, yong karapatan ko bilang babae. Yon...mahirap bilang nanay na lumabas-labas ng bahay dahil nga sa lima ang mga anak ko. Siyempre ako ang nagsusubaybay niyan araw-araw dahil nagtratabaho yong asawa ko. Ang ginagawa ko para lamang makapag-attend ako sa mga pag-aaral, tumatakas ako, cutedi ba? Tumatakas. Ang ginagawa ko pagumalis ang asawa ko ng mga 7 o'clock dahil 8 o'clock ang pasok niya, ginagawa no niyan, hinahanda ko lahat ng kailangan ng mga anak ko pagpasok at dumadalo ako sa mga pag-aaral. Hinahabilin lo yong aking mga anak sa mga kapit-bahay ko, ng yong katuus ko...kaya kaya...pagnandiyanang kapatid ko, sa kapatid ko. Yon' ganyan ang ginagawa ko.

At pagdating ko doonsa pag-aaral, bago pa mag-start ang pag-aaral, sinasabi ko na kaagad sa mga *resource person* na nagbibigay ng pag-aral, na uuwi ako ng 4 o'clock, kasi, 5 o'clock ang uwi ng asawa ko para hindi ko ma-abutan ng asawa ko na umalis ako. Ganoon ang pag-babalanse ko doon sa aking mga oras.)



children are usually unable to leave their homes not only puts them at risk of violence but prevents their personal and political development. The older generation of mothers had little choice, but Ayo's own experience shows that attitudes can change.

Ayo was emphatic about the importance of acknowledging the limits on women's time, basing her comments on her personal experience. She described community action as effective when gatherings or meetings can be planned around the women's availability, given the burden of their homemaker role. In order to balance her time she had to "organize" her husband and her children. She felt that unless her family was well informed, it would have been too difficult for them to understand her work and she would have felt unable to leave her home.

Because right now, in spite of the hardship that women experience, we still continue to organize. Many are becoming full-time organizers, working on issues that affect women. Then the women themselves continue to do the work that was started. Even our children need to be organized at home. That takes priority, to organize our family because if our family is not organized, we won't even be allowed to leave the house.<sup>3</sup>

[After she became a full-time organizer] I already organized my husband. He was no longer asking me what time I would come home, what day, he already understood. I would say goodbye to him only if I would be away, say, for 3 days, or if I was going to be late and will return around 2:00 a.m. That was okay. He knew already. He would wait for me, what time I would come back, just so he knew. And my children also... Because I am getting to middle-age, I will be 52 in November, when there is a rally, they would ask, "Mom, are you going to the rally?" I would say yes. "You should, Mom, when there is action like that, commotion, you should stand aside a bit because you are not so strong anymore and your knees are weak. Before, when you were stronger, [we] wouldn't ask you to stand aside. That was okay. But now, you need to stand somewhat to the side," they all said. That was the only advice they gave

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<sup>3</sup> *Original:* Ah, sa ngayon kasi, siyempre bukod doon sa mga kahirapan...kahirapan na nararanasan ngayon ng mga kababaihan. Katuloy pa rin naman kaming nag-o-organisa, dib a, kasi yon...yong...at magpasulpot, yong mag [ --] ng maraming kababaihan na mag-*fu-full-time* sa mga ganitong Gawain, palaganap yong mga *issue* na-nakaka-apekto sa mga kababaihan at sila rin mismo ay nagpatuloy doon sa mga Gawain naming, dib a. Kahit na y ong mga anak naming ay dapat otganisahin ditto sa loob ng bahay, di ba. 'Yon pa ang unahin, na yong pamilya ay organisahin kasi paghindi inorganisa yong pamilya mo, hindi ka papayagang lumabas ng bahay.)

me. But my children like it when there is a rally. They go and watch television right away, "There's our Mom."<sup>4</sup> (Ayo, UP)

Her comments here also convey the cost to family members who worry about the possible danger of activism to their mother.

Fely's (A) experiences as a woman who bore and raised a child in prison gave her a direct understanding of what can happen to women in high-risk liberation movements, but she insisted that the cause should come first.

For women, you have also the barriers regarding your understanding of what your role is with regards to your obligation to the family, and your obligation to the struggle. So a lot of contradictions have occurred there in terms of time, child-rearing, child-bearing...you know, what's a pregnant woman doing in prison? That's a big contradiction and I had to raise her in prison for almost two years. That's not a happy situation, but that's part of the struggle. And it's a small sacrifice considering that I know a lot of comrades, colleagues of my youth, who have offered their lives for the cause.

It should be noted that Fely did not elaborate on her personal story. Like the other women interviewed, her personal narrative of sacrifice and suffering did not have the same intense tone as her discussion of historical struggles and political actions as the frame for what happened to her. She informally mentioned to me that her child has grown to be an educated, successful young professional. Beyond this, Fely did not expand on her personal narrative. It can be observed as a cultural pattern, shared by the women interviewed, that one is reserved, though not timid, about telling one's personal story. In spite of their often exceptional and eventful personal backgrounds and influential achievements, the cultural ethos expects "humility"

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<sup>4</sup> *Original:* Ino-organize ko na yong asawa ko, hindi na ako tinatanong kung anong oras ka na uuwi, anong araw, alam na niya 'yon. Nagpapaalam lang ako kung mga 3 days ako hindi uuwi. Kung gagabihin ako mga 2 o'clock na ako ng madaling araw. Ok lang 'yon. Alam na niya. Hinihintay lang niya ako – anong oras ako uuqi, para malaman lang niya. At ang mga anak ko ngayon, dahil medyo na-idad na ako, mag fi-fifty-two na ako sa November, pagmay naggaganyan na sa rally, "Nay, pupunta ka sa rally?" Sasabihin ko, oo. "Dapat, 'Nay, pag me ganyang aksyon, mga commotion, medyo tumabi ng kayo dahil mahina na ang tuhod niyo. Noon, na medyo malakas-lakas pa kayo, hindi ko kayo pinipigilan na tumabi. Ok lang. Pero ngayon, dapat tumabi-tabi kayo," sabi nila. 'Yon lang ang bilin. Pero gusto ng mga nak ko pag me rally. Naka [-] na agad sila sa telebisyon. "N'an dyan si Nanay."

("huwag mayabang") and "reserve" ("huwag magiingay") in talking about oneself. To what extent this is part of a model of "female subservience" is debatable, since men in similar positions are also expected to show similar levels of calm and restraint rather than a self-congratulatory attitude. This modest decorum may seem to clash with these women's call for active, vocal, and forceful resistance and assertion, but it can also have the effect of reinforcing the value of their outspokenness on other occasions. Fely, like the others, was eager, articulate, and forthcoming in expanding on her analysis of the political issues raised in her life experiences and those of others. Individual self-effacement is accompanied by collective pride in accomplishment.

### **The Netherlands**

How similar, or different, is the domestic situation of the women living abroad? Some activists now living in the Netherlands are in enforced exile for political reasons. Yet some of these relatively well known activist women recognize their own need of assistance in raising their children while working outside the home, sharing the problems faced by economic migrants abroad and women who remain in the Philippines as well as working women all over the world. Patty (N2) made the following remarks about her discovery of "women's issues," which she saw as added to general oppression:

I think even my consciousness of being a woman is something that developed when I was out here [the Netherlands] already. I had to do a lot of housework...I had to do child care, housework, political work. Then I began to realize the double oppression of women because I began to experience it...I experienced it more when I had a child and then I began to realize that women *have* to do something about it....this consciousness really developed from my own experience of having had a double experience [of having to do housework *and* political work] of oppression.

For these women in the Netherlands, being abroad did not change the inequality of the division of labour between a couple in housework and child rearing. Veronica (N1), who saw this as an ongoing issue that most mothers constantly confront, shared the view that the home is a site of

struggle for raising women's consciousness (see below, "Gendered Roles"). In the migrant communities, family support and servants are less available than in the Philippines, yet women still usually take responsibility for raising a family, even those engaged in progressive movements. One woman is fortunate to have her mother to take care of her children, but this puts a burden on another woman. While the desire is there to encourage shared responsibilities for the home and children, the "culture" is still reflected, even when collective principles are developed in organizations with regard to gender equity for couples and families. Veronica felt that in addressing the "woman question" political and cultural aspects are intertwined.

The woman question should be a collective issue. But when it comes to specific problems, it is more the woman who is inclined to collectivize it and the man to privatize it. So [we have] a dilemma...in the first place, [*she switches to Tagalog*] we ourselves as women, the women's movement, should have its own agenda...because not all women have the same awareness about women's issues. That is why it is the obligation of the women's movement within the bigger [national] struggle to raise consciousness about the woman question.

She implies that men would rather keep women's concerns within the confines of the home because they see them as private, personal issues to be resolved between the couple or within the family, rather than as systemic ones that need to be addressed in the public realm. Furthermore, Veronica pointed out that when women's awareness leads them to start naming their subjugation as male oppression, they are more likely to share their stories and seek support from other women.

Both Patty (N2) and Chona (N3) had been influenced by a mother and a husband active in social justice work for the Roman Catholic Church. As described in Chapter 1, one legacy of Spain and later missionary programs from the United States is that the Philippines is eighty percent Christian, and predominantly Roman Catholic. The influence of religious institutions on the cultural identity of Filipinos is pervasive. Sister Mary John Mananzan, in personal

conversations and in her publications, has explored the role of the Roman Catholic Church in establishing, propagating, and maintaining feudal images and expectations of women through religious doctrine and devotional practices, particularly by encouraging women to identify with values represented by the Virgin Mary. Both Roman Catholicism and the local, indigenous Catholicism prevalent in the Philippines have been instrumental in perpetuating an emphasis on women's domestic roles and their acceptance of their oppression within those roles (1988, 1994, 1997). Many religious Filipino activists, like Sister Mary John, espouse a "preferential option for the poor" related to the "Christian Based Communities" established following reform in the Catholic Church after Vatican II in the late 1960s (see Chapter 1). These "CBCs" played an influential role in encouraging the passion and commitment many middle and upper-class women activists had for the poor of the Philippines. One of the women interviewed (Patty, N2) is a former nun. These women recognize the influence of their religious traditions, and trace their political activism and progressive positions today back to this strand of their experience of working for social justice, rather than seeing an opposition between religious motivation and revolutionary politics.

Chona (N3) described the educational work she does with undocumented women workers in the Netherlands. She expressed the view that enhancing these women's understanding of the larger issues of women's liberation in their own current surroundings, as well as of those facing Filipino women in the Philippines, must begin with analysis of their own personal experiences.

...you start from what is their concrete experience...what is their experience of any form of oppression, whether it's personal, whether it's in a relationship...you try to link their experiences to the experiences...of other migrant women, to the experiences of Filipino women...you begin to look for the commonalities and then you bring the analysis with regards to gender issues, but also with regards to other issues.

Sometimes if you're talking of the situation of the women in the Philippines and they cannot really associate with it or they cannot identify with it, then it's more difficult for them...but when you start from their own experiences, then they are really involved... Initially, they may not [see that involvement] but we have to start from the personal.

## **Canada: Vancouver, BC**

The women in Vancouver also spoke of long-term cross-generational roles in relation to their children and what they wish to impart to them. As mothers and contributors to the family's finances, they share the challenge of striving to be economically self-sufficient while also being active in community work and fulfilling family responsibilities. Marilyn (V2) states:

So it's hard for me because...I think it is challenging here, [or] even in the Philippines...is that guilt that you won't have a normal life, the stability that our children...and I can't give them also the economic stability that I could have if I decided to pursue a career to settle here. But at the same time, my eldest daughter...trying to explain to her, even if she's only four, some of the reasons why this is her situation, our situation, so that she can also understand...be also willing to do this kind of [community] work when she gets bigger.

There's not too much difference [between organizing in the Philippines and Canada] except that, because of the level of the organizing that's happening right now, even from my own experience that I'm trying to struggle with right now, about how to manage child care, since I know that in the Philippines that the women's movement was the one that spearheaded different child care and day care programs, so that Filipino women can also be full-time activists. For here though, it's a totally different context and I know there's not full-time activists here because they're also working and struggling for economic survival in this capitalist system. But that's something different. In the Philippines...child care...you can rely on your...it's more communal to begin with, like hiring nannies, not very expensive, it's affordable. But here...I think it's the influence too from the culture here that it's supposed to be seen as separated...[use of a] baby sitter...

Marilyn touches on the contradictory nature of activist women's interests, struggling in the Philippines when they themselves pay nannies (who may also have their own children) low wages. The priorities of some activists may be quite different from those of the poorer women they advocate for, and they may unconsciously retain some class-based assumptions (such as that their non-domestic work has greater priority or value than childcare or housework). Their needs may, ironically, be fulfilled by accepting class divisions they wish to eliminate.

Darla (V1) reiterated the tension of taking personal responsibility for her family and also for the community.

I have a lot of tasks to put to myself [laughter]. One is how to achieve also some kind of economic security for my family. That's one task as a woman. And to see to it that I am able also to bring my children into the struggle. So, the welfare of the family is very important. Then the community.

Michelle (V3) was more philosophical when she expressed the unpredictability of global trends, as they apply to the welfare of her children.

...at a very personal level...with the kids...you know their society that they're going to grow into will just be worse because I already see it in my own...over ten years...deteriorating at such a rapid rate so I always try to...think...oh, what are you gonna do when your kids get old and wanna go to university, how much is it gonna cost, or will that even be an option, I don't even know because maybe that won't even be feasible...economically, but is it really even something that they should even think about because if the changes in the system are...even here in Canada, when you're growing up it's gonna be worse, then maybe that's not where you need to...it's more you put your effort as a...person or parent or even more in helping them to be more internally strong and assertive rather than expecting that it's going to be the same for them as it was for me...

Many second-generation Filipino women who find themselves having to negotiate their children's future abroad also want to stimulate their interest in the Philippines. Often it is an arduous endeavour, in terms of time and money, to sustain family connections and their Filipino cultural heritage for themselves and their children. Occupying their place in Canadian society (in this case) and maintaining their participation in both cultures is a delicate balance from both the Filipino and Canadian perspectives. "Second-gens" are cognizant of the challenges awaiting their third generation children in terms of identity formation, social valuation, and economic security, which may prove similar to their own or very different.

### **From Personal Development to Combating Systemic Oppression**

While these women have very different lives in many respects, as shown in Chapter 4, here the focus is on the common issues they raised. One that they all felt they shared with those they represent relates to the relationship between domestic and political roles. The treatment of migrant workers in particular illustrates the paradoxical combination of on-going models of

female subservience, devotion, and modesty associated with the home (presumed to be a safe, protected space) and violence against women, often associated with confinement in the home (one's own or someone else's).

***Violence and Confinement.*** While two women from the Netherlands and from Canada mentioned violence against women as generally acknowledged and denounced, one woman from the Netherlands and three from the Philippines were more specific in naming particular issues of violence against women and also children. They evoked various types of violence:

...this Anti-Violence against Women Law...recognized for the first time that violence against women and children, particularly against women in intimate relationships, is a crime." It is a public crime and it should be punished, and it also identified the various forms of violence which [are] quite comprehensive, not only the physical but also the emotional, financial violence, and ascribes penalties to these crimes. ...and also it has a provision and protection order which...is a new thing in our legal system...but even before that, there was this Supreme Court ruling that recognized [that] the Battered Wife Syndrome is a valid, legal argument. (Marita, G)

Violence was described in terms of women's physical and mental confinement, in relation to the submissive roles demanded of them. Marita talked about protest actions against media images and social events (such as beauty contests) that degrade women, perpetuating traditional constructions of women as objects of male consumption and domination. While not necessarily naming these constructions as "violent," most of the women in all the sites described the humiliation and exploitation of women as rooted in attitudes that brainwash women to accept a whole range of violence against them, interiorizing their status as passive and inferior.

Veronica (N1) relates the story of a woman in her community living with her partner's abuse.

You know, there is value in a collective. We have a collective where women can talk freely...for example there was a woman in my collective when I was still in Laguna (Philippines). Her husband worked full-time, they had a house, but she had a problem with her husband even though he was part of the (activist community)...when he gets drunk, he starts throwing the dishes and when he gets home, he wants the food to be already ready. (Later) I made it a



point to stay overnight (with some women) otherwise you wouldn't understand why ...men don't talk...

Although this was not Veronica's personal story, she witnessed abuse suffered by another woman. She was affected by a fellow-activist's violence towards another activist, as well as by the physical and emotional abuse inflicted on a woman by her male partner. As members of the same movement that strives for political and economic justice, the contradiction in this story illustrates deep-rooted systemic problems that plague even those supposedly supportive of social justice for all.

*Confinement* appears as a condition and also a cause of violence against women. Ayo described in detail how poor women's role in the home often results in stagnation in their development as individuals and as women conscious of their rights. This entrapment also prevents many middle-class women from seeking more education or work outside the home, and women of all classes from attending meetings, assisting in organizing to improve their communities, or participating in their communities as equal members. Women of all classes are often unable to leave their home to join in gatherings, attend educational meetings, or participate in political rallies or negotiations/confrontations. They are unable to participate because of the restrictions on their time and their responsibilities towards children, husbands, and the household.

...they invited me to study but being a mother, it became difficult for me to attend study sessions, to leave the house because of my children. I was working [with workers] in my desire to learn...particularly the rights of workers.<sup>5</sup> (Ayo, UP)

As well, those who work outside the home are often confined in their work settings, where they endure unpleasant, dangerous, and unhealthy environments for fear of losing their income. In

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<sup>5</sup> *Original*:...inimbitahan nila ako sa pag-aaral pero bilang nanay naging mahirap sa akin yong pagdalo ng mga pag-aaral, yong paglabas ng bahay dahil naghihintay yong aking mga anak. Ang aking ginagawa sa kagustuhan ko na matuto...una pa nga ang *particular* na gusto ko noong karapatan ng mga manggagawa.

discussing causes of violence, Inday (RP) equated women's widespread physical and psychological confinement in traditional roles to feudal thinking. Accepting this kind of thinking causes women to place themselves in vulnerable and violent situations. Their confinement in physical spaces is closely tied to the "mental confinement" assigned to women since the days of Spanish rule, particularly by the Roman Catholic Church, and continued during US colonial rule.<sup>6</sup> Having seen their confinement as women (and for some as peasants) as inevitable since feudal times, many tend to accept their current treatment, suffering systemic violence at the hands of their spouses in their homes, or from their bosses and landlords for those working in the city or country. The women interviewed did not speak of having themselves suffered spousal violence, but they feel intimate proximity to the experiences of the women with whom they work. At work, as at home, the valued aspects of femininity can be a double-edged sword.

...women's contribution...it is a big contribution towards [social] change because women today are not only for staying at home. Isn't it, they say in Filipino culture, that women, when viewed by the ruling class – in the past – are for staying at home, for bed, and for fun.

That is what they are looking for these days in the factories, a pleasing personality, that you graduated, then you are single, because if you are married you will take maternity leave, vacation leave, because you have children. Factory owners are avoiding...their responsibility towards their workers.<sup>7</sup> (Ayo, UP)

These roles were readily understood as *sexualized*, from students being sexually harassed by men in the university to the sex trafficking of prostituted women or their exploitation as entertainers within the country and abroad.

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<sup>6</sup> See Wilhelmina Orozco. *The Patriarchal and Colonial Education of Filipinas* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1993); and Renato Constantino and Letizia Constantino. *The Miseducation of the Filipino* (World Bank Texts: Scenario for Deception. Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> *Original*: ...ang ambag ng mga kababaihan...malaking ambag ito sa pagbabago dahil and kababaihan ngayon ay hindi na pambahay na lamang. 'Di ba sabi, sa kultura ng Pinoy na ang kababaihan ay kung tingnan ng mga naghaharing uri, dati – noon nakaraan – kailangan pambahay, pang-kama, pang-aliw, ang mga ganyang termino sa kababaihan.

Ganoon kasi and hinahanap ngayon sa mga pabrika, kailangan a *pleasing personality*, nakatapos ka ng ganito, tapos wala kang asawa dahil pag-may asawa ka mag-ma-*maternity leave* ka, mag-be *vacation leave* ka dahil may mga anak ka. Umiwas yong mga may-ari ng pabrika...responsabilidad din nila para sa kanilang mga trabahador, di ba?

This group of women did not speak at length about their own personal relationships with partners, sexuality, or sexual orientation.<sup>8</sup> Their concern was to advocate for and work with women experiencing violence in their spousal and other social relationships. As previously mentioned, only one of the women had never been married (Leslie) and she and another woman (Chona) have no children. Most of these women are middle-aged, married or with long-time partners (previously or currently), and have had children; three are currently single mothers. The roles their husbands, or other men, played in their development as activists (whether as allies or obstacles) appeared peripheral to what they were highlighting in their stories. Only Ayo mentioned the link between her own transformation and how her relationship with her husband changed. The older women conveyed a heightened sense of awareness of how they overcame challenges as young women, and have since grown to define themselves through their own education and political involvement. In our discussions, they did not appear to deliberately avoid talking about their partners, nor did they have the urge to bring them to the forefront. Instead, as they described their particular struggles in managing a home and family, they related them to the systemic factors that continue to subjugate women in varying degrees.

**Gendered Roles.** As discussed already, women are still usually expected to conform to stereotypical roles, so that there is no fair division of labor at home even when they work full-time, and they are solely responsible for domestic chores and childrearing.

...the inequality of the division of labour...even if your husband is aware, you still talk about who does the house work and the equal division of work at home. It is a big issue. Of course that's a big irritant. Of course it is not something you regulate away, it is something that you educate away...even when there is lip service, in real life, it isn't...it's difficult...even if it is accepted that [we] should be equal...it becomes a big discussion when a woman has a child...because child rearing, what is the responsibility...when the woman starts

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<sup>8</sup> They were not asked directly about them, as I deemed these topics, on their own, to be potentially culturally inappropriate and personally intrusive. When the topics related to their activism, they were open and frank about certain details of their family life.

rearing a family, that when the issues become huge...because what happens is the woman is the one who stays [at home]. My mother took care of my children.<sup>9</sup> (Veronica, N1)

For Veronica, “child rearing is a part of life” and while it is an individualized experience, sharing this responsibility needs to be “collectivized,” i.e., resolved collectively between the couple and within the community. Though this problem is certainly not related only to Filipinos, she felt it important to note that Filipino communities and organizations are politically aware of the issue and some are trying to address it; the “woman question” is [not only] “a political issue [but also] something cultural.”

Two of the women are trained nurses and still have careers in this field abroad, where Filipino nurses have made an excellent reputation for themselves. Their career choice facilitated their immigration, as a valid category for entry into the Netherlands and Canada in the 1980s. The other women are engaged in local, national, and transnational community organizing and in “less traditional” work, including prestigious positions as parliamentarian, university professor, lawyer, political scientist, historian, or negotiator and spokesperson for international organizations. Their general awareness of the effects of women’s confinement is clearly reflected in the challenges they face even in their “non-traditional” roles as activists. Like Veronica in the Netherlands, Marita, the Congresswoman in the Philippines, recognized that while there is an acknowledgement of women’s equality in principle in activist organizations, the reality does not always reflect this:

...even within the progressive movements there are so many things that we have to assert as women activists...in order for others to understand what we

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<sup>9</sup> *Original: ...yang inequality sa division of labour...kahit mulat pa and iyong asawa mo, eh, yong usapin ng house work, who does...yong equal division sa trabaho sa bahay. Malaking issue pa yan. Of course that's a big irritant, Siyempre it's not something you regulate away, it is something that you educate away. ..kahit na may lip service sa totoong buhay, hindi talaga...it's difficult...even if it is accepted that [we] should be equal.....nagiging malaking usapan yan, ang isang babae ay nagkaka-anak....kasi yong child rearing, kung ano ang responsibilidad...when the woman starts rearing a family doon nagiging malaking issues siya...and nangyayari kasi...and babae and naiiwan. Mother ko and nag-alaga sa mga anak ko...*

mean by liberation...but it is a fact of life that we really have to assert. Even if you recognize that women [should have] equality and things like this, in actual every day life and practice, we really have to assert our space in everything. Even in press conferences, even now that we are six representatives and I am the only woman...even within that ranking I would assert myself and say...it is my policy not to sit on the far end of our seats. I will not sit on the last. And you will have to understand that visually, that is, you know, bad for our advocacy. I would have to assert that because they wouldn't understand that...I say that we are struggling...against marginalization when you always put me...*there!* You know, things like this are very practical questions but these are living [lessons], you know, on assertion.

Whether they remain in the Philippines or go abroad, women's gendered roles reflect legacies from feudal, patriarchal, colonial times, and subordination is still evident in the types of jobs most women do outside the home. Whether in rural or urban settings, several noted that there are more women in the service and "nurturing" fields, including health and care-giving, teaching, assembly line work, office support work, and agricultural work. These expectations have become even more systemic and globalized, as the migration of Filipino workers consists to a large extent of women doing domestic work worldwide, thus contributing to the current phenomenon of the feminization of migration (discussed in Chapter 1).

While the professional women living outside the Philippines all commented on their own specific problems of being working wives and mothers, still responsible for home management, they also conveyed the perspective of migrant workers abroad doing domestic work. These are, ironically, dispersed and then re-confined, not in their own homes as they would be in the Philippines, but in the homes of other families. In Canada, the LCP specifically requires this as it is mandatory that nannies "live-in," in the house of their employer. This requirement, along with an employer-specific work permit and their temporary immigration status, directly sets up the conditions and the environment for women to be potentially on-call to work for their

employers twenty-four hours a day.<sup>10</sup> Any violation of these requirements can mean instant deportation.<sup>11</sup> Women confined to their employers' homes, often in exclusive neighborhoods and suburbs, are frequently prevented from attending events on week nights and even on weekends. Their access to education, skill development, and other community programs is also limited because regulations of the LCP policy confine women to their employers' homes for twenty-four months (within a thirty-six-month duration) without exception.<sup>12</sup>

**Identity Formation.** A number of the women interviewed tied the feudal, gendered, and sexualized roles assigned to women to how their *identity* itself is shaped, and career possibilities are limited. Ayo's situation was typical for girls from a poor rural background.

Mother only stayed at home. My parents were only farmers. We did not have our own land. We were only tenant farmers. Not all of us were able to go to school. Only two of my siblings graduated. One is a mid-wife... another finished a secretarial [course], and others are high school graduates. Seven. We were all girls. No boys. Father was the only male in the family.<sup>13</sup>

She remembered her parents as "only" indentured tenant farmers, whose children (all daughters) could not automatically expect to become educated. Yet her father, the only male in

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<sup>10</sup> SIKLAB, a national organization of migrant workers in Canada, describes these requirements as "the fundamental pillars of the LCP." Together, they confine even former professionals to domestic work for one specific family in one specific household. Hence, the term "modern-day slavery" is used for their condition as domestic workers abroad: 65% of LCP workers are women.

<sup>11</sup> See Geraldine Pratt. "Is This Canada: Domestic Workers' Experiences in Vancouver, B.C." (UBC Centre for Research in Women's Studies and Gender Relations in Collaboration with the Philippine Women Centre of BC. *Occasional Working Papers in Women's Studies and Gender Relations*, 6:1, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> In May, 2007, a community campaign was launched to prevent the deportation of Laila Elumbra, a live-in caregiver under the LCP. After 22 months of her LCP contract, she was diagnosed with porphyria, an enzymatic disorder which resulted in a seizure, loss of speech, coma, and paralysis. After recovering from the coma, Elumbra had exceeded the 36-month period wherein she needed to have completed her 24-month live-in caregiver contract. In spite of a national postcard appeal to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Monte Solberg, Elumbra was issued a deportation order on the justification that there is "no exception" to this policy.

<sup>13</sup> *Original:* Nanay ko nasa bahay lang. Pero magsasaka lang ang aking mga magulang. Wala kaming sariling pag-aari na lupa. Nakikisaka lang kami. At hindi kami nakapag-aral lahat. Ang nakatapos lang sa kapaatid ko ay dalawa. Yong isa *mid-wife* ngayon...yong isa nagtapos ng *secretarial*, tapos yong iba noon mga *high school graduate* lang. Pito. Puro kami babae. Walang lalaki.Si Tatay lang ang lalaki sa pamilya.

the family, was a local councilor, a member of one of only two political parties that existed at the time. He was a “good man” who “did not owe blood to anyone” (“hindi ‘yan umutang ng dugo”), and must have been relatively supportive since Ayo managed to escape the confines of the feminine role assumed by her mother by undertaking a political engagement closer to her father’s advocacy for the poor. Her siblings also managed to improve their situation, albeit through typically feminine work.

Michelle (V3), who is Canadian-born, became aware of the impact that the stereotypical role of Filipino women had on her own identity:

I was involved in a youth group [in central Canada] and it was still just starting out, so we did one action...to protest the beauty pageant that this traditional group was putting on. They’re like this mostly religious group that they study everything about Jose Rizal [the national hero]. So they had a beauty pageant/sponsorship contest for young Filipino women but...you have this Maria Clara so you had to personify this character. So...they were even judging your moral character, there were some questions...and so anyways, we were opposing it, because we said, on the one hand, why would you bother giving a scholarship, why is that the form? And then also it’s creating this stereotype...that was interesting for me because I deepened my understanding there about...what the traditional roles of Filipino women are ...because even that action is in the tradition of GABRIELA, right, one of the first things they also boycotted or called for...was to protest a beauty contest in the Philippines. So that helped me a lot with my own identity...

Several of the women noted that the image they have of themselves as Filipino women activists, derived from the history of Filipino women as part of Philippine resistance and revolution, is still shadowed by dominant feudal roles. They expressed no nostalgia for a mythical past. While looking back at history, these women were not arguing for a return to the pre-colonial cultural identities of women of this archipelago. Their reference point was, instead, that of Filipino women’s more recent history. What they re-claim from a pre-colonial past, is a positive image of Filipino women’s leadership roles and honoured positions in society, and they bring importance to these characteristics present in women today. They assert that the tradition of women’s experiences, especially their active role in revolutionary and social transformation

movements, is as much in evidence in the women's movement today as it was in colonial times. In recognizing the value of women's roles in pre-colonial times, historicizing their resistance and struggle during Spanish and US colonialism, and linking these to concrete, activist contributions today, the women interviewed de-colonize ideas of women and of Filipino people imposed by colonization, and re-define their cultural identity dynamically, as they themselves seek to shape national history. Inday evoked with pride her group's willingness to take on a powerful global company.

...Bayer, a multinational...they were selling banned products no longer used in other countries, probably because they wanted to make a sale and would rather make a profit than dispose of them. But the Filipinos didn't know they were selling these here. But because we learned about it, we started a campaign and we minimized it somewhat in one area. (From that) we began (to organize) in seven provinces, and now we are in thirty two provinces and so we are organizing among women. We were able to mobilize the women to change their situation, their welfare.<sup>14</sup>

The women interviewed were not directly confronting what was imposed on women's identities by past colonizers. Nor did they analyze or embrace women's "lack" of identity as coming from the mixture of layers of cultural imperialism from many centuries of colonialism. They were not arguing about cultural identities, national culture, cultural imperialism, or hybridity. Rather, they articulated the material and psychological *impact* feudal systems and social constructions have had on women's lives today and on their sense of identity as Filipino women. It is to more recent history that they turn to re-assert the role of women who have struggled in concrete ways to create revolutionary change. Their activism directly addresses their right to educate themselves and to assert their self-defined identity as empowered, liberated, politicized, activists

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<sup>14</sup> *Original*: ...Bayer, yong ganyan, yong mga *multinational* ...oo na dito ibinebenta mga ban na ano na pala, na hindi ginagamit sa mga iba-ibang, ibang bansa. Eh ngayon siguro nag...gusto nilang maka...maka ano, maka benta. Gusto nila pagkakakitaan pa kay sa itapon yon. Hindi naman alam ng mga Pilipino eh di dito ibenta. So dahil nung nalaman namin yon, i-kinampanya namin dito, at medyo naminimize naman yoong sa isang banda...nagsimula ang (organisasyon) sa pitong probinsya lang ng pag-o-organisa, pero ngayon, ay nasa 32 *provinces* na [wow] nalumalawak yoong ano pag-o-organisa sa mga kababaihan...napapakilos mo yong mga kababaihan para baguhin yong ano, yong mga ilang kalagayan.



who act both in and beyond their homes. Raising awareness and education are critical activities mentioned by all the women, in order that more women may understand how they have systematically come to inherit these roles. This education attempts to analyze the intersections of gender and class, and also increasingly of race, as inseparable in the stereotyping of women abroad.

***Class, Race, and Gender.*** In the Philippines, rural women in particular are still preoccupied mainly with class issues:

For the women, what is primary is still discussions about their class...gender is only secondary...we combine these, and bring them together step-by-step...but really gender is not primary in our discussions. So, what is really important is that women get out of hardship. And that through education discussion on gender can slowly be brought to the family, and this is long-term because you cannot suddenly make people change their minds and the feudal perspective they have. (Inday, RP)<sup>15</sup>

Both *class* and *race* factors have confined Filipino women to domesticity and perpetuated their feudal roles in society. Poor peasant and urban women have had to learn to speak out, becoming educated through community organizing in spite of their lack of access to formal education. They also require an understanding of race segregation and domination, as members of a non-white society dominated economically and culturally by the white western world. Race, as part of the colonial past, is linked to the *mestiza/mestizo* complex, which still assigns higher social status and privilege to being light-skinned.

In relating class, race, and gender to the concept of commodification, McClintock (1995, 207-231) noted that “commodity lies on the threshold of culture and commerce” (212). Analyzing

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<sup>15</sup> *Original:* Sa mga babae nga, eh, ang primary pa rin yoong usapin ng *class* nila... *secondary* lang ang *gender*...yon nga yoong parang sa ganitong claseng na ano...pinag ko-combine nga natin, sinasabay na natin unti-unti...talaga namang hindi primary yong *gender* na usapin. Kaya, yoong matingkad yoong ano talaga ng mga kababaihan na mahango sila sa kahirapan. At yong usapin ng *gender* ay unti-unti mo naman sa pamilya ay sa pag-e-educate naman yan eh, at matagalan siyempre kasi hindi mo naman bigla-bigla mababago yong kaisipan ng mga tao na kung papaano yong mga *feudal* na pananawan sa kanila.

the global peddling of soap in Europe and in the colonies, she states, "From the outset, soap took shape as a technology of social purification, inextricably entwined with the semiotics of imperial racism and class denigration" (212). One Pears soap advertisement showed a black child emerging out of a bath with its body *white* while its head remained *black*. While in the Philippines conducting these interviews, I recall seeing billboards along a very congested freeway in the heart of Manila that advertised a papaya-based product ("papain") that claims to make a woman's skin lighter and so make her appear like a true *mestiza*. Using the empire's commodities, as represented by the soap conveying the imperialist agenda or this contemporary echo of it, is presented as a way to transform one's racial and class inferiority. The domestic space is racialized as clear/white, thus assigning cultural value to cleanliness/purity, although little or no economic value is given to women's domestic work. McClintock brings out the contrast between paid work outside the home and women's unpaid domestic tasks. The middle-class definition of femininity meant that most women were neither represented as workers nor remunerated for domestic work, yet the labor of women in the home, as well as in factories, mines, etc., was and is an essential contribution to the colonial, capitalist/ industrial enterprise. McClintock quotes Charles Kingsley (in England in 1860) as saying: "I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country...But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours" (216). This remark illustrates how those being overworked and underpaid to serve the public industrial economy, regardless of gender or race, were/are perceived as (like) people of color. Similarly, those confined to the private realm, performing unacknowledged, unpaid domestic work, are simply regarded as (like) women, regardless of their colour or their status as servants or wives. Undoubtedly, Kingsley would not have been appalled at the sight of white women doing unpaid domestic work, because women's work at home was taken for granted, as is still the case.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> More than one hundred years later, Kingsley's comment is not unlike a popular T-shirt sold to and worn

In the Philippine context, Rosca, a Filipino author and activist, writes in "Women and War" about the "historic defeat of the 'female sex'" seen particularly in times of armed conflict.

Class society and capitalism of course rest on the very anti-thesis of this premise [that every human being has intrinsic value]. Capitalism indeed thrives on the assumption that certain categories of human beings are disposable. This is the foundation of the class and profit system. People are marginalized so that they can be brutalized into the creation of surplus wealth for a few. All kinds of justification have been constructed to ensure that this dehumanization perseveres. There was the false science of eugenics to rationalize racism; social Darwinism to justify the exploitation of workers and peasants; and underneath it all, a continuing sexism so deeply ingrained in religious, cultural and political beliefs we can't even begin to fathom it. Those of us marginalized and exploited on the basis of class, race and sex have very little input as to where, when and what for wars should be launched. (2003, 4)

The women interviewed who named racism as a particular issue were those outside the Philippines. Being made conscious of their race was highlighted by the women from the Netherlands and Canada, as were experiences of personal and systemic racism. In the case of the women abroad, racism was closely related to their lower class and social status, whether as undocumented people, domestic workers, low wage earners in services or factories, or downgraded middle-class immigrants from a Majority World country. Because of the fight for basic survival, it was mainly the class/economic struggles and analyses that pervaded these interviews, but for the women in sites outside the Philippines, class and race were difficult to analyze separately.

...people are forced to leave their homeland. And now, they have transplanted themselves, eh. *Kasi* (because), you have whole families who have transplanted to the States. And then whole families transplanted to Canada. *Yong...talaga yong* (It is really...) [being] uprooted. The thing is none of us will ever be "Americans" or "Canadians" or "Dutch." The

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by US troops stationed in the former US naval base in Olongapo (since closed) outside Manila. Referring to Filipino women in the sex trade, it bears the message, "Little Brown Fucking Machines" (photo in Sandra Pollock Sturdevant and Brenda Stolfus's *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U.S. Military in Asia*. NY: The New Press, 1992, 40). Poor people's exploitation and gender did not warrant comment from Kingsley (likely having thought only of men), but racial hierarchy and inferiority did. In the case of Filipino women in prostitution, gender, racial, and economic exploitation are (ironically) taken together, and the women taunted shamelessly and publicly by (mostly) white, foreign men.

colours of our skin will not allow us. (Patty, N2)

For the Filipino women interviewed, the “racializing [of] domesticity” is seen from the other side of empire from the perspective taken by McClintock. In the service of empire (and of globalization),<sup>17</sup> racialized domestic work stems from a history of foreign domestic workers in Canada or the Netherlands as part of a racist and classist past. Under European colonization in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America, and the Middle East, servants to the officers and families of the colonial enterprise were “native” people of colour with limited economic resources. In North America, domestic work was carried out by black slave women (forcibly) and is still often undertaken by black women “imported” from the Caribbean.<sup>18</sup> However, the contradictions of racialized domesticity in privileged homes disappear and re-appear with the massive “infiltration” of Filipino women into white (when this is the case) and affluent homes. When Filipino domestic workers are part of a global importation/exportation of cheap, surplus labour to serve imperialist capitalism under neo-liberal policies today, they remain categorized as black/people of color and domestic space is “racialized” accordingly, as well as feminized.<sup>19</sup> With Filipino women domestic workers working abroad, the private/public space allocations from previous centuries are re-configured, as white, affluent women work outside the home and women of colour inhabit the domestic space. As in colonial times, affluent homes/spaces where foreign domestic workers are hired remain largely white (where poor women of colour do not “belong”), and

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<sup>17</sup> This is from Salazar Parrenas' title, *Servants of Globalization*, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> When initiated in 1992, the LCP required a grade 12 education (along with the use of English) from foreign migrant workers. This virtually gave Filipino women the edge as many women from other Majority World countries could not fulfill either or both of these requirements.

<sup>19</sup> Filipino domestic workers are also employed in parts of Asia (Hong Kong or Singapore) and the Middle East, which are “non-white,” where analysis of domestic work on the basis of race alone becomes inadequate. “Servanthood” and/or being “foreign” (and all that “foreign” implies by way of language or religion) rather than “race” may be considered the underlying reasons for the lower social status of Filipino domestic workers. The economic advantage of employers in non-white societies would play a larger role in the intersectional analysis of domestic workers in global servitude. As well, many immigrants of colour in Canada, including Filipinos who have succeeded financially, also have Filipino nannies.

female “domestics,” continue to do cheap, “dirty, dangerous, difficult” (“DDD”)<sup>20</sup> labour economy work (where they do belong), whether in homes or factories.

Thus, as in previous times, simultaneous race, class, and gender oppression remains intact for many Majority World women in neo-colonial enterprises. Filipino domestic workers are well aware of the common notion of affluent white women developing themselves “on the backs” of women of colour from the Majority World. Privileged women (including those of colour who become affluent) move into better-paid, public, most often urban work spaces, while most Majority World women remain in the economically marginalized female world of domesticity. Rather than race, class domination is a major factor when domestic workers are hired by wealthy Filipino employers in Canada and elsewhere, or by rich people of colour in the Middle East and Asia. However, it is highly unlikely that most Filipino domestic workers abroad would have sought similar employment in the Philippines, because as relatively educated women they have higher social status there than the poorer, often rural women who take those jobs. As mentioned by Marilyn (V2), back home some of them would probably have nannies or maids themselves. For transnational Filipino migrant workers, the intersections of race, class, and gender are evident in their commodification in the world market.

### **Issues Shared by these Women Activists**

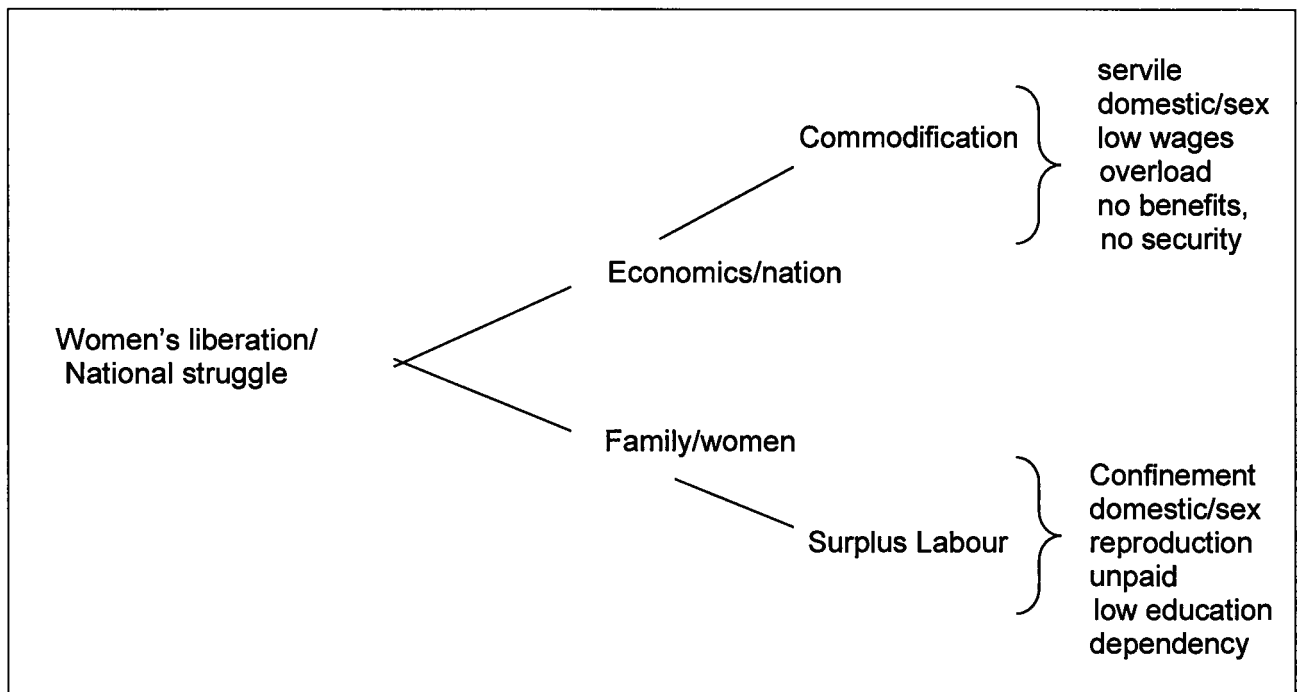
The diagram below summarizes what the women from all three sites described as the issues facing themselves or the women in their communities, with whom they work on a regular basis. My summarizing their comments is not unlike “facilitating” what I might hear participants describe in a focus group. What is different here is that the women did not hear or get feedback from what any of the other women named as issues (limited by the individualized interview

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<sup>20</sup> “DDD” is an acronym used for jobs available to immigrant/migrant workers. For Filipino women, a fourth “D” can be added which is, “domestic.”

format), although the women from each site knew and worked with the others from that site. They network with each other and may attend the same national or international conferences, but in this case they all independently reached similar conclusions.

**Figure 4**                      **Summary of Common Issues**



First of all, it is notable that no one discussed these issues as discrete problems. All the women, whatever their location, mentioned the liberation of women as inseparable from the struggle of Filipino people for liberation from entrenched national and global problems. None of the women elaborated on particular issues without placing them in the context of the nation's problems. They analyzed these issues as part of larger ones, including the history of Philippine society and of resistance and struggle against domination, coming from economic globalization or policies of the Philippine government and host governments, and leading to human rights violations by the state, at home and abroad. In fact, they insisted that unless women understand their own particular problems as linked to what is occurring in Philippine society and globally, no significant change in their lives or in their communities is likely. They reiterated that

whether the women are in the Philippines or abroad, the link they must make between the two locations is a vital one. Hence, women's liberation is seen as inseparable from that of "national liberation" in their contexts, rather than in opposition or competition with it. In both cases "liberation" implies a change in status in relationship to a dominant and exploitative other, in order to acquire an independence or freedom not yet achieved in spite of official nationhood or gender equity legislation.

Adopting this broader view, Tess (MO), Fely (A), and Marita (G) focus on the need to raise women's awareness about the historical and economic causes of their current economic deprivation, isolation, and stagnation. While Ayo (UP) and (Leslie (Y) are also aware of the consciousness women need to have of the "bigger picture" and the "deeper analysis," they described raising women's awareness more concretely in terms of their immediate identities as women and their lived conditions, involving their mental, physical, and emotional states. If the women remain physically confined to their houses and therefore cannot get out to learn more (as is the case for many poor rural and urban women), or if they remain so psychologically confined in their feudal identities that they cannot even recognize sexual harassment in everyday life (as for some students), then raising their consciousness is a daunting challenge. Nevertheless, all these women activists continue to believe the effort is worthwhile, and have seen positive results in the Philippines and abroad.

***Economic Needs.*** Given this vital link between women's and the nation's struggles, the issues all the women raised revolved around two related areas: economics and violence. The *economic needs* of the women result from the economic crises of the Philippine government and global capitalism (often entailing violent conflict), and in turn lead to the dire circumstances of their daily struggle for economic and physical survival in the Philippines and elsewhere, with domestic violence parallel to political violence. The participants clearly perceive how economic

forces commodify Majority World labour and women in particular, forcing many to migrate abroad, entailing struggles that impact their home lives. The lack or loss of jobs, for women and their spouses, forces the women to take on menial work with low wages, and an abundance of cheap labour drives wages down even further for all workers. The jobs the women tend to find are servile, domestic ones, where they are overworked and have to accept exploitation in order to keep the job. Their extra efforts provide unpaid labour, for no reward since they still have no job security. Once in these jobs, in homes, factories, or the “informal sector,” they have little access to benefits or to advancement to other higher paying jobs.

The women interviewed assumed that the work that women do at home or in raising children is “surplus labour,” for which they expect no remuneration. They seem themselves to accept this problem as inherent to the role women still have as housewives and mothers. The unpaid labour of women at home appeared to carry over into the workplace, especially for domestic work, and the women interviewed noted with concern that this is reflected in women’s low wages for the number of hours worked. The unpaid labour in their own home did not explicitly enter into the equation, since women so desperately need to work for wages that this took priority in their discussion. Many women decide to work abroad in order to have paying jobs, earn more, and provide for their children, who may remain in the Philippines. Children left behind also create surplus work for other women in the Philippines (often grandmothers). Migrant workers in Canada and undocumented workers in the Netherlands also often accept long hours and tasks outside their contracts as live-in caregivers, without getting paid overtime, because they are desperate to bring in (and send home) some money, however little time or income is left for themselves.

***Understanding Violence.*** As discussed above in relation to confinement, the second area of issues concerned was the social or physical violence women experience, which is related to



their economic situation. The women interviewed consistently link the violence women experience at home and at work to the larger issues and conditions that result in widespread social and political violence against both men and women. Ayo (UP), in the Philippines (confirming my own impressions from a visit to a poor urban area), talked of housing conditions so minimal that the close proximity of family members in a very small space leads to sexual violence (incest, rape) and physical violence. She also, as cited earlier, related that when fighting for their jobs and salaries at a factory, some of the protestors from the urban poor communities were beaten and killed (by entities difficult for them to identify at the time). Another notable link made by all the categories of women is that the current economic crisis that ignores specific impacts on women, while drastically affecting their lives, is in itself a form of violence. Economic violence is seen as the root cause of physical and sexual violence against working and peasant women, as well as those confined to the home or those exported for the sex trade. The need for women to work outside the home is also seen as a contributing factor when their children get into trouble:

Now, there are so many things happening...families are getting destroyed... they are saying that they are abroad and doing that for their children's future. But sometimes their children, because of the different life style...what happens is they fall into addictions/vices because there is no mother to support them and take care of them. This is a very serious problem...<sup>21</sup> (Inday, RP)

In short, economic conditions breed violence in families and communities and this violence is bound up in the broader social deprivation suffered by 80% of Filipinos. The central importance of economic violence is presumed by all the women in the different sites, even though the particular issues raised sometimes differed among them according to the context of their living conditions and circumstances. The deep underlying similarity of their analyses shows that when

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<sup>21</sup> *Original:* Kasi ngayon ang laki-laki, ang dami na ng mga...yong nangyayari din nga...nasisira yong mga pamilya...dahil, kung бага, sinasabi nga nila para sa kinabukasan ng kanilang mga anak kaya sila nandoon sa abroad. Pero kung minsan naman yong anak nila, dahil nagbabago yong *life style*, tapos...ang nangyayari eh nalululong sa bisyo dahil wala ng ganoong umaagapay na nanay na magalaga doon sa kanila. Isang malaking problem din doon...

women face economic survival issues with no solution in sight, they suffer the impact of systemic poverty in their daily lives, in their homes, and in their communities as direct violence to their person, their children, and the communities where they live.

While there were commonalities in the systemic links perceived between violence and economics, the women interviewed also indicated variations in their focus. Those in the Philippines raised issues that were more urgently focused on the intense struggle for daily survival and national struggles involving the Philippine government. For them, such problems need to be alleviated and advocated for immediately, without losing sight of the long-term development of awareness and skills necessary for women to become politicized and assertive. They also confront government officials or landowners with their immediate housing needs, owing to demolition of homes, landlessness, increasing farming debts, low wages, low pricing of their agricultural products, and the rising prices of all government or privately owned commodities and utilities. For them, opportunities to confront government policies that cause untold deprivation and displacement are literally right on their doorstep.

The women in the Netherlands emphasized the close relationship between solutions to women's particular issues and changes necessary at the level of government negotiations. Their confrontation with government is from a different political site and at a more comprehensive level of engagement. Two of the women were in official opposition to the government and their confrontation involved negotiating structural changes within Philippine society that would in turn change the semi-feudal, semi-colonial destinies of Filipinos. The women in Vancouver named the transnational dimension with more consistent connectivity, viewing the struggle of all Filipino women from the perspective of their work organizing Filipino women abroad. At the same time they remained connected to national issues, particularly those of women in the Philippines.

***Prostitution and Trafficking.*** Tess (MO) brought up the issues raised when Filipino women are pushed to go abroad as part of the global trafficking of women, be it as domestic workers (for most) or as entertainers, mail-order brides, or in the illegal sex trade.

The forced migration of Filipino women to other parts of the world is akin to trafficking of Filipino women. The Philippine government is engaged in the trafficking of Filipino women largely as domestic helpers and entertainers, and also as mail order brides. That 60 or 70, 75% of OFWs are women also points to the current need of imperialist globalization with respect to the type of workers that they need, for example, the domestic workers in Hong Kong or even the nurses in the UK. So it sort of fits into that and that's the reason there are so many women. But also in our experience definitely the plight of the Filipino women OFWs are more vulnerable to a range of human rights violations. Given the conditions of their work, largely as domestic workers or entertainers, they're usually isolated and also, they're more vulnerable to any sexual harassment, sexual abuse.

There is no clearer link between economic and physical/social violence and feudal attitudes than those seen in prostitution and sexual trafficking. In Philippine colonial society under Spain, and later under the US, when feudal and semi-feudal attitudes in women and men were intensified and maintained, the prostitution of women was a key example. In none of the more than eighty dialects and language groups of the Philippines did a word for *prostitute* exist. The closest connotation one might find is a word meaning "a low-flying dove."<sup>22</sup> A 1900 census of the city of Manila reported only a dozen, mostly foreign-born prostitutes.<sup>23</sup> It is conceivable that few would admit to their status as prostitutes, but this figure indicates the relatively low number of women in the sex trade at the time.<sup>24</sup> While the number of prostitutes remained low for the

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<sup>22</sup> Ninotchka Rosca at a public speech, Purple Rose Campaign launch, Vancouver, Dec. 1999.

<sup>23</sup> Rosca, Ninotchka. "Trafficking is femicide and organized prostitution is a violation of the collective human rights of women," National Consultation for Women of Philippine Ancestry: Migration, Labor Export and the Traffic of Women, Seattle, October 5-7, 2001, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Leonora Angeles (1989) points out that by the late nineteenth century, prostitution in Manila was tracked and regulated by the Bureau of Public Health and was a source of livelihood for some women. She explores the families' acceptance of their "daughters' occupation" and the sexual harassment received, not only by prostituted women but by working women, from parish priests and town friars.

next decades, there was a tremendous increase brought about by the Vietnam war in the 1960s and '70s. The US bases in the Philippines served as "R & R" (rest and recuperation) centres during the entire duration of the war.<sup>25</sup> In 1998, GABRIELA estimated that there were 400,000 prostituted women, not including unregistered women in the sex trade, seasonal prostitutes, overseas "entertainers," and victims of sex trafficking outside the country.<sup>26</sup> In 2005, GABRIELA and the International Labor Organization noted 600,000 women in prostitution in the Philippines, the highest number in Southeast Asia;<sup>27</sup> while AMIHAN, a peasant women organization, estimated the true number to be closer to 800,000 because of extreme hunger among the peasant populations.<sup>28</sup>

Chona (N3) relates the vulnerability of Filipino women when they risk going abroad for economic reasons, and the solidarity response from the community.

Ah...with regards to a particular gender issue, trafficking in women. In the late '80s there was this case of a Filipino who was trafficked for prostitution here in the Netherlands. Her recruiter in the Philippines was a judge, sa (in) Mindanao, involved...high up anyway in the lawmaking...supposed to be law making bureaucracy of the land. And she was brought over on the pretense that she was going to be working in a hotel and ended up working in a sex farm here in the Netherlands. And she ran away from the sex farm with a client who later became her partner. The Filipino community rallied around her case. And also Dutch women's organizations took up her case such that she was able to bring the case against her recruiter here in the Netherlands who

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<sup>25</sup> LILA is a women's organization of elderly Filipino women who served as "comfort women" to Japanese soldiers during World War II. They are seeking redress from the Japanese government, in a campaign similar to that of Korean and Chinese women who also served as comfort women. When U.S. military outposts and bases were established (from 1898 until 1991), Filipino women continued their sexual slavery to service foreign troops in the Philippines, until the present. With globalization, they are servicing men through the tourism industry and abroad, in the entertainment industry and the sex trade.

<sup>26</sup> GABRIELA. "Fleshing out the flesh trade: Data on the prostitution of women in the Philippines" (Metro Manila: GABRIELA, March 1998).

<sup>27</sup> Piglas Diwa, "Prostitution: Profits from women's bodies" (Manila: Piglas-Diw, 1999, 7). The number of prostitutes in the Philippines is the highest at around 500,000, followed by Thailand with approximately half that number, and Malaysia in third place, according to a 1998 ILO study.

<sup>28</sup> Alexander Martin Remolino. "Palit-bigas Prostitution or How Rural Women are Trading Sex for Rice due to Hunger" (Bulatlat, Alipato Publications, V:37, Oct. 23-25, 2005). <<http://www.bulatlat.com>>.

was sentenced to a prison term. But unfortunately her recruiter in the Philippines [the judge] was not...but that was for me one of the highlights also of a community coming together for concrete issues.

While the commodification (see Chapter 1) of Filipino women in the sex trade was not specifically elaborated on at length by the women interviewed, they all belong to organizations currently involved in an international campaign against the trafficking of Filipino women, the Purple Rose Campaign (see Chapter 6). All the women would include the trafficking of women through the entertainment and tourist industries, mail-order brides, and prostitution as part and parcel of the larger economic picture of the commodification of Filipino women, whether trafficked within the country or abroad. For example, Filipino women in the “entertainment” industry go to Okinawa in large numbers (where Japanese prostitutes are not allowed to go) to service US troops in over a hundred US military posts.<sup>29</sup> The women interviewed consider the economic and social conditions of women forced into prostitution as paralleling those of women forced into migration in order to find money for their families. Like those doing domestic work and child care, sex workers are engaged in a domain assigned to women because of their sex.

Marita (G) summarizes issues related to women’s oppression and exploitation in terms of their labour and economic contributions to Philippine society abroad, and lays out a broad analysis.

So it is important to connect this migration to our local, internal problems, in such way [that] the...struggle for liberation in our country would impact...naturally and integrally to this phenomenon of migration. So if we are able to solve our internal problems, it is an expectation that our migrants would come back...then decrease migration.

The issues she raises stem from the economics of the commodification of women and how these factors need to be confronted and eradicated. She has supported legislation against the trafficking of persons, which directly confronts and opposes the trade of Filipinos. The fact that

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<sup>29</sup> Ninotchka Rosca, Panel address, Women’s International Solidarity Affair Conference, Manila, August 2004.

women now comprise most of the labour export of Filipino workers as well as the majority of those in the sex trade (in the Philippines, Japan, and other countries abroad) makes her work in Congress focused on women, although the root causes apply to all Filipinos exported for labour. Because of her position in Congress and the mandate of the GABRIELA Women's Party, Marita has been able to introduce, debate, and advocate for bills and laws specific to women's issues. On March 17, 2006, while still forcibly confined inside Congress, she released a statement protesting that the threat of arrest, if carried out, would prevent her active participation in Congress on some key women-specific bills. She noted that she was one of

the principal authors or co-authors of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Children Act (RA 9208), co-author of the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act (RA9262), and sponsor of the Juvenile Justice bill that promotes restorative justice for children in conflict with the law. I also co-authored the measure to increase the minimum wage of workers and allowances of government employees and other pro-women legislations advancing specific concerns of women as enshrined in the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). My community projects, on the other hand, address the needs and interest of women, children, youth and students.

Our advocacy for women and children's concerns extends to our opposition to government measures that bring further impoverishment and heightened repression to the marginalized sectors. Thus, the Gabriela Women's Party stood strongly against the Expanded Value Added Tax (EVAT), a lopsided national budget, and price increases of basic commodities.

Like Tess (MO), both Fely (A) and Marita focus on women's issues as the result of the broader economic analysis. For Fely, violence against women and children is analyzed within the framework of the trafficking of women and children, including the violence inflicted on children when their mothers are trafficked or become migrant workers. This network of human trafficking that serves the global economy also provokes direct, global action from women activists.

By confronting and resisting economic globalization, the women interviewed appear to heed Mohanty's call to "respond to the phenomenon of globalization as an urgent site for the recolonization of peoples, especially in the Two-Thirds World" (236, 2003).

Globalization colonizes women's as well as men's lives around the world, and we need an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and contextualized feminist project to expose and make visible the various, overlapping forms of subjugation of women's lives. Activists and scholars must also identify and reenvision forms of collective resistance that women, especially in their different communities, enact in their everyday lives. It is their particular exploitation at this time, their potential epistemic privilege, as well as their particular forms of solidarity that can be the basis for reimagining a liberatory politics for the start of the century. (236)

Transnational as their analysis might be, most of these women emphasize the struggle for survival of Filipinos in the Philippines. Tess (MO)'s perspective (see above), having personally lived in Canada and the Philippines and advocated for the rights and welfare of migrant workers scattered worldwide, highlighted the issues of forced migration and its extensive and long-term social costs to individuals and to the society as a whole. She analyzed the policies in the Philippines that make this migration possible and necessary. The solutions lie clearly in "genuine" land reform and national industrialization. These would provide an infrastructure for the nation and waged jobs for Filipinos, and thus prevent the export of their forced, cheap labour, keeping them in the country to contribute and build it. Yet the consequences of this forced migration are not all negative. Filipinos' awareness of the causes of leaving their homeland is increasing and expanding. Returning migrant workers bring different experiences and acknowledge realities they and their families had not understood before they left. Thus, as Tess (MO) says, national and transnational organizing is critical. Filipinos, especially women, in the Philippines and abroad, need to be organized, particularly those who return to the Philippines.

## **Summary**

The issues shared by these women link domesticity and femininity to economics, from the period when colonial empires were amassing wealth from their colonies to the present profit-driven global efforts of governments or corporations; women contributed to their expansion

through unremunerated work in the home and undervalued work outside it, and continue to do so. Even as both women and men are exploited by economic and racial policies, neo-colonized men may still project their own oppression by seeking to dominate women in the personal, private domestic space. The social and economic subjugation of women intersect as femininity is further exploited when women enter the work force, assigning them to tasks that keep them doing “women’s work” that pays less than men’s and which make them vulnerable to sexual violence. With the expansion of capitalism to present globalization policies, women’s service to family and home, their sex and reproductive roles, have been systematically marketed as goods and services. Global human trafficking, of which prostitution is often considered the “last frontier” of women’s exploitation, is the vehicle by which the commodities are transferred and traded in the world economy. For Filipino women in general, it is on the transnational stage that systemic racism is experienced (see Chapter 6), adding another intersecting layer to their class and gender oppression.

The women interviewed revealed that external forms of subjugation extend deeper into the “colonization” of the mind, through culture, identity formation, and the confusion that results from overlapping gender-class-race discrimination. In their accounts, personal liberation and community de-colonization are not framed as sequential nor as cause-and-effect. In the case of Ayo (UP), breaking out of her personal physical and mental confinement allowed her to understand and act more directly to influence systemic issues on behalf of the larger community in which she was living. In the case of the younger transnational women, Tess (MO), Marilyn (V2) and Michelle (V3), understanding the historical and economic context of their family’s migration made them aware of the need for collective action and solidarity. In some cases, changed awareness was motivated by personal discomfort or anger that led them to understand the injustices in society, while in others, understanding how systems oppress people lead them to personal life-changing awareness and action. Both directions of change are reflected in



these women's praxis. Whether it is undertaking research, as in this project, or implementing community programs, Tuhiwai-Smith reminds us that there is

considerable work to be done in terms of undoing or deconstructing the dominant paradigms by which most scientific research was bounded, and connecting the research enterprise to feminism and to a social reality with which feminism connects. This has involved critique, the development of new methodologies, and the possibility of alternative ways of knowing or epistemologies (2002, 166).

The next chapter considers the evidence of this group of women's growing empowerment through their efforts to re-vitalize themselves along with the communities where they live and work, and the expansion of this work to a transnational stage. Their actions and attitudes reflect a particular combination of adherence to "domestic" or "feminine" values, along with assertiveness and political awareness that shed light on the reasons for their successes and determination to continue in spite of oppression and marginalization.

## CHAPTER 6

### COMMUNITY-BASED FEMINIST PRAXIS AS A MODEL OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community, there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist.

Audre Lorde (1983, 94-101)

...how do we define and locate community? Is community a geographic and identifiable site or a collective process through which individuals come to represent themselves in relation to others with whom they share similar experiences and viewpoints? ...identity conceptions including those that are coterminous with racial-ethnic identities cannot be detached from geographic or other constructions of community.

Nancy Naples (2003, 79)

#### Theory and Praxis

Tuhiwai-Smith notes that critical theorists and scientists often fail “to recognize their own patriarchal practices which continued to marginalize and silence women academics” (2002, 166). For the women in this study, there is a parallel in that they are engaged in a movement for social change alongside men (and women) who may still adhere to patriarchal and feudal beliefs and practices. In nation-building, women’s role and contributions are frequently suppressed or undervalued, as even militant women may function within internalized paradigms of gender oppression. Sandoval’s presentation of alternative methodologies, developed by and for the “oppressed,” claims that emancipation from still dominant models depends on a different consciousness (2000). Tuhiwai-Smith argues that approaches to research and action “can be generated from very different value systems and world views” denied by patriarchal and colonial paradigms (167). The women in this study are living the changes they speak of, in contexts where they continue to be marginalized, in the Philippines and abroad, even in political

movements for social transformation. For these women, who share a political ideology, transnational feminist organizing has to be based on what they call feminist praxis (see Chapters 2 and 4). Ironically, “transnational” in this context is inseparable from community-based local organizing.

The women interviewed were asked to describe and define *feminist praxis* from various perspectives: (a) their own practices with other women, for which they provided very specific, concrete examples, accompanied by their ideas, insights, and theorizing about these practices; (b) what they considered to be particularly effective types of action in working with women (as distinguished from “successes” or achievements *per se*); (c) what barriers or challenges they experience; and (d) what characterizes their sense of community and the role of democratic practices within that community, locally, nationally, and transnationally.<sup>1</sup> I was interested in discovering how they see their roles and values as women interacting with their public activism and collaboration with other groups.

I requested that they shift from the perspective of the nation and all Filipinos to that of women in particular, and asked about the work they are actively engaged in. To allow further analysis and include their own theorizing,<sup>2</sup> they were asked again why they considered certain actions effective. Their descriptions and analyses provide some indicators of their experiences as lived transnational feminist praxis. Naples elaborates further on “feminist praxis”, as based on feminist women’s activism, feminist theories, and reflective practices (2003, 24-26). She sees

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<sup>1</sup> Although (d) was originally intended as a general question on the overall national struggle for social transformation, the questions followed the discussion of their practices as women in communities and organizations. Consequently, it was felt that their responses to this set of questions likely flowed from their perspective specifically as women. Thus, their descriptions of community inadvertently revealed their perspectives on democratic communities from their experiences largely in women’s groups, and from interactions with women in their political activities and discussions.

<sup>2</sup> The importance of hearing the theorizing of these activist women is not only about “voice” but, more importantly, stems from Gramsci’s idea of *the organic intellectual*.

applications of feminist praxis in policy analysis and women's empowerment projects, as well as in the type of interdisciplinary research she undertakes. Her ideas, as well as those of Alexander and Mohanty (1997), and Mohanty (2003), on politically focused, local, class-conscious and anti-racist analyses and methods are applicable to the women in this study, who struggle towards social transformation from their particular local/transnational locations. The women interviewed here take the results of such praxis as demonstrating liberation from marginalized spaces. More importantly, they narrate how they live out, and continue to transform, the various levels and processes of change, as individuals engaged in particular communities. They narrate their striving for the empowerment that engaging in feminist praxis itself produces. Their feminist praxis in their everyday lives illustrates materialist standpoint theories, as their comments are always situated in the context of their work, and relate the national economic and political situation to the survival issues facing Filipino women at home and abroad.

For the Filipino women activists in this study, knowledge production through the melding of theory and practice is motivated primarily by experiences "from the ground," privileging the most marginalized and poorest sectors as sources of knowledge. Once this process is started, theory ceases to be "only" theory and is transformed into praxis. All the women interviewed started their activism from the ground. As was seen in Chapter 4, even those women who were socially and economically privileged in their upbringing and education became fully politicized only when they "hit the streets." From there, their awareness of the class injustices of Philippine society grew. These women had to learn in the streets because the elite education most of them received reinforced hegemonic beliefs. This system maintained the advantages of the upper classes, and initially prevented them from seeing their responsibility and share of culpability for the Philippine situation. Those who were not so privileged in their upbringing also learned in the streets, because the feudal relations that confined them to their homes prevented

the education that might have empowered them as politically active citizens. As they explained, these activist women advocated and acted with others on concrete issues related to daily life struggles. In their current activities, the collective planning and assessment processes they undertake at the community level also demonstrate feminist praxis. All the women are engaged in activities and debates that occur simultaneously in traditionally privileged sites – such as the university or government – and less traditional ones such as the poorest urban neighborhoods and tenant farms.<sup>3</sup>

The women consulted in this study are also able to engage in new forms of national and transnational praxis, beyond their local contexts, because of the unique transnational diaspora of Filipino women workers and activists. Those abroad are organizing regionally and nationally, dealing with issues that stem from policies of the Philippine state as well as from the host countries. From the Netherlands, some continue to be engaged in national negotiations. Some from Canada have lived and worked in the Philippines, while some activists from the Philippines have come to Canada as resource persons. As we will see from examples discussed below, some issues raised and projects initiated in the Philippines are supported by Filipino women's groups abroad, and some initiatives abroad are coordinated with women's organizations in the Philippines. Before reaching out and building alliances with non-Filipino international groups (but not excluding this effort), Filipino women's groups are building solidarity and consolidating their efforts as a global community of transnational Filipino women. Their experiences can contribute to new understandings of global or transnational feminism. Realizing the global dimensions of their situation as Filipino women, these women activists see their praxis as transnational solidarity work and a continuation of women's struggle for their

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<sup>3</sup> One might argue that while poor communities are not "traditional" sites of knowledge production, new and advanced praxis methods and knowledge often originate from them because of their need to organize in order to better their lives.

liberation from oppressions based on class, gender, and race, which have no national boundaries.

When the women were asked specifically about their work with women, they focused on how their actions are in direct response to a close-up understanding of women's needs. In most cases, they named the very specific issues identified by particular women, on which they base their organizing. The needs of the women in certain communities not only influence, or as some said "inspire," their work, but are the very reason for the existence of their organizations and the purpose of their activist endeavors.<sup>4</sup> In most cases women's particular conditions were linked to the root causes of economic domination that condemn the nation to mismanagement and poverty. As they contextualize women's needs nationally and globally, their actions aim to bring about real, material changes in the personal lives of women they know, including themselves. Aiming at practical changes in daily life does not mean they necessarily start from the perspective of individual women, or as members of a specific community or organization. Rather, looking at the lives of women more broadly, and at the most effective and challenging actions already undertaken by themselves and women elsewhere, they perceive and experience both personal and collective achievement as a process of on-going change and reassessment. Collective needs are addressed and community narratives heard through organizing and education. As reflected in Chapter 5, all those interviewed emphasized the

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<sup>4</sup> In my years as a volunteer for Amnesty International, I have been struck by the differences between how a women's organization such as GABRIELA Philippines was born, in comparison to Amnesty International. Peter Benenson, named as the *single* founder of Amnesty International was a London lawyer who was riding the London tube in 1961, when he read about two Portuguese students in 1961 who toasted freedom and were immediately arrested and imprisoned by the then military regime in Portugal. Personally outraged, he left the train and prayed in St. Martin in the Fields Church in London. After this moment of outrage and inspiration, he gathered a group of people, including lawyers, who wrote letters to the Portuguese government in protest. Their action grew into an international organization which continues to write letters on behalf of those unjustly arrested, imprisoned, or tortured, and those to whom the death penalty is applied. In contrast, GABRIELA was formed by a growing community of women who addressed state injustices imposed on their lives through their own organizing and mobilizing efforts. Its very existence grew out of years of injustices and their collective response contributed to the toppling of a dictator for the first time in Philippine history.

inseparability and reciprocity of both outer and inner changes in their personal lives, in conjunction with the changes manifest in their communities. For them, feminist praxis, aimed at women and the “nation,” entails *social transformation*, played out both personally and collectively, in the self, the family, and the community, nationally and transnationally. Ayo’s story reveals how for some, a subtle shift occurred between fighting for workers rights as workers, and engaging in the same fight with a different focus, as a woman.

I wondered why I was in this organization...I began as an ordinary worker, then I returned to the community where there was some unity among the workers against low wages, contractualization, even when there is no guarantee of housing in the city...so when I lost my job...I became part of the organization of the community...because I believed in the actions and unity of the people, to fight for the rights of the people, as the poor and marginalized, and as women.<sup>5</sup>

This does not mean that tensions do not exist, as it requires considerable efforts to draw attention to women’s issues, in spite of resistance, as Marilyn (V2) mentioned.

I think the presence of women who have a stronger foundation in women’s perspective [shifts consciousness] [but] I think there’s that tendency to also try to downplay the specific issues of women...it still starts with a class perspective...at a theoretical level, there’s that need to start the process of transformation even on the issues of gender and understanding our issues as women now...it’s still a class society...you have to start that [transformation] now because otherwise you’re losing the benefit of all of that process of struggle and debate and bringing things to a higher level and culture too, that relationship of the liberation of women... to the country...

Filipino women activists are still dealing with old debates over the intersections of national liberation and women’s liberation in the Philippines, but these tensions become less central when they are involved in transnational spaces and debates in a global context. Mohanty’s comments on feminist praxis “within a cross-cultural, international framework” (“Cartographies

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<sup>5</sup> *Original:* At and sabahiga ko na bakit ako nandito sa isan organisasyon...ang umpisa ay doong sa isan manggagawa ako tapos and alam ko na and isan manggagawa, sa komunidad din it umuwi, na kung saan, may ugnayan talaga yong usapin ng manggagawa hindi sa pagtaas ng sahod, kontraktualisasyon, at yong pagumuwi ka sa komunidad na hindi naman talagang...wala naman talagang katiyakan sa paninirahan ng mga maralitang taga-lunsod. Kaya, ako, noong nawalan ako ng trabaho...naging bahagi din ako ng organisasyon sa komunidad,...dahil naniniwala ako na sa sama-samang pagkilos at pagkakaisa ng mamamayan, maipaglalaban mo yong karapatan mo bilang mamamayan, bilang maralita, at bilang babae.

of Struggle”, 2003, 43-84) become just as relevant as the national scene. Mohanty brings together analyses of decolonization and national movements in the Third World, in relation to present-day white, multinational, liberal-capitalist patriarchies dominating a global economy (83-84). Like Mohanty, these Filipino women activists acknowledge the importance of developing political consciousness by sharing stories, creating an oral history based on individual testimonials, in order to develop collectively a “politicized oppositional identity” (77). Mohanty claims that such stories can bring Majority World feminists together, united by their opposition to the forces that oppress them.

This, then, is what indelibly marks this discussion of Third World women and the politics of feminism together: imagined communities of women with divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systemic. (Mohanty, 2003, 47)

However, as discussed in Chapter 2, this purely oppositional framework is inadequate to describe the attitude of the women interviewed, whose actual or imagined communities of resistance are not primarily or only oppositional. Their attitude adds a more positive dimension, as they see themselves living out transformation in the present, through democratic feminist practice, building a better society that will not find unity only in opposing the dominant order, but by building something new. Chona, in the Netherlands, explained how she sees her work there as inextricably connected to what is happening in the Philippines, and believes that pressure from those abroad will lead to improvements at home that will change the situation of those forced to migrate.

Ah...you can say that the liberation of our people will necessarily include the liberation of migrant Filipinos who are outside of the country because the root causes of their migration are in the social, economic, and political conditions of the country which at the moment, you know, are pushing hundreds of thousands of Filipinos to leave the country. So we feel that the kind of work that we are doing outside of the country can only contribute to what we hope will be a different Philippines, you know, a different sort of...country where people are ensured of jobs, where they can send their kids to school, where they can earn an income which will ensure their family's survival. So, we hope that with the organization and the social awareness-raising that we're



doing, and the mobilizing of the migrant community here, that this can somehow have a positive impact in terms of what's happening in the Philippines. Positive impact in the sense that... there will be a stronger voice from the Filipino migrant community wherever they are in terms of taking the Philippine government, for example, to task with regards [to] its governance and leadership and also giving more support to the work of progressive people's organizations in the Philippines who are generally seeking...social transformation. (Chona, N3)

The actions the women undertake in their local communities build on and extend the earlier experience of organizations in the Philippines and beyond (both national and women-specific), and in many ways they correspond to strategies deployed by progressive democracy movements everywhere. Yet they have met with remarkable success in very different contexts. An overview of what they actually do, based on the women's answers to the interview questions and my own experience, will provide the basis for analysis of what may be deemed specific or exceptional, in relation to the transnational activism of these Filipino women.

### **Effective Action**

Many of the actions described here are not just distinct strategies but interrelated. What might be campaigns or protests are also opportunities for education, capacity-building, or community and/or alliance-building. The focus may differ when an action is related to the overall purpose or for specific objectives. Some, like one described below, may have had both an immediate objective and the long-term purpose of educating about the exploitation of women.

**Protests.** In general, the most effective actions were considered to be those that addressed specific concrete issues, followed by equally concrete, public action that further educates about women's issues and gives voice to their concerns. For example, Marita (G) told of two demonstrations against the portrayal and use of women as objects for male consumers and for profit. The first concerned a "bikini carwash", where scantily dressed young women were used to attract men to have their car washed. The women were students who needed money for their studies.

So when we learned of it...I called GABRIELA in Iloilo, protested against it, and then I called the mayor and said that you should revoke the license of that [car] wash. [It] became a national sensation until...everything just happened I think in two or three weeks, two weeks, something like that, and it was closed down due to pressure. And the other one in Manila, who started theirs *siguro* [perhaps] one week *pa lang* [only], also closed down. So we wanted to see if they had really closed down...so we told one of our staff [to] go there. And so she went there to have her car washed. And then she was asking, "*Ito ba yong bikini car wash?*" ["Is this the bikini car wash?"] "*Ay, oo,* [oh yes] but we stopped already because that crazy Congresswoman is against it." [Laughter, more laughter] You know, this...gives you strength. If we can do this, we can do more, you know.

Marita also described another protest against a more sinister, violent billboard advertisement for vintage (*anejo*) brandy. The offensive and sexist slogan ran thus: "*Nakatikim na ba kayo ng quince anos?*" ["Have you ever tasted a 15-year-old?"] An equally strong nationwide protest was mounted and the billboard was taken down.<sup>6</sup> These two campaigns confronted the objectification of women through the use of sales and marketing strategies. While these may appear to be business or advertising practices that need to be denounced and replaced everywhere, the underlying connection to national policies in the Philippines that enable migration is more profound. While the use of women's bodies in advertising, purportedly to increase sales of goods and services to men, is common worldwide, Filipino women as commodities for business and trade are particular targets in the global market. As discussed in Chapter 5, "trafficking" of women in the sex trade is a multi-million dollar industry, and exporting them for cheap labour implicates private agencies and governments in perpetuating the use of women in the pursuit of capitalist globalization economic policies and practices.

Organizing wherever women are, in response to the specific needs of particular communities, families, and individuals, and having women address and act on issues they themselves

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<sup>6</sup> Of notable interest here is that in 2005, prior to the current President calling a State of Emergency in Feb. 2006, the brandy distillery company contested the taking down of the billboard which occurred almost two years before. It threatened to re-open the case and file a suit against the Congresswoman who led the protest action. More a harassment tactic than a real threat, the suit never materialized.

identified, proved to be effective strategies. Mass protests in the streets, letting women lead and express themselves, were particularly successful<sup>7</sup>. For example, in September 2005, women's organizations planned a rally to protest against increasing oil prices. A crowd composed exclusively of women stormed oil depots in Pandacan, Manila, linking this issue with the rising price of other basic commodities that specifically affected women and families. They created a mock oil barrel, decorated with the face of the President and the emblems of three multinational oil corporations, which they burned. The women then joined a nationwide transport strike (of women and men), also against oil price increases, held a few days after their protest.

At the same time, union and other public sector workers, including men, were engaged in similar protests against national economic policies that run counter to the needs of marginalized Filipinos. What made the protests specifically feminist in the Filipino context was the focus on women's domestic role and how they directly suffered the impact of rising household commodities and services to meet basic needs for food, health, and shelter for the family. Such public street protests did not correspond to typical "feminine" images, especially of poor women. By engaging in such vocal and forceful activities, marginalized women can assert the importance of their issues within a feminist agenda, bringing their domestic struggles from the private to the public sphere and linking their particular exploitation to systemic subjugation attributed to the policies of the state.

The women distinguished between what is effective in the short-term in relation to a specific situation, and what needs ongoing efforts. Recognition of a dialectic between small efforts and

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<sup>7</sup> Similar protests were held abroad in solidarity with the actions in the Philippines. This was heightened when there were protests in 2005 in the Philippines and abroad to oust the current President, as evidence came to light of election fraud and corruption by family members, including her husband, leading to a call for her to step down due to what was deemed the illegitimacy of her Presidency.

larger issues characterizes their analysis. In her capacity as an activist from the early phases of the women's movement in the Philippines and her current involvement in academia, a teachers' alliance, and women's grassroots organizations (see Chapter 4), Fely (A) evokes this dialectical notion:

Oh, we've had so many successes...we have really...achieved a number of tactical successes. We have overthrown a dictatorship supported by the might of the United States. This was the Marcos dictatorship. We have overthrown a corrupt and immoral president, Joseph Estrada, okay. Recently because of the people's clamor, we have managed to have Angelo de la Cruz, a migrant worker in Iraq, come back at the expense of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's relationship with George Bush. So these are immediate victories. But at the local level, we gain victories in fighting for our economic rights, you know. Through the struggle, we have managed to gain...higher year-end incentives from the administration, the University. We [women and men] have won some additional benefits for the administrative staff of the employees, that's a three-day special privilege leave such as union leave for the officers of the union. So it's a combination of big and small, combination of economic and democratic gains.

While these results were achieved in collaboration with men, they would not have happened without the women's efforts, and the feminist aspect of their involvement is evident in their follow-up work.

**Specific Campaigns.** Important campaigns, emerging out of Filipino women's unity of purpose and transnational solidarity, address shared issues and relevant strategies. The goal of several prominent ones has been to change certain laws, after some bills that affect migrant workers abroad and women at home were formulated in consultation with women's groups and introduced in the Philippine Congress by representatives of GABRIELA Women's Party. These campaigns seek to have the bills passed into law, with support from national and transnational women's organizations. Marita (G) told of her experience in Congress, illustrating the dialectic of the critical inter-connectedness of theory and practice embedded in "praxis." These campaigns also bring out the possibilities of solidarity across different sectoral and class locations, when laws affecting women are seen as an integral part of the national struggle.

Through attention to the effects of existing laws, legal theory is informed by the direct experiences of Filipinos, particularly women, and the practices of women's organizations. New laws, once enacted, infuse a different analysis into women's organizations, and the women's movement itself, which deepens and extends women's practice. The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Republic Act 9208<sup>8</sup> of which Marita (G) was one of the principal authors, is an example of this dialectic. It was a direct result of the experiences of Filipinos and their massive migration as cheap labour. References to "forced migration" experiences, and the "modern-day slavery" described by Filipino women who came through the LCP reflect some of the terminology that have been adopted at the Philippine Women Centre of BC since 1989, to raise the awareness of LCP women to levels of conscious feminist analysis and praxis. In turn, a law such as the one mentioned above means these experiences and resulting resistance are raised to further levels of theory within a particular legal framework. The existence of the law can allow women's organizations in the Philippines and abroad to further develop their practice in educating women living under these conditions and their strategies for opposing and engaging in the development of government policies, in the Philippines and abroad.

But of course, it's a long way, whether it will be implemented...[with] a system here [the Philippines] that will be accessible to the poor. Of course that is another question. But I think from the perspective of [setting up] a standard to measure what are the things that should not be tolerated by society...I think this law is a positive thing. (Marita, G)

Another bill recently introduced by GABRIELA Women's party parliamentarians is one on divorce. Divorce does not legally exist in the Philippines, owing to the influence of the Roman Catholic Church that prohibits it. In practice, many couples in the Philippines are de facto divorced, and it has historically been common practice for some men to have simultaneous

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<sup>8</sup> It defines trafficking as a crime, its different forms, and the respective penalties. It includes the category of "forced labor," in which the law can be applied to the direct experience of the labor migration of Filipino men and women. "*Forced Labor and Slavery* refer to the extraction of work or services from any person by means of enticement, violence, intimidation or threat, use of force or coercion, including deprivation of freedom, abuse of authority or moral ascendancy, debt-bondage or deception" (Republic Act 9208).

partners and second families tolerated by their first wife. However, this "Divorce Bill" was introduced in response to the more recent experience of many migrant Filipino women (often domestic workers) who have been apart from their husbands for a number of years. Some no longer intend to return to them, since the breakdown of family relationships and marriages is one major negative consequence of migration (as will be discussed later). For some women who were not happy in their marriage, this separation may have eased their forced migration, since they could escape from their partners without the stigma of divorce (even being admired for their decision to leave home in order to support the family financially). Nevertheless, they encounter problems in their new country, because they are unable to divorce their partners or re-marry legally. Those who do remarry anyway and want to return to the Philippines, for visits or permanently, fear being exposed as breaking the law since their marriage to new partners and any children they produce are not recognized as legitimate. In Canada, when the women have completed their LCP contracts and are processing their landed immigrant application, marriage certificates have to be produced. If they declared their married status at the time of entry to Canada sponsorship of spouses and children is allowed. They may wish to bring over their children, without the husband, or the husband may wish to be sponsored, although the couple is no longer really married. The woman may divorce her husband in Canada, but this divorce is not recognized in the Philippines, where only obtaining an expensive annulment from the Roman Catholic Church (an arduous process) is recognized as ending a marriage. A campaign in Vancouver by the migrant workers' group pressured Canadian Immigration to accept an affidavit from the women declaring they were no longer with their spouses and would not sponsor them to come to Canada. At the same time, the GABRIELA Women's Party introduced a divorce bill, supported by women's organizations, that claims divorce as a woman's right. This campaign illustrates the transnational unity that can be achieved and lead to significant results.

Another example of this is the *Purple Rose Campaign*, an international campaign to stop the sex trafficking of Filipino women and children (see Chapter 5). Launched in 1999 by GABRIELA, it was taken up in different parts of the world where Filipino migrant and women's organizations are working. The rose is "purple" because it is not in the nature of a rose to be this way, just as it is not in the nature of Filipino women to be physically abused (bruised) or sexually exploited and trafficked for profit. Chona (N3) reflected on the transnational solidarity of these campaigns spearheaded by Filipino women's groups working together across national boundaries.

We relate with GABRIELA and the network of GABRIELA in the Philippines so if there are any campaigns or any activities of GABRIELA, we try to coordinate that here in the Netherlands. We are able to project the issues that GABRIELA brings in terms of the Philippine situation. With regards to the Filipino community, if their participation in our activities is any indication of their growing...consciousness, then I can also say that through the years of working with them, their consciousness has also slowly broadened...that's the women here.

***Creating Community.*** In all three locations, the women talked about how developing a collective life takes many forms. These include gathering in their own spaces, having pot-luck celebrations of achievements and special occasions, and sharing stories of their challenges, tragedies, and hopes. In public spaces, women also communicate more formally, by giving reports or participating in panels and workshops, facilitating and learning to be resource persons for the community and others. At the PWC in Vancouver, some women share living space in a residence, and have introduced a micro-credit mutual aid program. Called *Paluwagan* (which means "to ease, to loosen"), money is contributed by a number of women so that they can take turns borrowing from this fund when necessary. The women themselves have created these *paluwagan* circles, when they needed them.

When asked how they celebrate their successes, as individuals or as communities or organizations, most of the women laughed and recalled parties and light-hearted, enjoyable

times. Ayo (UP)'s initial response was to say that urban poor women could not often celebrate because such events would be too costly. Later, however, she recalled the community's anniversary, when they had a "salu-salo," a potluck. Others talked about similar gatherings around meals, outings, birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. Veronica (N1) in the Netherlands said their group has not had such events, but in their meetings they "invigorate each other." Others also spoke of the daily, ordinary "celebrations of togetherness." Chona (N3) said,

...even just sharing news...before every meeting...women just updating each other about what's happening in their lives.. that in itself is recognizing women and recognizing their moments and that in itself is like a celebration of your togetherness.

Speaking also of the value of coming together and celebrating, Marita (G) explained,

...how we value it [the community] is through...the spirit of belongingness... that you have the same goals and purpose in life that you are all working towards....that is priceless...when you talk of how you celebrate it....knowing I have all these women that...have the resolve to work for our ideals...bettering our friendship is bettering our commitment also, helping each other out. That is, I think, how we celebrate and that is for me – that is life...that is life [emphatic chuckle]...that is for me a life.

Ayo (UP) felt that when women came together and the community trusted the organization as one with a good reputation for being helpful to women, then solidarity work became very effective. She cited the first-time ever election of a woman representative to Congress and the role of women's organizations and communities in that achievement:

What I know of success, because we are here in the city, is when women are in solidarity [in struggle], like we already said that politicians use government salaries not to serve the people [unlike women in solidarity], so women participated in the elections and we won and we have a representative in Congress who will raise the issues of women and children. So that is what I see as [gains] for women, that we now have a women's and children's representative in Congress, along with the strengthening of women's organizations here outside [the Congress] so that we can be quicker in demanding laws that our representatives in Congress can introduce. We're not just going to let the representative in Congress push for laws, but we are



still here organizing so that we can be stronger in pushing for laws she will be introducing.<sup>9</sup>

When isolation maintains women's domestic oppression, the simple act of women coming together collectively appears as a success in breaking this barrier. As seen in Chapter 4, activist women need to explain to their families that "political" organizing is as central to their lives as reproduction and caring for the family. Explaining their gatherings, including reflection sessions, is part of educating their families to see that they do not gather just for social interaction, but for political aims. Politicizing their families becomes part of their activism.

Raising other women's awareness and consciousness through networking and community-based education, often combined with research, was central to the women's organizing and community-based work. As an academic, Fely (A) noted the need for education and research to take place together to get more effective results.

In terms of education, consciousness, awareness raising, mobilization, and organizing, [I am also] so involved doing research because you cannot have effective education methods without the commensurate research results. In the same manner, you cannot mobilize fully without also the research component.

Fund-raising for education and research is a struggle and at the same time an opportunity to build community life. In Vancouver, BC, seeking funding for local and national research projects is a site of struggle in itself. Funding for research projects comes from many sources. For example, recent 2006 figures at the PWC-BC showed that only 40% of the Centre's budget comes from public funds such as City of Vancouver grants, while 60% is from the fundraising

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<sup>9</sup> *Original:* Eh, sa ngayon, ang alam kong tagumpay dahil nandito naman kami sa lunsod, 'yon katulad noong nakapag...na sumasama [sa patis?] ang kababaihan, na sinasabi nga natin na ginagamit lang naman ang sweldo ng gobyerno ng mga politico na hindi naman nagsi-silbi sa mamamayan, lumahok sa eleksyon ang kababaihan at nakapagpanalo tayo ng representant sa *Congress* na magdadala ng *issue* ng kababaihan at bata. Kaya 'yon and parang nakikita lo na nagging [bonansya?] ng kababihan, na meron na kaming representante ng kababaihan at bata sa Kongreso, kasabay ng paglakas sa organisasyon ng pagkababaihan ditto sa labas para mabilis na maisulong yong mga batas na gagawin ng mga *representative* naming sa *Congress*. Hindi lang pabayaang naming siya sa *Congress* gumawa ng batas, nadito pa rin nag-o-organisa para malakas na maitulak yong mga batas na gagawin niya.

efforts and donations of members. In the Philippines, the search for public and private funds within or outside the country is equally difficult, if not more so. Funds for research are important for community-building. The experience of the PWC of BC is that, once research is funded, there are opportunities for community advancement. For example, a recent six-month qualitative research project on violence against women resulted not only in understanding the issues faced by Filipino women experiencing various forms of violence, but in recommendations for action and policy changes. It led to outreach (when seeking subjects), interviews, and gathering women together to educate themselves and others on issues of violence against women, as well as organizing actions for the women themselves and the rest of the community. In the process of the research, practical and capacity-building skills are acquired, and as noted by Fely (A) above, women's education raises consciousness about their issues and strategies for action, thereby strengthening the community. (See PWC project reports and research publications in the Bibliography, and "Building Alliances", below.)

***Providing Education.*** Community education does not merely impart important knowledge by transmitting history (especially its hidden underside), but also conveys profound values. This process was important to the women in the three sites. Michelle (V3) noted the need in Vancouver to record a local history of struggle, advancement, and achievement, for self-encouragement and to pass on the experience gained.

I think there's many successes. Every day is a success actually. But especially here locally, just thinking about here in Vancouver, that and on a national level, international level, I can see how much it's really grown since when I started becoming involved. Because I was involved in '95 I guess here in Vancouver. So, that's already ten years, that's why some of that organization...they're having their ten-year anniversary, you can really see the success of sustaining these grassroots organizations with hardly any funding or government support, really you know, doing the kind of grassroots participatory research that we've done. I was also involved with some of the first researches that we did about the situation of domestic workers, and I think, since that time, we've deepened our understanding. So that's really a success, the need to start documenting that experience.

Michelle was well placed to compare what is being done in Vancouver with earlier efforts in the Philippines in terms of community research and education.

Well, I've also been back from the Philippines, since I started getting involved, I worked there for two years, just recently...[in] a research institution, Ibon [Philippine research institute], but even comparing the kind of research we do here, because Ibon has been around for twenty-five years, it's very established, has more credibility even within the broader society, even just comparing, our research is really deep. I mean, I could see that especially in terms of the situation or experience of the migrants. So I think to have those researches, to have that documentation is really...a big contribution actually. It's been able to deepen the whole movement's understanding. And even internationally, the phenomenon of migration and the particular experience of Filipinos.

Inter-generational transmission of knowledge and history raises awareness and pride among the youth, and was mentioned by a number of women as evidence of success as well as a challenge. Marita (G), in the Philippines, clearly saw the transmission of ideas and actions to the next generation as not only a sign of organizational success but as a vital element ensuring the vibrancy and survival of a movement. Leslie and Tess in the Philippines, and Michelle and Marilyn in Vancouver, are all involved in youth organizing and education. The current activism of these four younger women attests to the continuity of community work. It is interesting that although Leslie, who works with students, did not specifically mention the need for generational transmission, she did elaborate on the need for young people to be part of the social change movement, in order for it to continue. She assumes the importance of knowing the history of women's struggles, and by implication, the continuation of past struggles by the new generation, since

...the youth sector is part of the women's movement...or the women's sector in general. We also make it a point ...not only to campaign for specific sectoral issues ... like issues of women in the urban poor communities, issues of women peasant workers, (or students) because ...being in the academic sector...being women students is just a transitional stage. Sooner or later we will be part of the working force...so students and the youth should also be informed on that...should also be part of the force that would institute change in society. 'Yon [That's it.]

In the cases of Marilyn and Michelle, they both went from Vancouver to the Philippines, and lived and worked there for a while (see Chapter 4), because of the questions they raised about their identity, their parents' history of migration, and Philippine history. Michelle's story shows certain aspects of feminist praxis from her experience of growing up in Canada and searching for her identity. She actively sought to uncover her own story by learning Philippine history that was hidden from view or too distant for her to access, and reassessing what she did know, such as western feminism, in the context of her own transnational narrative. Her journey to the Philippines and return to Canada had a significant impact on her praxis, as seen in her continued volunteer and leadership involvement in the activities of Filipino women workers. Tess, having grown up in Canada, had a similar desire to go to the Philippines, and in the end she decided to continue her work and make her permanent home there. This "return" to the Philippines by these young women born or raised in Canada reflects transnational Filipino women's struggles for identity and brings together intergenerational issues and feminist perspectives from different national locations. Part of youth activism in Vancouver has been to raise the second generation's awareness not only of Philippine history but its relevance to the current situation. Although some young Filipino-Canadians have gone back for their own personal or political development, many others do not wish to go to the Philippines, or are unable to. Children or adolescents who arrive in Canada as part of their mother's family sponsorship are often homesick for the family members who raised them, and their friends (Ugnayan, 1998; Pratt, 2006). Increasing their political awareness, providing support (for example in dealing with racialized or racist experiences), and building their capacity to understand their history, especially why their mothers migrated, are tasks that the local activist community group can undertake.

***Archiving Materials.*** Intergenerational communication depends on the preservation of stories. Creating and preserving history entails keeping archival materials, including documents, taped

interviews, photographs, films, and other more creative or technological records. Maintaining and conserving websites, blogs, even internet conversations, are valuable and efficient ways of preserving culture and history, as well as debating policies, laws, and actions and assessing how these impact on community life. The library at the PWC in Vancouver provides one of the few sources of documentation for Filipino women's history and activism, and is used by many for research, for community education, or developing cultural projects and campaigns. In Vancouver, three community-based Women's Studies courses (Level I once and Level II twice) have been developed and delivered. Research presentations by numerous facilitators and resource persons have been documented (some filmed) and archived. Significant components of these courses have focused on the history of women's activism from pre-colonial times to current struggles. Linking the actions of the women at the PWC today to the lineage of Filipino women activists is seen as making history. Collective knowledge production, participatory discussion, and group field projects have been documented and preserved for today's analysis as well as tomorrow's historical perusal. Another significant way in which history has been preserved and ideas conveyed by youth, migrant, and women's groups in Vancouver is through cultural expression.

A political fashion show project, now in its third annual presentation, includes feminist methods, reclaims femininity, and sharpens political analysis through art, song, dance, and words. These shows have been preserved in written scripts, on video, and through media articles. Men and women participate in this project, which communicates women's stories and issues through costumes worn and mostly created by women. Typically feminine skills (sewing and modeling) become the means to increase awareness of issues of women's oppression transnationally, and a tool for women to assert themselves. For example, a version of a traditional Philippine dress called the *Maria Clara* (developed during Spanish times to hide a woman's body) was modeled by a PWC volunteer at one of the Fashion Shows. This dress had a very long piece of fabric

trailing behind it. As the audience's eyes followed the fabric gliding across the floor, a gasp was heard as we realized that two small children and their father were precariously hanging on to the end of her train. Each dress modeled depicts a part of Philippine history or the story of migration. Art and other cultural means of expression (theatre, dance, crafts) have proved significant tools for the PWC to convey, preserve, and contribute to the political story of Filipinos in the Philippines and abroad. Such projects require research, and create links to both the local arts community and college students. Education and research go hand in hand with community development.

***Engagement in Research Projects.*** Such links are part of Philippine activist history. In Manila the Centre for Women's Resources (CWR) was created in 1982 during the Marcos regime when women, through their protests, became empowered, and saw that "research and training play an important role in promoting women's full participation for genuine social transformation." Today, CWR provides library resources, advocacy and publication services, education and training, research support, and a databank. CWR has been responsible for gathering data and publishing research articles on the situation of women in the Philippines, such as prostitution, trafficking, women's health, and economic issues, providing information that has directly strengthened campaigns and research undertaken abroad, including in Canada.

The grassroots organizations in Canada have been involved in participatory action research for nearly fifteen years. The PWC pioneered community-based, "action-reflection" popular education methods in attempting to pinpoint the issues facing Filipino women in Vancouver and to develop appropriate support for them, as well as to propose future research topics. Research data from interviews, focus groups, surveys, and presentations has directly informed the type of services and programs PWC plans, based on the concrete needs of women. Associated groups like the UKPC (for youth), SIKLAB (for migrant workers), and FNSG (for nurses) have used

these methods of doing research to identify the main issues faced by Filipinos in these sectors as well as to tell the story of the Filipino community as we are living our lives today in Canada. The UKPC continues to engage in research that draws attention to the educational and economic issues facing Filipino youth, especially the effects of racism. SIKLAB was instrumental in focusing on the divorce issue, which arose from conversations with domestic workers. FNSG has studied the experiences of nurses working under the LCP, especially their need for Canadian accreditation. This led to a program of review classes, and campaigns for them to be able to take qualifying exams which can release them from the LCP. The NAPWC<sup>10</sup> is currently engaged in a national research, capacity building, and community enhancing project that furthers the participation of Filipino women in a multicultural Canada. Fulfilling the purpose of action-research, the NAPWC looks at issues facing Filipinos in Canada, and in the process of doing so helps young people of both sexes to understand our history both here and in the Philippines, and to envisage the actions we need to take to enhance our future development. The Canadian context and agenda cannot be isolated from on-going issues in the Philippines, as more and more Filipinos enter Canada because of the economic and social turmoil there. Much of the research recently undertaken has built on collaboration between Filipino communities and academics across Canada and some in the United States, demonstrating the importance of productive alliances.

***Building Alliances.*** From her “inside” perspective as a member of Congress, Marita stated that staying connected to the women’s movement makes her work more effective, especially when women make demands through militant action. She felt that these actions are just as important as being represented in Parliament itself (see discussion above on campaigns to change laws). One unique aspect of her work in Congress is that she has to develop working

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<sup>10</sup> The National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada (NAPWC) is a recently formed national Filipino women’s organization with members including the PWC of BC, PWC of Ontario, and the PWC of Quebec.

relationships with other parliamentarians, particularly the five others who represent grassroots workers, farmers, and communities' interests (building any relationship with the other dominant parties would presumably be more than challenging). She particularly elaborated on countering male domination and the patriarchal hierarchy embedded even among her supposedly more gender-enlightened Party List colleagues.

Even to step back and say that even here, even within the progressive movements there are so many things that we have to assert as women activists, even within, in order for other...our comrades to understand what we mean by liberation [women and men, you mean other comrades] ...yes, yes, exactly, so that...unfortunately, or I shouldn't say unfortunately, but it is a fact of life that we really have to assert. Even if you recognize that women, equality and things like this, but in actual everyday life and practice, we really have to assert our space in everything. Even in press conferences, even now that we are six representatives and I am the only woman<sup>11</sup> and I'm supposed to be... because parang lahat [it's like everyone]...ay naku [oh, dear]...I had to...[speak] as one. (Marita, G)

Being in parliament does at least ensure some publicity for what Marita has to say. Local organizations may have more difficulty in achieving recognition and gaining media attention. Veronica, in the Netherlands, noted that once an organization has acquired a reputation and credibility within the community for helping women, this gives more weight to its efforts. Such a reputation can only be established over time, through consistent support from the community for women and their needs. Those who have received support often later support the organization, not only because they need something in particular but because they have understood the role of the organization in the community.

...it was still new then. PINAY sa Holland [*Filipino Women in Holland*, a women's organization based in Amsterdam]...has been known for 10 years. PH already has the [positive] reputation/prestige and is known in the community. Now, its influence in the community? You see sometimes we need to outreach not only to individuals but to people so they learn that the organization is an organization that helps the community. And also, it's not only specific individuals who help the community. That's different, you see. No? So now, it is different, we have that...because we are increasing and we don't rely just on certain individuals...many...especially new faces...for

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<sup>11</sup> There are now two women representatives in Congress following the May 2008 elections.



example, someone who is undocumented here meets another undocumented person in the park, “Hey, are you a member [of PH]? PH is okay, you should be a member.” So they don’t [go to PH] only when they need something from the old timers...that is our approach.<sup>12</sup> (Veronica, N1)

Women build local alliances on the basis of their immediate concrete needs or to achieve a specific goal, but women’s organizations can also come together more broadly in order to address common concerns, especially transnational ones. There has to be some common ideological base for this to be successful, as Marita (G) reflected:

Although there is commonality...the linkage of women’s movements would require ...certain development, even in their own contexts, for us to have a deeper basis for solidarity, di ba ([Isn’t it])? So...we try to harness what is there...to harness solidarity on the basis of issues, on the basis of trafficking, on the basis of the problems...in a comprehensive way, there’s something to be developed. Also because, objectively, some women’s movements are not on that level yet. So there is their own process of ripening their struggles that has to develop in order for the solidarity to be in a deeper way.

For the PWC women in Vancouver and the NAPWC nationally, partnering with academics in projects and research on Filipino women, youth, economic security, violence against women, and health is an important part of their profile in Canada. The alliances built with academics in different fields (including Women’s Studies, Migration Studies, Geography, Economics, Art, Community Planning, Health, Law) reflect not only traditional views of alliance-building, which may include public relations or financial support or endorsement of projects, but a Philippine tradition of links between feminist academic research and women’s activism. As mentioned by some women in the Philippines, transnational relations may be in the form of financial support, in terms of funding for international research projects. However, at the PWC and NAPWC,

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<sup>12</sup> *Original: ..dahil bagong bago pa yung... PINAY sa Holland. PINAY sa Holland has been known for 10 years. PINAY sa Holland may prestihiyo na yan at may pagkakilala na sa kaniya in the community. Ngayon, influence sa community? Kung minsan kasi ang kailangan mapangibabawan, ay di lamang individuals yung pinupuntahan ano? Kung hindi yung tao, nakikilala na yung organisasyon as an organization na nakakatulong sa community. At hindi na lamang specific individuals na nakakatulong sa community. Iba yun eh. No? So ngayon iba na, may ganiyan tayo na...dahil kumakapal tayo dumarami at ah...di na lang umaasa sa mang-ilang individual, ah, marami...halimbawa especially... new faces...halimbawa pag yung walang papel dito ma meet lang ang isang walang papel sa park, “huy member ka na ba? Huy okay ang [organisasyon], mag member ka.” Saka di na lang yung kailan sila lang may kailangan lalapit sila sa old timers dito napangibabawan natin yun.*

alliances are built above all on collaboration in participatory research by local people. It is part of these activist women's empowerment to share mutually in the work, results, and prestige of a project, as Darla (V1) explained.

...the Filipino women's struggle is also illuminated even within the women's movement in Canada. It is a big contribution to the women's movement here. No one else is going to look at the transformation of Filipino women if we're not going to do it and lead within this Canadian society. So when we actually achieve something, it is also to the advancement of the women's movement here. ...the impact right now is there are so many women academics who have a better understanding about the Filipino women's situation. We raise it to a political level so that we continue to also disturb the status quo. For example, we continue to talk about the modern-day slavery of our Filipino women. I think without the PWC and without our work, this kind of issue will not be raised here.

Thus, in planning meetings that I have attended at the PWC, the discussion of research proposals begins with the sharing of mutually beneficial goals and modes of participation that increase the community's skills<sup>13</sup>.

**Capacity Building and Training.** These women described their work as having to be in women's communities. They reflected on how women's needs motivate their commitment and inform the way they work; at the same time they expressed the expectation that some of the women for whom they advocate will themselves become organizers in their own respective communities. When asked how working women respond to the ongoing processes of analysis or reflection that occur in the context of the communities where they live and work, Ayo (UP) explained how ideas are spread:

There is a link between the workplace and the community because workers go home to the community and the workers themselves are the urban poor. So the problems at work are related to the problems in the community because for sure when you go home to the community, it means that the issues you are fighting for are still there in having a secure home. Meanwhile when you're at work, you're concerned about getting a higher salary and job security so you don't lose your job. That's it.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In November 2008 an international conference was held in Toronto, focusing on research related to Filipinos in Canada by both community-based and academic researchers and illustrating collaboration between them.

This woman (see Chapter 4) described the process of the struggle of poor urban women for land and how it changed their situation in concrete ways. Education and preparation allowed them to proceed with their campaign. She emphasized that the campaign was successful primarily because of the community's efforts to work together.

Indeed there are community experiences. Even though people [women] were in one particular place, we had additional sharing about our struggles. There was this one community here near Dona Imelda [neighborhood] along E. Rodriguez [Avenue] whose houses were under Meralco [electric company]'s ownership, what is called Meralco's 'right of way.' But after such a long time that they had lived there, which already reached 30 years, [for] the longest-resident there, nothing terrible actually happened to them there. The only bad thing was that, because they were poor, they lived there, because of their poverty. So we went to that community to help organize them, and half of them became organized and the other half were organized by the barangay [community governance structure] itself. They already had a Neighborhood Association. Forty families were organized during the time of the demolition – they believed in struggling together...they were the ones who remained in the community. The ones organized by the barangay moved to the government housing project.

This means that they were removed (transferred) from that area and the rest stayed in the Meralco land. You see, they were promised Pesos 18,000 per family to leave. [Those who remained] took the P18,000 and went to Meralco and told Meralco that they will accept the money but that they would like Meralco to add to the money that they had joined together so that they could buy some land. These forty families wanted to buy their own land. They dialogued with Meralco and with another government agency and Meralco agreed to put up some more money and they were told to look for the land. Meralco gave them additional money.

So now they bought land here in San Mateo. They now own this land. This means that they believed in the struggle. Those who moved to the housing project sold their units because they could no longer pay for them because of their low-wage jobs. So this is one of the gains the community made in the past year. So even if it were only women who fought for this, we gained if you really believe in fighting together for something...<sup>15</sup> (Ayo, UP)

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<sup>14</sup> *Original:* Yong tagakaugnay noon doon sa paggawaan at sa komunidad dahil sa mga manggagawa ay umuwi talaga 'yan sa *community*, kasi mga *urban poor* itong mga maggagawang ito. Kaya nakakaugnay ang problema sa paggawaan tapos doon sa komunidad dahil siyempre pag-umuwi ka sa *community*, ibig sabihin nandoon pa rin yong gusto mong ipaglaban, yong katiyakan doon sa paninirahan. Pagsatrabaho ka naman, yong pagtaas siyempre ng *salary* mo at katiyakan mo rin satrabaho na hindi ka mapatangal sa hanap-buhay mo. Yon.

<sup>15</sup> *Original:* Mayroon ngang mga karanasan din ang mga [*community*]. Kahit nandoon sila sa

All the strategies discussed above have proved effective in achieving specific goals. A different type of on-going challenge to feminist practice lies in the internal organization of various groups. Whether in the poor areas of Manila or in gatherings in Amsterdam, the women emphasized the need to nurture relations with women, so that consciousness is raised, community is created and strengthened, and women become empowered within a collective. To build capacity, as an individual or as a group, requires a feminist approach: that of sharing our own knowledge and skills with others (rather than competing with them), and passing on the experience of becoming able to be vocally assertive, as well as participating in campaigns to increase understanding of the relationship between women's issues and those of the nation(s) concerned. By participating in community processes of decision-making, taking action, and assessing these actions, I, for one, have built my capacity as a transnational feminist whose personal identity is reflected in a collective struggle.

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isang lugar. Kasi mayroong kaming *additional sharing* lang doon sa laban. Kasi mayroong isang *community* kami dito sa may Dona Imelda *along* E. Rodriguez na yong kanilang tinitirahan ay sa ilalim ng Meralco. Yong sinasabi nilang '*right of way*' ng Meralco. Pero, sa tagal ng panahon na naninirahan sila diyan, umabot na sila ng *30 years*, yong pinakamatandan tumira diyan, wala naman daw nangyaring masama sa kanila. Ang masama lang, dahil sila'y mahirap, kaya diyan sila nakatira, sabi nila, dahil sa kahirapan. Anong...nagpunta kami diyan sa *community* na 'yan, na-*organize* ang *community* na 'yan, at ang kalahati noon ay na-*organize*... pero yong kalahati ay *organize* mismo ng barangay. At mayroon na silang *Neighborhood Association*. Yong *40 families* na na-*organize*, noong panahon ng *demolition* -- naniwala sila sa pakiki-paglaban ng... sila yong naiwan sa *community*, naiwan sila tapos yong na-*organize* ng barangay, ang nalipat doon sa *housing project* ng gobyerno.

Ibig sabihin natanggal sila diyan tapos yong natira sa Meralco – sinabi nila kasi na bi-bigyan ng P18,000 *per family* – kinuha yong pera na P18,000 at pumunta sa Meralco mismo at sinabi doon sa Meralco na kukunin namin yong pera naming at... gusto naming dagdagan ninyo itong perang nalipun namin at bibili kami ng lupa. Yong *40 families* na 'yan, bibili sila ng sarili nilang lupa. Nakapag-*dialogue* sa Meralco at sa isa pang agencia ng gobyerno at pumayag naman ang Meralco na dagdagan at pinaghanap sila ng lupa – nadagdagan yong kanilang pera binigay ng Meralco. Pumayag naman ang Meralco.

At ngayon, nakabili sila ng lupa, dito rin sa San Mateo. Sarili na nila yong lupa. Ibig sabihin, naniwala sila doon sa laban. Yong ibang nagpalipat sa *housing project*, ay binenta na yong kanilang mga *unit* doon at hindi nila makayanin dahil ang hanapbuhay nila ay [mahina]. Kaya yon yung isa lang sa mga *gain* ng [*community*] na ipinaglaban yong nakaraang...ito lang. Kaya kung baga, kahit na ito ay kababaihan lang nakikipaglaban, mayroon ding mga ganancia kung talaga naniniwala doon sa ipinaglalaban na yong sa sama-samang...

## **Organizing Process**

Any group of people coming together more formally needs to organize in order to plan and carry out activities to achieve common goals. Specific collective decision-making and governance processes were described as growing out of this sense of togetherness and belonging. The comments on this topic provide a window on how democratic principles function within these feminist communities, in contrast to the lack of such democratic realities in the larger society. For example, women members of larger communities were often not consulted on issues of major importance for them, such as housing or setting the fair market value for their products. The principles of consultative and consensus-based democracy make change possible and form an integral part of feminist praxis. According to the women interviewed, these democratic practices are not a utopian ideal, but are used successfully in current, actual decision-making and governance processes within their own local communities or community-based organizations.

These processes are practiced in two intersecting configurations: their own core or leadership groups, and larger organizing communities that involve more members and participants. For example, Inday (RP) explained the functioning of a core group that guides and supports the community (where a larger number of women are active) by playing a leadership role, and also how the larger activist community (including men and other mixed organizations) makes its own decisions on specific actions and projects that directly address local people's needs. She described the process of gathering the community together, prioritizing issues, and making decisions for strategies and actions. The familiar aspects of consensus-building as an inclusive decision-making process were consciously put into practice. Tess made similar points in discussing her work dealing with migration issues:

Collectively, that's how decisions are made. This emphasis on grassroots decision-making, collecting the information, collectively studying the problem *ano yong* [like] root problems, *ano yong mas magandang gawin* [what the root problems are, and what is the best course of action]...

Then we formulate the campaign based on what our members are capable of implementing. So, example, here...we have what we call a campaign committee. This committee is comprised of four or five people here at the office. But after devising or coming up with a plan or whatever, based on the conditions in the community, then we also call what you call an all leaders' campaign meeting. That's when people from the different areas come and we talk about – this is what we think, what do you guys think? Can we do this? And they're like, 'no we can't do that'. After the meeting we come up with a program or a plan that we've all agreed on and that we believe is feasible...sometimes we'll decide on a plan or something like that but it's not based on the real situation of the people so . . . [Q: it doesn't work...]

Ya, it doesn't work. Either they don't participate or they can't because of logistics or capabilities. This is also one of the challenges for our sector. Because we're talking about, for example, issues of OFW sometimes. So our challenges also, because some of our chapters are based in urban poor communities, so we have to link [i.e. to the broader community, including men].

Both these women saw the use of democratic processes and practices as in itself advancing community capacity and solidarity, by the very fact that it implies participation and taking responsibility, aside from the specific goals it sets out to achieve.

### ***Decision-Making***

Rather than following a strict sequence of "phases," their practice appears to involve interactive exchanges constantly moving between action and reflection, demonstrating the principles that govern decision-making by consensus:

- gathering information, knowing the community, and being aware of each other's situations
- collective decision-making in prioritizing issues and actions
- participation in and commitment to decisions made
- on-going assessment of the effectiveness of actions taken.

The information-gathering phase is essential in order to know the members of the community and ensure that they understand the situation; their input is then necessary to prioritize the issues involved and plan accordingly. An inclusive approach drawing on everyone's knowledge builds trust and confidence. Fely, the academic, saw these principles of democracy in action as fundamental to raising women's consciousness and providing education that leads to agency. The organization's leaders' immersion in the community is seen as a mutual educational exchange, and essential for any spokesperson to be able to "represent" others at local, national, or (trans)national levels. The dialectic of learning about and from the members of a community in turn allows the organizers to advocate, teach, and be involved in more effective ways, as Inday (who works with poor rural women) explained:

Efforts in your work, as women, and in organizing, we need to gain the trust of women because we are outsiders. It is better to go there when we know someone, a contact to begin. Then from there the contact becomes valuable to women [organizers and women in community] because they can see that we are not separate from them, we are not outsiders, we live with them. We show that we are concerned about their welfare. In trying to enlighten and educate, we need to be examples to them. For Filipinos, it has to be personal. We cannot be a stranger to them. Then when we hear and share stories, we have to be able to get it. If they are watching daytime soaps we also have to watch them to begin the sharing of stories. What happened in the soaps, we start exchanging stories, then slowly, we start to think, what will happen in the future, and compare this to real life, what is true and what isn't.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Original:* Anong efforts [sa inyong trabaho, komo kababaihan]...ang pag-o-organiza namin kailangan mong makuha yong pagtitiwala ng mga babae. Kasi outsider kami, eh. Kung baga, na pumunta doon na may nakilala...may contact lang kami na sinimulan. Tapos mula doon, i-ko-contact kayo tapos...[ ] ngayon mahalaga din yong ano sa mga kababaihan...makita nila na hindi ka talaga hiwalay sa kanila...hindi ka talaga outsider, nakikipamuhay ka rin sa kanila. Tapos, ipakita mo yoong...yong concern mo doon sa kalagayan nila. Tapos yong pag-papaunawa talaga din sa kanila talagang kailangan mo yong *education*...siyempre kailangan example ka doon sa mga kababihan. Tapos kung sa Pinoy din, hindi puwedeng...kung baga yong may *personal* ano ka rin...yong personal mong mga ano, kailangan alam din nila yong ganyan. Hindi ka puwedeng parang estranger lang talaga. Tapos yong mga kuwento sa mga kuwentuhan kailangan nasasakyan mo rin. Kung sila nag-tetenovela kailangan din manood din muna kami noong mga telenovela na yan, ano, para pagsisimula ng kuwento, para unti-unting... Tungkol sa telenovela, ano yong nangyari kila ano, ganyan-ganyan, nagkuwentuhan kayo, tapos, yon unti-unti mong ipaano sa kanila na...yong isipin din natin...parang...ano ba yong mangyayari, parang i-kumpara natin sa tunay na buhay, itong mga ano na ito, totoo ba yan.

Her initial efforts to find out about the rural women's lives, taking her out of her own class context (see Chapter 4), led her to choose to identify with them and achieve a better understanding of their priorities.

Ayo, who works with poor urban women, pointed out that collective decision-making constantly requires evaluation, and can be a potential source of tension. The balance of power between local people "leading" and organizers originally from outside "guiding" is sometimes delicate to maintain. There is always a struggle to sustain what Leslie (who works with students) called "democratic centralism," which allows the organization's leadership structures to be maintained while grassroots democracy is being practiced. As many people in the community as possible need to be constantly consulted and encouraged to actively participate, yet there are situations where decisiveness, usually possible only from a smaller group, may be required. This process of moving back and forth, in the planning, implementation, and assessment phases, between the core leaders and organizers and the larger group of members of the community, can be as complex and tense as it can be creative and collaborative. The women interviewed described how consciously seeking unity and action as a collectivity is necessary to address the realities of diversity within a community. Ongoing daily struggles, even among the "converted," can only be resolved by a constantly reformulated vision of short and long-term change, and a focus on new challenges as they emerge.

One aspect identified by all was that a basis for collective effort and agreement has to be present, for any successful plans for action to develop. This was particularly obvious to Marita, the Congresswoman:

We have our members on the ground and there is always this dynamic exchange of information and...issues that we can feel on the ground that we process and identify as important issues that our organization should take up and that is also true for me as a parliamentarian because my work in Parliament is just an extension of the women's movement.



While acknowledging divisions and voting are necessary in national elections, she sees grassroots organizing as based on “a long process of consultations,” involving “everyone (across sectors – in factories, peasant communities-- and classes)” and “everywhere (from local *barangays* [neighborhood structures] to Parliament.” The more women/community members are consulted, the better the issues may be understood and solidarity across sectors maintained. For example, Marita explained how a women’s conference on work contractualization became merged with a larger consultation on sex trafficking, which then became part of a broader assessment of government policies and practices in these areas. Ideological differences were put aside in order to address a common set of issues.

...we have consultation everywhere....we expand also on the basis of issues...for example, conference of women contractals...or there’s even a bigger consultation on sex trafficking. And now that I’m in Parliament, I’m also able to maximize this position to also broaden our reach among many sectors of our society. I can organize conferences with traditional women’s organizations, at the *barangay* level...

In her capacity as a member of Parliament, Marita seeks to reach out to many sectors of society on specific issues, consulting widely before advocating for changes to the relevant laws and policies.

...of course we focus on...advocacy. We focus on issues that women face at various levels. For example in specific gender issues like sexual harassment, violence against women, also the economic issues of women’s life for example, contractual labor, contractualization. We have raised those issues...low pay, low pay for women and the impact of globalization on women. These are issues we have taken up and we have also organized around the issues of the different sectors or classes of women and we have mobilized on these issues. We have...extended our advocacy into the Parliament and we have...passed our priority bills like this anti-trafficking, and now also there is this Anti-Violence Against Women Law that was passed also, and this is also recognizing domestic violence or violence in intimate relationships as a crime.

Chona also noted the need for migrant women in the Netherlands to be involved from the planning to implementation stages, and Patty stated that having a long-term plan arrived at

through consultation and consensus helps the group to strategize before taking action. This process is time-consuming, as they acknowledged, in contrast with other more “efficient” role-defined conflict resolution models driven by authoritarian leadership or simple majority procedures. Even within the consensus approach, an energetic and forceful leader may exert considerable influence. Darla, who has been a very effective leader in Vancouver, pointed out that sometimes a decision has to be “decisive.”

Decisions are always very difficult to make. You have to have that kind of skills and also the drive and also the ability to make [a] decision. If you don't make a decision and [are] not able to also persuade the collective to make that collective decision, any organization will fail. But what is important for an organization [in] the decision, is *decisiveness* [her emphasis orally]. Sometimes it takes a certain character to actually make a decision whether it's going to be a failure or not. What's more important is that [there is a] decision and things will happen.

This kind of situation, where others have to be “persuaded”, has a successful outcome when the leader has already demonstrated good judgment and gained the community's trust. Such decisions, though occasionally necessary, are never arbitrary. Once a decision has been made, it takes *commitment* to carry out the resulting action, and a readiness to respond quickly to change. Two of the women in Vancouver spoke of the inevitable (“natural”) process of change and the constant need to perform on-the-spot analysis in context, as everything is always shifting. As Darla put it,

You know in this natural process, even if you're not going to move, things are moving. How do you fit in yourself into this natural way and then put your own principles and your material perspective into this whole natural process? And again, when you have this materialist thinking, you know that everything has a cost. How are you going to make it and how are you going to adapt to the changes, to continue to learn, to continue to analyze, continue to reflect. Again, you have that process of always connecting, analyzing, looking at where, what's the cost of this, even what's the cost of the failure, and how are we going to change and learn from this? 'Cause things are always moving, and changing...always changing.

A number of the women interviewed described the phase of *assessment* as an essential aspect of accountability, requiring a constant process of reflection. They attributed the success of

certain actions to the process of evaluation of previous efforts. Patty saw this as applying to local and (trans)national levels:

...to see what went right, why was it right. And also to look at what went wrong and why was it wrong. How can you improve it next time and how big also was the mistake. Was it so big or was it not that big, to look at the proportions of these achievements and the shortcoming, saying at the end was it mainly a success or not...was it mainly a shortcoming...

Leslie saw assessment as important for the young people she works with, in the period after an activity when it is still fresh in their minds. Disappointment after an apparent “failure” can have a positive effect, according to Fely, because of what can be learned from that experience.

Marilyn (V2) also emphasized the continual need to revise strategies because things never remain the same, but are constantly changing.

...so I think that’s one of the reasons why we’re able to sustain it [the work] because...we have that historical sense, you have...that grasp that you still have to learn. Everything is always changing...and putting it in context, like locating the bigger, local and national, international.

### ***Challenges to their Practice***

The interview questions included a set (see Appendix 2) that encouraged them to be critical of their praxis, and to look at possible drawbacks. This shift in focus allowed them to articulate what they want to avoid, as well as what they desire in a liberated and democratic society. They also talked about the barriers they face, including direct opposition. Leslie, for example, as a student at the state university, found that some professors (she did not say if they were male or female) were openly anti-activist.

...for example in U.P. [the University of the Philippines], even if the university has the reputation of being the bastion of academic freedom, there are still professors, there are many of them actually, who are... we call them, “anti-tibak”, anti-activist because...for example we go to their classes and we ask them if we could have five minutes of the class’s time so we could discuss, they would shut the door at our faces. If we try to do snake rally..., what we call snake rallies, we like...we mobilize students and go from the first floor to the fourth floor with megaphones in hand, you know. Some professors would really slam the door at us and they wouldn’t really want their students to hear what we’ve got to say. It’s also difficult because...also in some classroom

settings...students and your professor is *anti-tibak*, they would always expect you to...you know to....parang [like] to...they're always on the look out of being...saying something against the person, against their classmates. Sometimes it's difficult kasi parang...parang [it's like] you're a bad student just because you're an activist. Every single thing that you do is scrutinized by the professors. Even being late...if you're late, the professor would say, "Why do you even go to school? If you're an activist, then go to the hills, go to the mountains." Don't...totally uncalled for.

Abusing their authority and power, some professors engage in a politics of fear, threatening radical students with punishment through bad evaluation, or worse, implying these professors' connection to government authorities or agents. Rather than flourishing in an atmosphere of academic freedom to debate ideas, students may encounter opposition on campus similar to that experienced in street protests.

Among those abroad, only Patty mentioned suffering from lack of support for her work in the Netherlands because of her transnational context. She felt that being far away from the national Philippine struggle made it difficult for her work with migrants to be sufficiently acknowledged in the Philippines, although she believes that activism abroad is getting more exposure and attention there nowadays.

Alam mo sa akin [You know, for me], living abroad is a difficulty. You're far away from the struggle, and yet...you're part of it, no. And uh...now, in the early years, it was even more like we weren't part of it, but people, when they would discuss this situation, they'll discuss the work in the countryside, the achievements there, they would discuss the work in the mass movement, and that's all. And yet there was international work going on. Parang [As if] it didn't even exist. Ngayon [Now] because ang dami-dami na talaga [there are so many] Filipinos doing international work, it's become a recognized thing. Uh...the thing is...like you keep on working, you keep on doing everything you can and yet parang [as if] you are not in the heat of the struggle. And yet when you look at the big picture, you're part of it.

On the other hand Darla, in the Canadian context, saw her geographical distance from the intense, Philippine struggle as providing a better perspective on that struggle. However, she sees her organization as facing some barriers in the host environment, including resistance from some branches of the broader women's movement there.

There are also numerous challenges that we face as Filipino women here in Canada...despite the many recognitions and also commendations about the PWC, we continue to be deprived of the benefits and the privileges<sup>17</sup> that the mainstream women, women's movement are enjoying. So we still continue to face racism within the women's movement. We continue to be criticized because we're taking a more militant position. We are...I think this is very subjective, but also being watched that we do not become more political in our advocacy, in our mobilization, that also we're very critical of the system, and very...our perspective is anti-imperialist. I think because of this, taking a very militant political position, is our disadvantage.<sup>18</sup> Yeah, but on the other hand, it is also our advantage. We always look at the two sides. We can work on our being disadvantaged because we can strive harder, and also we can be more critical. We work hard in order to be able to sustain that work. And then it's also an advantage because then we're able to analyze better our situation and therefore we're able also to strategize better what we're going to do. What are the steps in order for us to reach the kind of transformation that we want to. I think we know what we want.

Based on this experience, it is not surprising that it sometimes proves difficult to create coalitions with other women's organizations, some of which regard the PWC as too militant. Some of the women interviewed mentioned the challenges of organizing women in different stages of political awareness; similar problems emerge in trying to work with other groups that are in various stages of political development or adhere to different ideologies. Depending on the specific issue involved, the PWC joins other groups to oppose certain policies, campaign for certain programs, or promote public education. Collaboration in campaigns for universal child care, or against the working conditions and immigration policies affecting temporary foreign workers, is actively sought and developed by the PWC. However, other issues, such as the legalization of prostitution, may require confrontation and debate before coalitions can be built, if

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<sup>17</sup> Through the LCP, Filipino women in Canada do not necessarily have access to health services, unemployment insurance, lack of recognition of their prior education and training from the Philippines, housing, or higher-wage jobs because of their immigration status or economic restrictions. Lack of access or receiving of benefits and privileges has been well-documented in PWC research projects (see references to these in the Bibliography).

<sup>18</sup> I assume that "disadvantage" refers to instances when the PWC has not been included in certain mainstream debates (in spite of its acknowledged expertise in areas such as migrant labour, immigration, accreditation, youth racism, or community organizing work). Its research is not always recognized or even cited, and funding may have been refused at times because of its critical and outspoken stance against some currently dominant positions in academic or policy discourses, on issues such as the legalization of prostitution (see discussion below).

the analysis and principles behind another political stance are contrary to the PWC's collective position. In this case, while some women's groups are committed to supporting the legalization of the sex trade and protecting the women involved, the PWC, along with some other feminist groups (particularly in the Majority World) rejects legalization as potentially aggravating the exploitation of women who are particularly vulnerable for reasons related to race and class. Common ground can nevertheless be found by focusing on the decriminalization of women in the sex trade, a position the PWC does not oppose, although it advocates for the elimination of all prostitution, from the perspective of marginalized, racialized, poor women including Filipinos. This "intermediate" or selective approach to coalition-building has advantages. Joint community discussions on various aspects of this controversial debate have been undertaken as a contribution to public education, and stronger alliances are consolidated when another woman's organization shares the same fundamental premises.

Aside from ideological differences, competition for scarce resources can also affect coalition-building. My own experience at the PWC has shown how difficult it is to build relationships with public and private funders in a time of cutbacks. Joint proposals may sometimes have more chance of funding, and the PWC has been generous in sharing resources and expertise. We have contributed speeches, art, and food to support common campaigns; for example with Grassroots Women in the campaign for universal child care, or Vancouver Rape Relief in education sessions on debates about prostitution. The PWC is a rare entity among local women's groups, since although, like others, it lost its capital funding in 2001 because of widespread provincial cuts, it has managed to sustain itself through a mix of public and private donations. While "militancy" may still be cited as a reason for some other groups to avoid relations with the PWC, joint issue-based ventures have demonstrated the potential for collaboration with other groups that share a similar political analysis. Such collaboration

represents feminist praxis, rather than reverting to the competitive (ruling) relations inherited from patriarchal organizations.

### ***Organizing Filipino Women in the Canadian Context***

Beyond the local context, Marilyn raised the need for Filipino women in Canada to have a national (Canadian) focus. She saw as a barrier the lack of a pan-Canadian national voice for Filipino women, in order to engage in becoming part of a multicultural Canada and work with other migrant and immigrant groups here. While the issues of migration, trafficking, and other aspects of globalization arise from the Philippines, and links to what is happening there are essential, a Canadian voice is necessary to ensure Filipino women's increased participation in addressing these issues from within Canada. Marilyn expressed strong support for the relatively new national organization (NAPWC):

I think one of the challenges is also how to...well, I think we're hampered really in our advocacy work when we're doing things only at a local [level]. We see more now that we need to have the national voice. That's where the NAPWC is a good mechanism but we really need to see how to strengthen it. I mean, with the NAPWC it's better now, right, because we have that. We can always say we want to scrap the LCP<sup>19</sup>, which is a Canadian policy,... national-wide... for Filipino women in Canada. But if we're just the PWC in BC and nobody else is maingay [making noises], especially there in the East, the seat of political power in Canada, the state, the policy makers,...it's so easy for them to say, well, how come in Winnipeg, the people seem to want to support the LCP and there's a group here that is even putting up ...has their employment agency. They're also Filipino, so why...[they] are...Filipino women even, so how can you...or they always use that, I guess they're still using that divide and rule thing against [us]. So I think now the NAPWC is a lot...it helps a lot. It's not just one little group over there, especially BC.

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<sup>19</sup> While the NAPWC campaigns for eliminating the LCP for its anti-woman, racist policies," others, including Filipino groups and individuals, would like to see the program reformed, on the argument that if the LCP is removed, the door will close to Filipino women wishing to enter Canada. At the same time, the NAPWC also campaigns for the accreditation of Filipino nurses and other professionals so that women in particular can enter Canada and be able to practice their professions, as well as obtain permanent immigration status (this is also true for workers under the TFWP), as they did in the "first wave" of Filipino immigration in the 1960s and '70s when Filipinos practiced their skills and professions upon entering Canada. The NAPWC rejects the notion that professional and skilled women from the Philippines enter through the door into Canada primarily as domestic workers, not only because of immigration policy but mostly because of labour policies. As in the past, Majority World women contribute to the First World's economy and imperial expansion.

Several organizations in Canada work against human trafficking and for the protection of migrant workers, but until now advocacy for LCP issues rests in the hands of Filipino-Canadians. Various groups have different mandates: for example, the NAPWC focuses on the liberation of women, while the Domestic Workers Association (DWA)<sup>20</sup> does not take a feminist or nationalist perspective on workers' rights in Canada, and Migrante International<sup>21</sup> has established groups worldwide, including Canada, and calls for the transnational protection of all domestic workers. Building solidarity between organizations in Canada and in the Philippines is important, particularly when challenges appear on many fronts, including, as Marilyn pointed out above, those Filipinos who propagate and profit from the exploitation of Filipino workers abroad.

Organizing in the larger Canadian community involves the challenge of trying to educate all Canadians about labour policies such as the LCP or TFWP, to make them realize that these are mainstream "Canadian" issues. Organizing Filipino migrant workers and other residents and citizens in the Canadian context is further complicated by the suspicion on the part of some Canadians that Filipinos in Canada remain more loyal or committed to the Philippine "nation" than to Canada, and such claims can lead to an "anti-immigration" stance, or resistance to groups perceived as defending "ethnic" interests rather than assimilating. Our response is that whether they are immigrants to Canada or born here, Filipino-Canadian citizens are Canadians

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<sup>20</sup> The Westcoast Domestic Workers Association, founded in 1986, is a non-profit organization that advocates and provides service for workers under the LCP. Founded by non-Filipino women and currently headed by a Filipino woman, it is not an organization that focuses on Filipino/Filipino-Canadian issues, but because 95% of women and men under the LCP are Filipino, it has acquired the reputation as a "Filipino" organization and in reality serves mostly Filipino domestic workers. In a similar vein, the Multicultural Helping House in Vancouver (originally a Filipino non-profit society), mandated to provide settlement services to all immigrant groups, targets most of its programs and services to Filipinos.

<sup>21</sup> Migrante International is an alliance of Filipino migrant organizations which aims to look after Filipino migrant workers worldwide. Migrante has branches in several countries including Hong Kong and a recently formed one in Canada.



and their home is now in Canada. This should not prevent them from advocating for the rights and welfare of Filipinos, here or in the Philippines, particularly when injustices are seen as being promoted in Canada by private or state bodies. Solidarity with progressive Canadians on issues related to “mainstream” labour, immigration, or women’s rights is necessary, as is working with other “ethnic” groups that participate in the Canadian political system by sharing their experiences as racialized immigrants with particular collective stories of becoming Canadian.<sup>22</sup>

To address the identity issues faced by young Filipinos in Vancouver, particularly racism in schools, the Filipino-Canadian Youth Alliance (*Ugnayan ng Kabataang Pilipino sa Canada*, UKPC/FCYA), was formed in 1997. Michelle, Marilyn, and Tess (who now lives in Manila) were all members of UKPC (see Chapter 4). Patty, from her experience in the Netherlands, noted how the visibility of the migrant’s skin colour, when settling in a predominantly white society, prevents them from being perceived, or perceiving themselves, as “totally” Dutch or Canadian (see Chapter 5). I have learned from my own work in schools with children of migrants and immigrants from Majority World countries what a formidable, sometimes disappointing, but usually ultimately worthwhile journey it is to become “Canadian.” Many of UKPC’s members are Canadian-born or came to Canada as very young children, while some arrived recently, sponsored by their mothers through the LCP. While Ugnayan focuses on educating youth about the history of the Philippines, Filipino migration, and identity formation, they also confront their experiences of racism on Canadian soil, regardless of their immigration or birth status, and participate in a mainstream Canadian struggle to overcome racism in our communities.

Unfortunately, as discrimination based on race and class takes its toll, many of the youth drop

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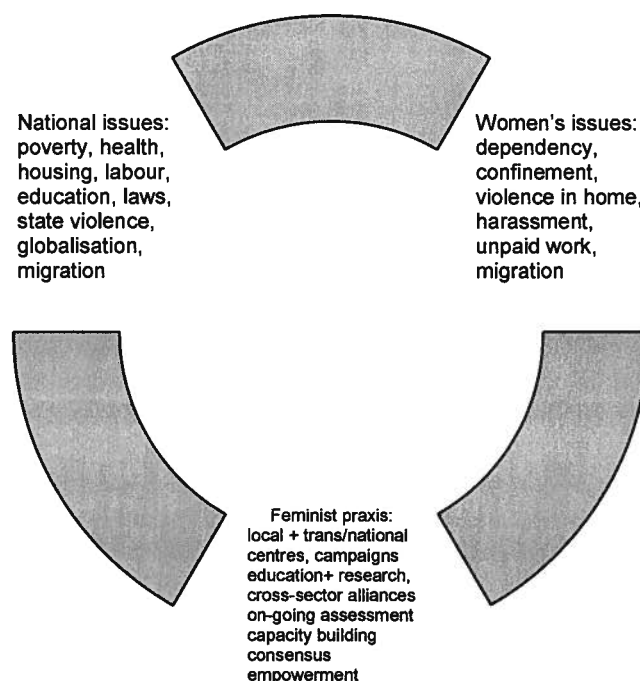
<sup>22</sup> To this end, as mentioned, the NAPWC is currently involved in a national study of “ethnic-specific” Filipino experiences, highlighting Filipino communities’ “participation in a multicultural Canada” whether as migrant workers on temporary visas, immigrants, residents, or citizens of Canada.

out of school in order to make money for themselves or their family, taking underpaid, menial jobs (Ugnayan, 1998). Some young males become involved in illegal activities, and the pregnancy rate among young unmarried Filipino women has increased. The killing of Filipino students in secondary schools in Vancouver and on the streets of Toronto has galvanized Filipino and Filipino-Canadian youth across Canada to understand the reasons for this violence and take action to prevent it. The national youth organization is now taking on the task of educating all Canadians about the consequences of systemic racism in Canada, and the negative effects of the LCP on families in Canada and the Philippines. As members of the PWC, Darla, Marilyn, Michelle, and I myself all work closely with the UKPC to address these issues as part of the larger community's concerns.

### **Summary**

To summarize, the actions and processes this group of women considered effective can be considered indicators of successful feminist praxis. As conveyed above, the necessary conditions include three main elements: (1) the issues must be specific and relevant to the community; (2) organizers must be integrated, not as experts or observers but as active members of that community; and (3) actions must demonstrate women's raised awareness and empowerment. The diagram below shows how their comments were organized into clusters, showing the issues identified as general/national/global, those specific to women, and the common elements in their praxis.

**Figure 5 Effective Feminist Praxis in Response to National and Women's Issues**



These women leaders emphasized that the effectiveness of their activism is seen in other women's growing awareness of their situation, both nationally and as women, and their empowerment to address concrete issues collectively. Activist leaders need a wide range of skills to achieve success, from managing their own families to public speaking, organizing and leading campaigns, undertaking and publicizing political analysis (including the intersections of gender, class, and race), and passing on leadership skills.

The women all had a strong, clear sense of the value of their experiences of "community", and their comments contribute to an understanding of what constitutes "community." According to their analysis, an activist women's community brings a range of women together to confront specific problems, and its strength lies in a particular combination of the personal and the

political. Engagement in common actions for change builds solidarity and individual confidence, as Chona (N3) explained:

...we come together, we visit each other, we share stories...stories not only about problems, but you know, stories also...that encourage each other...and give hope to each other, so the women are there for each other in times of trouble and whatever else and we do activities together, which is important that we express solidarity and this intimacy, you know, in terms of what we do for each other and for the bigger community that we are part of.

Darla (V1) summarized the community-based empowerment model of women organizing for change in transnational settings, where those involved have often already exerted agency by leaving their homes to support their families by whatever means possible. She evokes the dual concept of being “responsible” and “response-able” discussed in Chapter 2:

...from a disempowered community to an empowered community, or from a community that has the needed consciousness and also a community that has a low sense of their rights, even the struggle for it, to a community that is transformed into an empowered community...that is now able to make a decision for its own, despite...[not being] privileged or underprivileged or disadvantaged but still able to make big decisions, a community that is able to organize even the sectors of the youth and those who are oppressed and exploited, now able to transform....workers to go back to their profession. These are really what we mean by a community able to transform into something. They are so marginalized, underdeveloped if you look at it, or their experience of stalled development, but able to get up or wake up and say, okay, this is what we want to do as a community. We don't want to have a community that is being caught in a corner and being told this is what...this is your place. We disagreed with that. We fight against that. It is not transformative, it is not liberating, so we fight against this...

Beyond being simply in opposition or “fighting against” oppression (which is still necessary), these women are fighting *for* something better. The next, concluding chapter will situate their vision of social transformation in relation to trans/national feminism, revisiting the relationship between national struggles and “women’s liberation” bearing these women’s experiences of successful activism in mind.

## CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

From Cell Nine

it is not bare tonight  
this black wall.  
it suddenly wore a tiny star,  
when you stared a hole  
on the coldness of concrete –  
all right, I shall rub the crack with the eye  
as if it were some amulet.  
tomorrow, tomorrow,  
our world struggling to be free  
will pull through here.

Merlinda Bobis (1990, 57)

(Filipino poet and activist)

## CHAPTER 7

### SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND TRANS/NATIONAL SOLIDARITY

This study set out to find out more about women belonging to a particular category of activists who identify themselves as Filipinos, although they live in different parts of the world, and work together across vast geographical divides. The aim was to ascertain what holds them together, what their goals are, and how they go about achieving them with relative success. The interviews conducted with women in the Philippines, the Netherlands, and Canada, showed that several elements contribute to a sense of cohesion among them, and form the basis for their transnational solidarity. In this concluding chapter, I will summarize these elements, and then return to take a closer look at the trans/national nature of their collaboration in relation to the “national” identity they continue to share. Their focus on women’s issues and actions in local contexts ultimately appears as inseparable from the national and transnational dimensions of their vision of social transformation and of feminist solidarity.

#### Common Elements

One element that clearly stands out in their comments is that these women *contextualize* their actions and dreams in an analytical framework that explains their harsh yet hopeful reality. They link past history and current factors in order to arrive at a deep, thoughtful, and comprehensive understanding of the root causes of the Filipino people’s subjugation in the past, through feudalism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. Past resistance is related to current struggles against the forces of globalisation that now control their circumstances in the Philippines and as migrants. While immediate local needs may at times have priority, and certainly cannot be ignored, they avoid decontextualizing and compartmentalizing their work. While not generally conforming to strict Marxist or other ideological doctrines, they maintain that systemic and structural change in political and economic terms is necessary to make a lasting

impact on social conditions. They do not all share the same beliefs, for example regarding religion, but they are all committed to seeking a profound social and personal transformation. They claim that this transformation is not a utopian goal on the horizon, but something incremental that is actually achieved through and during the process of working towards it.

The social transformation that they see themselves as producing and being produced by necessarily entails community empowerment. Individual efforts and personal evolution are not enough, and often come as the result of community involvement, rather than the reverse. The types of community action they engage in may be undertaken in collaboration with broad-based coalitions likely to include men who share a socialist vision for change, but they are all primarily working with groups that address issues related to the situation of women in particular.

The women interviewed share a personal connection to the social revolution against the Marcos dictatorship, whether through direct involvement themselves or the experience of their parents. They evoke a tradition of militant women fighting for sovereignty over the centuries, and see the present fight against globalization as a continuation of past struggles. While they know they are strong women, and are fearlessly outspoken, they continue to value other characteristics traditionally associated with Filipino women, such as devotion to the family and caring for the suffering and oppressed. They all share also a belief in the value of education, whether formal or informal, as a necessary step in learning how to analyse the present in light of the past.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said (2001) described the colonized identity as necessarily hybrid:

I don't believe that anybody can cut himself [sic] off from his [sic] own past and one's own experiences, because one's own experience is necessarily heterogeneous. There's no such thing as a monolithic experience. And to think that you're going to try to remove some primitive, unalloyed pure essence of something that has been corrupted and polluted, as it were, by the West, or by empire, or by Zionism – then you're wasting your time. So, it's

much better to accept it and work with that mixture than to try to start to separate it. (199)

This group of Filipino women is conscious of the need to work towards something new, without forgetting the past, rather than mourning a mythical lost identity. They emphasize, however, the on-going importance of still identifying as a collectivity marked by a common past, as Filipinos, even as the “nation” becomes increasingly difficult to define, and the population is dispersed across the globe.

The socialist base of their analysis places an emphasis on class identifications or “sectors”, and on the economic structure of capitalism as a root cause of inequality. They all see a need for “mass” organizing of the poorest and most silenced segments of Filipino society, whether at home or abroad. Yet almost all the women interviewed are themselves from the middle- or upper-class and well educated. Some revealed blind spots due to their class background (for example, in talking about child-care arrangements and expectations), but all have consciously attempted to identify with, and advocate for, those who are the most in need. Some are familiar with feminist theories from the West and from the Majority World, and see feminism as an important part of their engagement, while others (such as Patty in the Netherlands) are not comfortable with the label “feminist”. However, the actions they undertake can be considered typical of feminist praxis, whether or not they are perceived as ‘feminist’. While lobbying strongly and consciously for women’s rights and causes, these women do not see themselves as anti-men, but rather as engaged in the same struggle as men who seek social transformation. They will, however, confront men who do not situate gender oppression within the national struggle. For them, any genuine social change for the better automatically includes women as full participants.



## **Feminist / Feminine Concerns**

Nevertheless, they have a sophisticated analysis of violence against women and of gender inequities. They understand the feminization of poverty in the Philippines and the more recent feminization of migration, and are all concerned with the export of Filipino women as domestic or sex workers. They see this commodification of the roles that were previously part of the private world of the home and not assigned market value as a radical change in the situation of many Filipino women with very negative impacts. They also see opportunities that may arise from this new form of exploitation, for some women to gain greater independence. They see the need for women activists at home and abroad to join together to expose the reasons behind this migration and the links between desperate situations in the Philippines and abroad.

In their activism, these women deploy skills and modes of communication associated with women's lives and work in the private sphere to denounce the oppression and exploitation of women. They share stories, meals, and problem-solving. They sing and integrate arts and crafts into their political campaigns. They openly share their emotions in response to what they experience, whether individually or collectively. I have experienced countless moments in PWC and NAPWC meetings and conferences when sharp, critical analyses have given way to tears. Like rain on parched earth, tears are their way of creating an oasis in the desert of their lives. They also laugh together in the midst of suffering, and with the men, to lighten heavy hearts. Jokes and English-Tagalog puns can ease the pain (like the one about how mail-order brides unwittingly end up marrying M-M-M men – in Tagalog, *mayaman*, *matanda*, *at malapit ng mamatay*, rich, old, and near the end of their lives). Emotions, intellectual exchange, and practical planning combine, illustrating Sandoval's idea of differential consciousness in light of a complex, shifting world of power dynamics and strategies.

In this respect, the values and strategies illustrated by Tuhiwai-Smith in describing indigenous models of community empowerment and transformation (as discussed in Chapter 2) are relevant, particularly for Filipino communities stranded abroad. The past is never to be forgotten, although it cannot be retrieved. A common culture needs to be nurtured and valued, in an environment where it is marginalized and devalued. And the future has to be imagined, so that the transformation can start now. Solidarity is built through the exchange of stories and empathy, and common struggles are seen to exist in places that are far apart.

Comparisons could also be made between these women's narratives, and those that convey struggles in other contexts, such as Central America, where a combination of Roman Catholic liberation theology, Marxist analysis, and western feminism has also influenced women's activism. Those contexts raise similar questions as to who is part of the "nation" to be "liberated," in terms of geographical areas and ethnic or religious minorities as well as class distinctions. In this sense, the Philippine struggle is part of a wider, transnational one. Yet "transnational" was used by these women primarily to refer to the relationship between Filipino women in the Philippines and those living and working abroad, as part of a global diaspora that is one of the most striking effects of globalization. While migrant workers come from many nations, and are of both sexes, the sheer number of Filipino women in this category has caused Filipino women activists to take a prominent leadership role in this area. Their comments were illuminating, as they discussed the challenges as well as the excitement of creating and sustaining transnational links through feminist praxis in this specifically Filipino context.

### **Transnationalism**

This version of "transnationalism" is not about links or similarities between people of different nations, but people who still see themselves as part of the same "nation" (implying geographical, ethnic and linguistic origin) although they are situated in different parts of the

world. They are united not only by a shared history or past, but by an analysis that sees Filipinos, and Filipino women in particular, as suffering social and economic marginalization at home and abroad for reasons that have the same source structural and systemic source in globalization. While this may lead to alliances with other national groups in comparable situations, initially these women's initial concern is with sustaining links among Filipino women who are dispersed with those at home, and obtaining support for their cause from feminists of other nations.

A significant feature of this study is that participants were interviewed in three separate locations: the Philippines, the Netherlands, and Vancouver, Canada. A certain measure of agreement was evident in their priorities, wherever they were working, in terms of the needs of the women they represent, the goals they seek to reach, and the methods they use in their activism. However, when it came to discussing the transnational aspects of their involvement, some differences did emerge. While they all stated that transnational links are important, even essential, those in the Philippines did not always have the same view as those abroad of the form such links should take. Although aware of issues in the Philippines, those abroad were, not surprisingly, very concerned about migrant issues in their current location. Some of the women come and go regularly between two or more places, while others move around much less. Some have returned to the Philippines having lived abroad, others see themselves in forced exile, while some now have dual citizenship and are increasingly identified with their country of adoption. Many commented on these disparities.

### **Expectations from the Philippines**

Those in the Philippines are necessarily preoccupied with the violence still occurring there. The state, which should protect its citizens, is still frequently the perpetrator of repressive measures against them. While everyone is well aware of the violent repression that occurred under

Martial Law during the Marcos regime, on-going violence since then has often received less attention. Fely, a professor at the state university in the Philippines, who was herself imprisoned during Martial Law (as were several other participants), pointed out that many women continue to experience state repression.

You should write about Carol Araullo, who had to suffer seven stitches because of head wounds, and the police knew who she was. She's the leader of BAYAN<sup>1</sup>. She's a very articulate [spokesperson]. She's a doctor of medicine, and you know, they can do that with impunity.

On-going human rights violations since the start of the Macapagal-Arroyo regime in January, 2001, have been well documented by human rights organizations.<sup>2</sup> A crucial element of these reports is the extent to which the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have been implicated by witnesses and victims. The KARAPATAN 2006 Report stresses that there have been more killings and disappearances under the current President than during the entire Marcos regime (which lasted almost twenty years). The negative impact of militarization, especially on women and on community organizing work, was specified by Inday, who works with peasants in rural areas.

Of course one real problem is militarization. As we've said, the impact of militarization on women is greater because the men get killed...or get caught/imprisoned... we all get killed, but the women get assaulted and raped. This is the situation for being women, as if your humanity is the lowest, worth the least.<sup>3</sup>

Peasant farmers and fisherfolk, including members of peasant women's organizations, are particularly vulnerable to violence from local and national police and the military, but according

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<sup>1</sup> BAYAN is a political party that represents the workers and peasants of the Philippines.

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International Annual Report 2006; KARAPATAN 2006 Human Rights Report.

<sup>3</sup> *Original:* Siyempre ang isang problema talaga eh yong militarisasyon (*militarizacion*) din. Sabi nga naming, mas may *impact* sa mga babae yong ano ng militarisasyon kasi and mga lalaki, napapatay, parepareho lang naman kaming napapatay, pero ang babae, o nahuhuli, pero ang babae, nagagahasa, namo-molestya. Ganitong kalagayan na ano bilang babae ka, na kung бага, yong pagkatao mo pa eh pinapababa pa.

to human rights documents, women in urban areas are also vulnerable to state repression, especially journalists or others who draw attention to cases of abuse.

These events are often not covered in Western media, or only minimally, and one role those at home expect from those abroad is to seek to draw attention to them. All the women interviewed were fully cognizant of the state's open use of police and military resources against community-based workers.<sup>4</sup> Almost all those in the Philippines mentioned among the major obstacles to their work the use of police and military force to suppress public protest and even their daily community-based activities. Of equal concern is what Tess (MO) called the "psy war black propaganda tactics of the Philippine government,"<sup>5</sup> implemented by the military and police. The State of Emergency declared in February 2006, followed by the Anti-Terrorism Bill in April 2006, recently passed into law as the Human Security Act, attests to the government's open confrontation with individuals and groups opposing it.

...especially since 9-11, President Gloria is trying to paint the picture that militant organizations or activist organizations... are similar to the so called terrorist groups. And in the Philippines, now, there's still an ongoing effort by the administration to pass an anti-terror bill which is very bad, and whose real target is those who are participating in the struggle for national democracy. . . for national liberation. So this is one of the overriding challenges that we face because it manifests itself in different forms. So, like the media, the repression of the police, the dispersals, also, we have to challenge some of the stereotypes that others may have about our groups. (Tess, MO)

The women in the Philippines consider it very important for Filipinos living abroad to remain well informed of what is happening at home and to make their voices heard in

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur, in his 2007 report, "Extrajudicial Summary and Arbitrary Executions," interviewed civilians and military personnel in the Philippines. The report concluded that the military was directly or indirectly implicated in systematically intimidating civilians, noting that in the previous six years, this included the disappearance, torture, and killing of trade unionists, farmers advocating for rights, indigenous people, lawyers, journalists, human rights campaigners, and members of religious institutions.

<sup>5</sup> When asked to expand, she added, "...since 9-11, President Gloria is trying to paint the picture that militant organization or activist organizations...[are] similar to the so-called terrorist groups. And in the Philippines now, there's still an ongoing effort by the administration to pass...an anti-terror bill which is very bad, and whose real target is those who are participating in the struggle for national democracy."

order to influence policy towards the Philippines in their country of adoption. Marita, who is a member of Congress, emphasized the need for pressure from abroad as well as from people in the Philippines:

It is important, therefore, to put our struggle...in the international arena...because...everything is linked together. So we cannot isolate ourselves or isolate our struggle. Our problem is also global. It's intrinsically linked...the pressure is intrinsically linked also with foreign domination and [we need to] muster all the international positive forces to support us in our struggle.

Two of the women now living in the Netherlands, as explained in Chapter 4, are directly involved in government-level negotiations involving groups in the Philippines associated with armed resistance (including women guerillas), in the hope of eliminating armed combat, and are well placed to speak abroad about the situation at home. Those in Vancouver also remain in close contact through visits, and are even more horrified by what they see there, in comparison with the relative absence of this type of violence in Canada. They cannot but be moved by what they see and hear, as Darla (in Vancouver) reflected:

The situation in the Philippines is of course very different from our situation here. The economic and the political situations (there) are really very intense so their struggle also needs to be intense and that's everyday. They're waging a very difficult but at the same time very inspiring struggle. I think that is what touches us here because [tears]...as Filipino women abroad, we can express the same goals as Filipino women in the Philippines but the everyday struggle and resistance is so different [tears] than what they have... a lot of women have to really go [to] full time work just to be in the struggle, to be a full-time activist, to be a full-time mom at the same time, worker, partner, so they have a...when we look at their multiple tasks, it's really, I don't know how to imagine that is their [tears] limit... there a full-time activist cannot even eat sometimes. Their struggle is so intense (compared to) our struggle here. That is keeping us alive and inspired abroad, because I think there's something we can contribute to the struggle of the women there and also worldwide, for their emancipation.

As well as seeking publicity and moral support for the struggles at home from both expatriate Filipinos and foreign supporters, activist organizations in the Philippines often depend to some

extent on financial support from abroad. This expectation was expressed by Inday, who works with rural peasants:

It is good for Filipino women abroad to organize so they can become aware, so they can be supported because they can do something about [their situation]...no matter what they do, this will help in the struggle...even say, with resources because they [women abroad] are the ones with access...like funding agencies that can help with women's projects here. They can help recommend...or highlight women's issues so that other women's organizations in other countries can also support the struggle of Filipino women here, and that would be a big help....This includes all organizations, even the different peasant organizations here in the Philippines, or multi-sectoral organizations, and others. That is valuable because different groups can help each other. ...In a way [the work abroad helps the struggle] because they can also organize here, they can help their relatives here if they come home here. In whatever way, they can influence their relatives here, in their thinking. Because, for example, those who have gone abroad and their livelihood has gotten better, then they don't get involved, especially when they left and their family was not organized. But if they are organized abroad, then they can help their relatives join an organization here if their families are organized [here and abroad].<sup>6</sup> (Inday, RP)

Naples (2002, 3-11) and Desai (2002, 13-33) discuss the role of transnational funding and its political ramifications in local struggles in Majority World contexts. They point to difficulties that can arise among locally-based feminist organizations in relation to national NGOs supported by

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<sup>6</sup> *Original*: Maganda kung ma-oorganisa din talaga yoong ano...yong mga Pilipina doon, na maunawaan nila ...at makasoporta sila, kasi kung baga, may magagawa din naman sila tungkol doon sa...kung papano tutulong doon sa pakikipaglaban..yong...pati na sa resources, kung baga, kasi sila yong may access doon sa mga ibang ano...papano, yong mga *funding agencies* na makakatulong din sa mga proyekto para sa mga kababaihan dito. Puwede silang makapag-*recommend*, pwede silang makatulong o...yong pag-ha-*highlight* din noong *issues* ng kababaihan dito na mai-ano din sa ibang bansa para yong iba pang mga *women's organization* maka-soporta din sa mga laban ng Pilipino *women* dito, eh, malaking bahagi yoon.

Kahit sa lahat...kahit yoong doon sa mga iba't-ibang *peasant organization* dito sa Pilipinas, o yong *multi-sectoral organizations* at iba't-iba pa. Mahalaga yong kasi yong may iba't-ibang grupo na magtutulongan.

*In a way*, kasi, kung baga, puweden rin kasing...kung ma-oorganize sila dito, puwede silang makatulong din doon sa kamaganak nila dito eh, kung uuwi sila dito, dapat papano din i-ipluensyahim yoong kanilang mga kamag-anak nila dito, doon sa *thinking*, ano. Kasi yong ilan dito, halimbawa, kung mga nasa-abroad na yong mga ano, at medyo maluwag-luwag na yong kabuhayan nila, medyo hindi na sila ganoong nakikilahok, no. Lalo pa kung umalis sila na hindi naman *organized* yong pamilya nila. Pero kung na-*organize* sila doon, papano din nila matulungan na mai-ugnay sa *organization* yong kanilang mga ka-pamilya [yong organization dito at organisasyon doon].

Western funders, as well as to international organizations. Determining the approach to be adopted and setting priorities sometimes creates tensions and may have a negative impact on transnational feminist organizing, even when different women's organizations share similar overall goals. Nora Angeles (2003, 283-302) frames these transnational relations to include efforts by the state and civil society groups to negotiate "development, social capital, capacity building, and gender mainstreaming." She notes, for example, that in the post-Marcos era, transnational links were forged among women's NGOs, the national government (National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women or NCRFW), and Canadian development agencies (CIDA). When it came to gender advocacy, the boundary between the state (national) involvement and the work of civil society (local) groups became blurred, as "state feminism" focused on gender mainstreaming in government planning while women's NGOs continued their own advocacy, often in opposition to the government. In this climate of changing relations, CIDA shifted its focus from women's NGOs to government agencies such as the NCRFW. Because of this shift, Angeles calls for "new organizational formations for more democratic planning and governance" in the formation of NGOS (2007, 226-262). While the women interviewed make connections between local and transnational issues and projects, and are aware of actual or potential problems caused by competition for funding and potential government support, their commitment to grassroots organizing in the cause of social justice for marginalized groups distances most of them from such debates. Nevertheless, some organizations receive support from Filipinos and others abroad, which assists them in their work.

### **Transnational Organizing: The View from the Philippines**

In the Philippines, even Ayo (UP) and Inday (RP), who are engaged in local grassroots struggles, were informed and concerned about the transnational dimension of Filipino women's



organizing. Ayo mentioned the importance of people who are about to leave home being aware of what support might be available in their new location.

What I know now is there are organizations abroad, like Migrante [International]. It's not like before that when you went abroad, you're on your own. But now there are Migrante organizations in different countries. Before leaving here, for example, one might have relatives who are members of GABRIELA or Migrante, so we tell them even before they leave that it is not a bad thing to consult with Migrante for your own protection in case something happens to you abroad. ...It's also a good thing that they are organizing Filipinos abroad...because they can share with those abroad what struggle women are engaged in here in the Philippines. And there are many aims and ways that we can support their struggles here.... in other countries, they are also struggling for liberation. ... We have a struggle here that others can take and apply to their struggle.<sup>7</sup> (Ayo, UP)

Although they are not living abroad and are immersed in immediate local issues, the women from the Philippines talked about their views on how their local and national work is linked to transnational concerns and community work. Inday (RP) is well informed about relevant international organizations and their efforts.

The people or masses...for example, Amihan [peasant women's organization] is included there...Amihan and the Secretariat are part of APWN (Asian Women Peasant Network), who meet as Asian women to share their situations, and they also have common issues that they campaign for. And

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<sup>7</sup> *Original:* Ang alam ko ngayon, mayroon ng mga nag-bubuo na rin sila ng *organization* eh sa ibang bansa, mayroon na yong sa Migrante, di ba. Hindi ka katulad noon na paglumabas ka na ng bansa, bahala ka na sa sarili mo. Pero sa ngayon na sa iba't ibang bansa meron ng nakatayong organisasyon ng Migrante. Bago umalis dito, halimbawa, may kamag-anak kami na alam naming *member* kami ng GABRIELA, alam naming yong Migrante, sinasabi na naming na bago kayo umalis, hindi naman masama namakipag -konsultahan kayo sa organisasyon ng Migrante para lamang sa kaligtasan ninyo kung saka-sakaling may mangyari sa inyo sa ibang bansa. 'Yon yung pinakamaganda sa amin.

Na nasa *organization* [abroad]? Ah...mabuti rin ang ginagawa nila na nag-o-*organize* rin sila ng mga kapwa Pilipino doon sa labas...dahil...para maging...maki-*share* din nila doon sa mga bansang pinupuntahan nila kung ano nga ba ang ginagawa ditong *struggle* doon sa mga kababaihan ditto sa Pilipinas. At mahalao yong...mahalao yong mga ibang mga karanasan na puwede nating i-ambag dito sa kanilang pakikipaglaban.

Di ba? Kasi doon sa ibang bansa, nag-kikipag -*struggle* ng *liberation* di ba...hindi tayo eh, naman *porque*'t mas maunlad yong kanilang pakikipaglaban na *struggle* i-*apply* na kaagad sa Pilipinas. Iba yong kalagayan ng Pilipinas doon sa bansa, sa iba't ibang bansa. Mayroon lang mga iba't ibang...ano ba 'to...iba't ibang *struggle* na puwedeng i-*apply* sa...sa bansa. Tayo rin naman mayroon din naman tayong laban dito na puwede rin naman nilang kunin at i-*apply*.

then they show solidarity with each other. But we ... can't organize those abroad, we don't do that. Because our work is to organize the women here among the people.<sup>8</sup>

Tess (MO) took a comprehensive view of women's activism on the global stage and its relation to national issues, drawing attention to the role of women who return from abroad.

For our sector, we look at ... the role of overseas Filipinos in the liberation struggle. So, along with organizing fellow Filipinos to be part of this national democratic struggle, their role is also to raise the awareness of people in their host countries, to also support and be in solidarity with our struggle, so that for example, in the long run, they will have played a key role in generating support for our movement...

But also in our experience, even inside the Philippines, we have found that it's the women who are the most vocal. . . they're usually the most active. Like even here, in metro Manila, we set up a chapter in a Muslim community composed largely of returned Filipino women domestic workers from Kuwait who are victims of the Gulf War. And in our experience, in our campaigns and protests, they have been the most active and the most vocal. And they've been very committed.

Q: Are these Muslim women, not just women who lived in Muslim countries?

A: Yes, they are Muslim women.

Q: They were OFWs?

A: Domestic workers from Mindanao [in the southern Philippines, an area which has large Muslim communities].

Tess's experience of seeing women migrant workers who have been organized abroad become more vocal than men, or than women who are more isolated, is similar to what advocates in Vancouver relate. This outspokenness may be attributable to the fact that this group of women had the strength to leave their homeland to support their family. When women leave home for abroad, they often learn to be self-sufficient within their (often limited) environment. In solidarity with other migrant workers, some formerly reserved women find the courage to stand up for

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<sup>8</sup> *Original:* Masa ng ano namin yong...halimbawa katulad sa Amihan, kasama kami doon sa...ang Amihan and Secretariat doon sa APWN (Asian Peasant Women Network) na kung saan, pagsama-sama ng mga Asian women, mag-sharing ito ng kalagayan, tapos may mga *common issues* din na ini-ca-campaign, yong ganyan. Tapos yong pakikipag-solidarity talaga doon sa kanila, mga ganoon. Pero yong pag-oorganize halimbawa namin ng mga nag-abroad, hindi na yon. Kasi ang trabaho namin, organisahin yong mga kababaihan dito sa mga layunan.

themselves, and when organized in a political or advocacy group they learn to be vocal and assertive about their rights and welfare, even when (if) they return home.

### **Transnational Organizing: The View from Abroad**

In the Netherlands and Canada, the transnational aspects of these women's work are equally apparent in their comments. Patty, who works with documented and undocumented (mostly domestic) workers in the Netherlands, reiterated how women's struggles begin in the Philippines and play out abroad. In both locations, the reasons for their experiences and work continue to be rooted in the Philippines, even as the community expands transnationally and deals with specific issues in the host countries where they find themselves forced to live:

...well, in the first place...I wish that we could all stay home and have good jobs, good paying jobs, you know, that we didn't have to leave the country. Ha...[notable sigh] not to have to leave in the first place but, I mean, that's wishful thinking [chuckle] at this stage... for migrant women to ... be able to make informed choices about...the kind of lives they want to lead, whether they are working here, whether they want to go back home, to have...that freedom of choice, which unfortunately is not the case at the moment because of very restrictive immigration policies. And ...to be able to practice ...their professions, and get properly remunerated for it while they are here, because you know, at the moment, hundreds of thousands are working in jobs which are not commensurate to their experience, their skills, their educational background. So that I feel it would be very important to address the kind of things we would like to see change, in regard to the situation of migrant women. (Patty, N2)

Patty also mentioned that she required medical attention when she first arrived in the Netherlands, and was amazed at the level of service available. She became even more determined to work to ensure that all women in the Philippines will some day be able to receive the same level of care.

Patty ties the forced nature of losing one's roots to the need for critical analysis of the deep-seated reasons why Filipinos, as a community, leave their homeland.

Filipinos have been forced to leave the Philippines because of circumstances that are not bearable...to look for jobs or because of political reasons... (in the States there are not too many political asylum seekers, but they have had to leave because of political reasons...and yet many also, for economic ones. Why is it economic? It's all tied up to the whole system in the Philippines, it's bulok [rotten]. The more bulok [rotten] the system becomes, the more the Filipinos will leave .... and I *hate* to encourage them. But...what is their future?

She reiterated the urgency of making migrant Filipinos realize the political reasons and implications of their forced dispersal, and the need to organize against this diaspora.

I think it's important for us Filipinos... living outside..., to understand the causes of the migration..... A lot of the Filipinos, especially early Filipinos who came to Holland, were so exploited, but they didn't realize they were exploited, kasi [because]...the one guilder that they would earn so that they could send back to the Philippines was worth so much more in pesos. So parang [it's like] they didn't realize the exploitation. And they were living a more comfortable life in Holland as against the Philippines. And yet they were very exploited... And then they [the nannies], they come here, they can only stay one year. Among themselves, they look na [already] for Dutch men who are looking for Filipina wives. And then they start introducing (themselves), to stay. .. And then before, it was only the doctors and the nurses, ngayon [now] everyone, and (you see) the importance of politicizing and organizing those who have migrated.

Darla, in Vancouver, also reflected on the challenges of creating empowered transnational communities while migrants leave families struggling with daily problems in the Philippines and are also fighting themselves for a place in their host countries.

I think migration is a very important topic right now. People are going to countries where they can work and survive. That's a truth of our community because of our economic and political crisis in the Philippines. The out migration is not very near to an end and so in terms of our being abroad, it is also really important to continue to bring the reality of the transnational communities and their struggles (home), their resistance against it. And also look at some of the ways we, as members of the transnational communities, can come together and talk about our issues, and also do something about it. And I think we are part of that and we are very conscious about our migration and the impact of globalization in our communities. So I think it's really good that we continue to talk about the impacts, about the reality of being uprooted and displaced. I mean "transnational," you know when you think about it and when you hear about this term "transnational," it has a very palatable sound and meaning, but when you look at the reality of people as transnational communities, you really have to look deeper into it, because their experience, their realities are so that you cannot just accept that we are good communities. We have the benefits and the privilege of being uprooted from

where we are and displaced. And being in a capitalist country, we think that we have everything. I'm really excited to actually do more work about this community and do more research about the situation of the transnational communities.

The question of why Filipino women abroad need to continue to connect to issues of the Philippines is often raised by those in the Filipino community as well as outside. There is sometimes a presumption that once abroad, the migrant or immigrant should leave behind their lives in their previous home. Both Patty (N2) and Darla (V1) insist on remembering the root causes of migration, not only to raise one's consciousness of the past, but more so, to connect to the present reality.

It [the national struggle] had given us the opportunity to see the impact of globalization, imperialism, in our lives as people, as Filipinos, able to analyze it, able to look at the situation in the Philippines even though we're not there, but because of our reality here, we have to continue to connect because this is the only way for us to get the real sense of our situation, real sense of who we really are. Are we really privileged members of transnational communities, or do we...face challenges also here as transnational communities? So I think...migration and displacement is...it's hard...it affects you also emotionally. You always long for a place and you always long for that home. So I think that even if they'd like to make it sound good, and appear good and also making it more attractive and even making it more positive, for transnational communities, I think it's still kind of artificial...because these (choices) are being done by forces beyond us. And we know, we want to have a better place for us as Filipinos, and as Filipino women, and there is just no way we are going to achieve that as a transnational community. (Darla, V1)

Those who see that they are likely to remain in a foreign land, and raise their family there, have to deal with identity crises typical of all displaced, uprooted people. Even activists who care deeply about issues in both places may find it difficult to decide where and how to spend their time and energy.

### **Dual Locations**

Many of the women interviewed have a (trans)national focus in their work because of their own dual physical locations, coming and going between the Philippines and abroad, constantly

dealing with shifting contexts and different sets of issues. Two of those in the Netherlands and Darla in Vancouver are frequently spokespersons for the community on one continent to women on another. Tess, the Canadian-raised young woman working with an organization for migrant workers in the Philippines, has left the land where she grew up to return to that of her parents, but many of those who have been forced to live abroad for political or economic reasons do not have that kind of choice. Like many immigrants or exiles, they have to deal with the tension or ambivalence of dual identities and homesickness, or no longer feeling at home anywhere. Their families may be dispersed across the globe, and efforts are required to remain in touch.

All those in the Netherlands drew attention to the increasing social and cultural diversity of the Filipino transnational community there.

And then ... we have created our own culture also, the subcultures that are created, the Filipino Dutch. There are some Filipinos who speak only Dutch ngayon [now], ganoon [like that], eh, aside from the children, and then ...it's a whole subculture, that kaya [that's why] diaspora na [already] ang [for the] Filipinos. That's the only word you can...call it. And now many Filipinos here go on holidays to their families, they go to the States to their families nila [their]. That means wala na silang [they have no more] roots. At the same time, as we are growing older, there are Filipinos who are talking about wanting to retire in the Philippines. And I think it's the same phenomenon in the States, wanting eventually to go back....to where we came from. (Patty N2)

The dispersal of families to different continents further complicates ties between those abroad and those at home. The sense of being uprooted and losing one's sense of home is, of course, a sentiment shared with immigrants who may have left voluntarily. Darla (V1) like Patty, saw it as the experience of the Filipino community in Vancouver in general.

[It is a Filipino community that has been]...displaced and uprooted. We're just like ... refugees, sometimes they call us economic refugees. If you have a country that cannot support or employ their own people and you need to survive, you need to have a refuge. So also philosophically, right, it's that kind of perspective. You are being uprooted, from where your roots are.

Transnationalism is associated with experiences of displacement, separation, and loss, and these women's stories often echoed those conveyed by Lindio-McGovern (2003, 2004), in her research with Filipino women migrant workers in Italy, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. In discussing her notion of the "transnationalized household," she evokes the estrangement and familial alienation experienced by migrant mothers who have left their own children and households behind, linking this experience to their pivotal role in transnationalism. She states:

The migrant mothers who left their children behind experience this form of alienation within their own household in the Philippines and in the household where they work. The export of reproductive labour, which involves the care of the young, the elderly, and the workers when they come home from work, and the maintenance of the household, or paid domestic work has transnationalized the household in the host and sending societies and migrant mothers are at the nexus of this transnationalization. (2004, 219)

In her earlier analysis of "transnational emotional labor," she sees it as illustrated by the "long-distance mothering" and "substitute mothering" that migrant women experience (2003, 526-527). Filipino children are deprived of their mothers (and often also of their fathers as well), to render greater emotional benefits to the children of employers abroad. The trajectory of this transnational emotional labour is charted by policies that create situations and conditions of emotional imbalance and personal and familial alienation for Filipino women workers, at home and abroad. For most of them, the migration experience, as Darla (V1) stated, "is definitely not a good experience", although they may have left home with high hopes of a better life.

Living in a transnational limbo is far from satisfactory for many, and these women did not downplay the negative effects of transplantation. Not surprisingly, views on the transnational nature of their work, which includes Filipino women in the Philippines and those dispersed as one community worldwide, were more clearly articulated by women abroad than by those in the Philippines. Yet both groups see the need to acknowledge the transnational context of women's liberation, and recognize the collaborations that are necessary for women to work together in

this age of globalization. Transnational similarities speak to the national and global root causes of Filipino women's struggles, played out in various sites in the world.

### **Globalization and Transnationalism**

In general, this group of women activists, while firmly focused on the conditions and rights of women (see Chapter 5), all brought up issues that were multi-sectoral and multi-layered in the comprehensiveness of their analysis at national and transnational levels. They shared a common, broad view of the phenomenon of forced migration, the role of women in this exportation of cheap labour, and the need for an understanding of these roots in order to fight for the economic, social, and political survival of Filipinos at home and abroad.

While their approach entails a socialist vision for the future and a materialist analysis of the current situation, these women differ from theorists like Jennifer Cotter (2006), who analyzes "transnational feminism" solely from a socialist perspective that emphasizes the exploitation of women's work, particularly by the state. Cotter brings out the configuration of a transnational capitalism opposed by "transnational-local resistance", basing her class-based analysis in a strictly economic frame. The Filipino activists in this study, while very aware of the economic aspects of women's oppression and its effects in their daily lives, also emphasized the importance of organization and education/consciousness raising among Filipino women, to empower them to understand the reasons for their situation, in order to work to change it personally and collectively. Their analysis leads to collaboration between those struggling for freedom and democracy in the Philippines and those struggling to survive abroad, linking the two situations in relation to transnational connections at the personal as well as the economic levels. Their opposition to global policies does not diminish their commitment to local issues, and they invest considerable effort in maintaining connections across the globe.



The transnational experiences of these women involve connections that have to be actively strengthened and maintained, to ensure that Filipino feminist activists at home and abroad do not become cut off from each other. While Mohanty does not use the terms “transnational feminism” or “transnationalism” *per se*, she has led discussions on Majority World women’s praxis within capitalist globalization and their solidarity across borders (2003). Razack also emphasizes the exchange or transfer of capital, resources, and ideas (2000), in the same vein as Grewal and Kaplan (2000), who see relations among women from different nations as key to a feminism that is global but linked to nationalism. These discussions tend, however, to start from the perspective of western feminists, including Majority World feminists like myself who are living and working in the industrialized world and have become to some degree “westernized.” As pointed out by Brenner (2003), Euro/North American-led NGOs that function in the Majority World, including UN-supported, NGO-implemented micro-economic projects, maintain First World/Third World relations and propagate the economic principles of capitalist globalization. Such transnational feminist perspectives, coming from Europe or North America, often intentionally or unintentionally prescribe relationships that create tension or reinforce First World/Third World frames of ruling relationships (Naples, 2002; Desai, 2002). They may acknowledge these changing global relationships yet leave the intra- or inter-national power balance the same as before (Angeles, 2003).

For Filipino women, whether they are speaking from the Philippines or from abroad, from their experience as exported workers or as activists, “transnationalism” must include in its definition the geographical and emotional displacement of a community of migrants. The movement is massive and families are separated and extended across oceans and terrains. Yet the community of Filipino women is still seen as one, even though women are scattered throughout the world. There was a sense that common conditions create a continuity of community, rather than that a spread-out geography creates a loss of continuity. Overseas Filipino women still see

themselves as part of Philippine society, belonging to a “migrant or overseas Filipino sector,” according to Tess (MO), who claimed that poor women at home and those forced to go abroad share the same roots of oppression and therefore are part of one movement for the liberation of all Filipinos, and of women within that national movement:

...we're [migrants] able to broaden the ranks of the Filipino people who are, say, fighting against oil prices hike or are fighting against land use conversion because we expand the struggle to include the women not just inside the country but also the women abroad. So like in the cases of trafficking of Filipino women or the plight of the mail-order brides, the voice of the Filipino women from overseas is a great testimony to what the reality is for them when they go abroad. It also shows the Filipino people and the government what the effects are of the policies that they are implementing. So it is very important that the women overseas are also organized.

While their particular contexts and experiences differed in their respective settings, the women shared a framework based on recognition of neo-liberal economic policies as the reason for the recent and worsening situation of workers at home and abroad, as Tess underlined:

I think when you bring this sector together, like migrant workers, inevitably that's what our issues go back to – imperialist globalization. And also not just the issue but also [to] foster [and] create a movement that transcends – that's transnational.

Leslie, a student leader, also thought it essential to see the reasons for migration as originating in the Philippines:

Migrant women wouldn't be there if not for the problems endemic in Philippine society. So [the] personal objective of the migrant women to come back home and be with their families they left so they could go to work, it goes hand-in-hand with the objective to liberate the people...the national liberation...While you are trying to address the specific or the personal desires of these migrant women, migrant Filipinos...you also wage the struggle to eliminate the roots of oppression and exploitation in the Philippines...so...it would be possible for them to come back to have a better life than what they have.

“Going back” or “going home” may be possible for some but not for others. Many are forced to give up all hope of returning, or must accept a hybrid existence between two places.

Maintaining solidarity with Philippine issues while fighting for one's rights in the host country means fighting on two fronts against the same local/global injustices. The emotional and psychological implications are immense, and Patty and Darla drew attention to the need to avoid isolation and seek community empowerment.

There's really that strong and very...close relationship [Philippines and abroad] although they're there and we're here. We still connect strongly and that is expressed in ....the way we feel as Filipino women. When we talk about Filipino women's liberation, it's very much felt by all of us involved in the movement. I think it's really...because there's that human aspect. It's not only saying, oh yeah, yeah, yeah. The struggle itself and the resistance, is the humanizing part of our existence in North America. I think that's how I can express it because sometimes you lose your humanity here, your dignity, it's a de-humanizing society, [but] when you think of the struggle [in the Philippines] – it's so alive, it's so intense, it's so inspiring. Like every day, how can they continue to be on the streets and at the same time continue to bring their families up and ...grow in this situation, it's amazing. I don't know what else we can say. That's the most humanizing part – that you are in the struggle, that you're part of this transformation that we are working on. (Darla, V1)

Having dual citizenship does not mean betraying one's country of origin, or forgetting about it, but developing a "layered" identity that allows commitment to both. Just as denouncing the Philippine government can be a sign of loyalty to the nation, lobbying for changes to immigration and labour laws in the host country can be seen as a sign of commitment to the good of that country and its people, of which immigrants ideally become a part. Michelle and Marilyn in Vancouver bring the experiences of a younger second generation of Filipino-Canadians to their analysis of migration. Michelle (V3) described her experience of discovering the Philippines:

You can really see the impact of globalization, that imperialist globalization impacted the lives of thousands, millions of Filipinos, the majority of them women. Because everywhere that I went in the Philippines everyone knows or has a relative who has gone abroad. So you can see how widespread the impact of that forced migration is...I was able also to internalize my own experience, to understand the root causes why my parents were also forced to Canada from the Philippines. That was part of the reason why I also wanted to return there to understand that. So I think that I was able to see how the conditions in the Philippines ... don't give people any opportunity. That's their only choice, basically, to go abroad, 'cause it's so common... everyone wants to go abroad. I talked to young women in the cities, I talked to young women in the countryside. That's their future, yong ang pangarap nila, magiging [their dream is to be] migrants sa [going] abroad. You can

really see how, unless we are able to solve the roots of economic crisis in the Philippines, that's not going to end unless we change the whole system, that's not going to end the migration.

Marilyn also brought in an analysis of the political motivation of the Philippine government for encouraging the migration of Filipinos, which is apart from (but intimately tied to) economic reasons.

Well, I think it's rooted in the system in the Philippines [transnational relationships] but it's also...if you look at it...it's all interconnected...the crisis in the Philippines getting so bad...that people, you know, want to leave but then you have to look at changes also here in Canada...like in imperialist countries... women are the ones that are abroad now. You can't deny that ...everybody wants to leave, both men and women, but why is it the women who are the ones...the majority...so it's also a...question of women's liberation both here and there...so.....fundamentally if the migration was not happening...even if there was no way for them to get out, they would still try to get out, though every door is closed... it's such an obvious way...to diffuse the social tension. So it helps or it doesn't help in that way. But on the other hand, what can you do? As I was saying before, the migration can also be used to expose really what's happening globally. People feel at a deep level too like having to leave.

Countries like Canada perpetuate this massive movement of people. Immigration and labour policies provide migrant workers to fulfill Canada's needs, ignoring the plight of Filipinos, and become party to their "trafficking". As Marilyn explained, speaking of her own family, this kind of migration "is definitely not a good experience":

I mean even my family, like my cousins visiting from Winnipeg...this family didn't even come as domestic workers, right. They were sponsored because...Dad was still able to sponsor his niece...you know when the policies were still...[in the] late 70s. And then she ended up sponsoring for her whole family...now my cousins... were a family of seven kids. The youngest is about my age, she's like a year older than me. So when she came, she started into high school in Winnipeg, so grade 10. So they're all hoping that she would be the one [to succeed] 'cause she had the benefit of the community education, she could go to school, well, at 18, na buntis siya [she got pregnant], then she got married, you know, never was able to do all of that. Then now her kid also just had a baby and you know, it's repeating itself, and they don't see how to...you know, if you're just in that situation, well, how come that family's like that? You know...it's individual but not only...if you look at...to me...it's all migration...

Displacement was a constant theme associated with transnational relationships. Solidarity was seen as a complex and necessary aspect of transnational work that is not always easy to achieve. Some made positive comments on interactions between women at international conferences, and learning from each others' work, but what mainly brings them together is a shared awareness of their necessary struggle against capitalist globalization. The transnational relations are not only among Filipino women but between Filipino women and migrants from and in other countries, and with women in receiving countries. Their sharing is often evident in international conferences (for example when Filipino activists come to national conferences in Canada) or when those abroad go to the Philippines for extended periods to learn and participate, beyond visiting their families. Thus their evocation of the "feminization of migration" implied a deeper political and gender analysis of the worldwide migration discussed earlier.

### **"Babies Floating in the River"**

As discussed earlier, what the activists in this study have in common is their collective understanding of the deep causes of the crises of their nation and the specific effects of these crises on Filipino women. They do not wish to fragment the population or individualize people's experiences, but historicize and contextualize the impact of globalization and neo-colonialism. In their activist work they analyze these experiences in detail in order to raise people's consciousness, and then motivate people to act concretely. In so doing, they begin to effect and see changes in themselves and in their communities, even in the face of serious challenges in a non-homogeneous society (at home or abroad) with systemic hierarchies of gender, class, and race/ethnicity, and diversities of language, religion, and sexuality, among others. Unlike some other activists, they are questioning the very basic processes and structures of Philippine society.

This focus, compared with that of many other groups also working to improve women's lives, can be understood through the image of "babies floating down the river." Women in some organizations are preoccupied with rescuing the babies and providing them with care, but those in this study are more concerned about the root causes up river that explain *why* the babies are coming down the river in large numbers. Their activism aims to resist imperialist enterprises as the main root cause of the "commodification" of labour and the "exportation" of the bodies of Filipinos in the unprecedented "forced," "feminized," and "hemorrhaging" dimensions experienced today. Thus, they all observe this migration, but some are positioned up river, some downriver, and some in mid-stream. As the woman working with a migrant organization stated:

...Filipino women in the Philippines and overseas are all hit by the basic problems of Philippine society...feudal[ism], landlessness, corruption, imperialism...they are hit by it to varying degrees. So they share the same roots of exploitation and oppression...we are part of this same movement – this national democratic movement whose aim is the national liberation of the Filipino people. (Tess, MO)

Marita, who is in Congress, stated that in her opinion the militant action taken by women in organizations and communities is "more important than parliamentary action," and concluded that unless women are organized collectively, there can be no self-development or empowerment to act. Once they are organized, activist women become part of structural change and national transformation, and their praxis in working with women is essential to the long-term national struggle. To "educate, organize, and mobilize" themselves and others remain integral components of what they have to do in order to transform themselves and their communities. They may have begun with little education or few leadership skills, but their own transformation becomes a model for broader change.

This group sees women as essential players in defining the national agenda, making decisions, and implementing policies and programs. Their participation is based on the principle that national democracy and justice and women's liberation are dialectical, reciprocal, and inseparable. Hence, the negotiations between the Philippine government and other sectors and coalitions in the nation are vital, as are multi-site grassroots struggles that build capacity for future participation in a social transformation that is already underway.

### **Final Reflections**

This study is incomplete in many ways, and could be expanded in many directions. The participants themselves urged me to follow up with interviews with more young women, to see how their activism is being passed on to the next generation, in the Philippines and abroad. The study could also be extended to men who share a similar vision, or to the men in these women's lives, in order to make more gender comparisons. More detailed analyses could be made of the situation of migrant workers in the Netherlands and in Vancouver, as well as elsewhere, comparing those from the Philippines with those from elsewhere. Others are engaged in research in this area and on different groups of women seeking change for the Philippines, such as women in church communities, NGOs, and underground movements. Going beyond the particular sectors I selected would have meant a very different focus for the study. I chose to enter into a dialogue with women activists engaged in work similar to my own, with all the advantages and potential dangers of that location. I hope that the result will be of interest and use to them, and will investigate the possibility of following up on their suggestion to make a more "popular" form of their stories and discussion available to women in Filipino community groups.

I will close with a story of my own about the PWC in Vancouver, involving a situation that can serve as a metaphor for the concept of continuous, already happening but never finished, social transformation that we believe in.

### **Perpetual Transformation**

The Kalayaan Centre in Vancouver houses a number of Filipino community organizations, including the Philippine Women Centre. It is located in the Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, which is considered to be one of the poorest and most marginal neighborhoods in Canada. For several years we discussed undertaking renovations in the back half of the building. Finally, about a year ago, through volunteer effort, a small planning group came up with an architectural blueprint, a budget, and a timeline. The plan was to make the same space more functional and efficient, to bring in more fresh air and light, and make the rooms more esthetically pleasing and comfortable to be in. The initial work took two months to complete. In the first month, teams of volunteers stored what was worth keeping, discarded what was not, and re-built the space from top to bottom. I was part of some of the various stages of renovation and I also observed the skills that we volunteers were gaining in the process. I saw the work as an opportunity for group participation and community building.

As each area began to be transformed, I started to relate the change to the social transformation that I had been thinking about over the last few years, as I worked on my dissertation research. I tended to see the struggles described by the participants as a constant spiral of sacrifice and progress. They were enthusiastic about their short-term gains, and adamant about maintaining a long-term vision for radical change. Yet I sensed a fear deep down that the longed for transformation – true national liberation accompanied by women's full emancipation -- would remain inaccessible and elusive, at least in our lifetime.



As the renovation proceeded, several changes occurred in the people involved that made me understand more clearly the connections these women kept talking about. Finally, I shared their conclusion that struggles themselves change us, in the here-and-now, and commitment means keeping long-term goals in sight in an ever-changing and unpredictable world of events. We have to recognize that change is always incremental and gradual, and may involve setbacks. Even the most radical revolutionary change does not last, and may revert to reactionary oppression, but the triumphs of the past, however impermanent, provide models for further liberation movements.

There is a dialectic here in real, lived time. The more societies do transform for the better, the more the struggle to maintain awareness becomes vital. The more the struggles are consciously lived out, the greater the social transformations that can be imagined and achieved. Over a longer period of time, the patterns of struggle and transformation are repeated but are never the same in their moments and places in history.

Our renovated space has three parts: a rear library and meeting area, a middle computer and work area for the various organizations housed there, and a lounge area where service and advocacy interviews take place and refreshments can be provided. The rear and middle areas were the first to be completed. The team painstakingly scraped off peeling paint and filled holes with plaster. Once the walls were "paint-ready," the rear and middle areas were painted, each in its own shade of chromatic progression of colour. Then a surprising, startling thing happened. The volunteer directing the work gave instructions that the third lounge area should not be painted during a weekend when he was not going to be present, because he felt that the preparation (scraping, filling....) had not been well enough done. To his great surprise and dismay, when he returned he saw that the lounge had been painted anyway, with scotch tape and bubbles simply covered over and a blotchy surface. Quick results, and satisfaction that it

looked “good enough,” meant that the last phase of the transformation was cut short and short-changed, since the apparent improvement only masked the old imperfections, rather than removing or correcting them.

My own disappointment was deep, beyond imagining the newly painted walls beginning to peel almost immediately. I could see that this group would not go back and do the painstaking work over again. I wondered if they thought we didn’t deserve a beautiful space, or feared it would look too bourgeois? I proceeded myself to remove the tape that was painted over, bought more paint, and painted over the area again to create a solid, even surface, although it was far from perfect.

This reminded me of political events in the Philippines. When “People Power I” succeeded in 1986 in overthrowing the dictator Ferdinand Marcos, the world applauded the bloodless revolution which served as a precedent for others. When President Joseph Estrada resigned after the street protests by “People Power II” in 2003, Filipinos once again asserted their rejection of corruption and their desire for a transformed people’s democracy. When people once again went to protest against the current president, “People Power III” appeared to be in the making. The intensity of Macapagal-Arroyo’s crimes against the people is well-documented, and protests have been just as intense and justified as in the two previous efforts to oust corrupt governments and cruel presidents. Current political activities seem as dynamic as at the time of the struggle against the Marcos regime, yet this last round of protests has not resulted in the president’s ouster, like the first two efforts.

The reasons seem to me to be deeper than issues of political or organizational strategy, particularly oppositional ones, but that they are deeper. The reflections of the women I interviewed kept echoing in my mind, reminding me that some struggles have to be repeated,

not as a sign of incessant “failure,” but because radical transformation requires changes in ourselves and in our level of commitment to others. Like the third area in our renovation, “People Power III” didn’t quite make it to the level of what preceded, maybe because not enough people saw the transformative value of doing the *same thing yet again*. Was it difficult to see, because we were impressed by our partially transformed, new space, even if the original decrepit surface will soon break through? The foundations may not be in question, but we may be too ready to accept superficial improvements that allow the rotten elements from the past to re-emerge.

We have to “go there and do that “ again, because we are not in the same place as before if we accept the nature of constant change. The experiences of the activists in this study show that policies and institutions can be changed, if people engage with them in sufficient numbers and with enough persistence. When I discussed this metaphor with volunteers at the renovation site, one woman objected that renovation cannot be taken too far as a metaphor for decolonization because it would reinforce “reformist” thinking – rather, it is the foundations that have to be changed. I responded that part of our “foundation” as a people is that we have been “distorted” by colonial history and thereby changed forever ever (as Said pointed out in the remark cited earlier in this chapter). The renovation metaphor accepts this irremediable deformity, but suggests that living with disfigurement means holding one’s head up and refusing to allow oneself to be disabled. We can come back to the painstaking task of bringing all our space up to the standard we know we deserve and can achieve, once we have regained our strength through mutual support.

This can also be seen as the “Third Space” that brings people together beyond borders and allows them to rise, vertically, above their own tendency to accept less than total transformation, to make the effort that means we can continue to hope for it. In the words of Merlinda Bobis (in

the epigraph to this chapter), “tomorrow, / our world struggling to be free/ will pull through here”. We cannot eradicate past history, but can live and create history in the present, in the spiral of struggle, to build a better space for ourselves in the long-term, locally, nationally, and transnationally.

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## **APPENDICES**

<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>Certificate of Approval for Behavioural Research Ethical Board</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
<b>Appendix 3</b>	<b>Coding Form</b>
<b>Appendix 4</b>	<b>Key to Coding Form</b>
<b>Appendix 5</b>	<b>List of Tables</b>
<b>Appendix 6</b>	<b>Marcos-Martial Law 1972 and Macapagal-Arroyo State of Emergency 2006 Proclamations</b>
<b>Appendix 7</b>	<b>Comparison of Live-In versus Live-Out Domestic Help</b>

## Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR <b>Raoul, V.</b>	DEPARTMENT <b>French Hispanic &amp; Italian</b>	NUMBER <b>B04-0436</b>
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT		
CO-INVESTIGATORS: <b>Carrillo, Marilou, French Hispanic &amp; Italian</b>		
SPONSORING AGENCIES		
TITLE: <b>Towards Social Transformation in the Philippines: The Role Filipino Women Both Inside and Outside the Country</b>		
APPROVAL DATE <b>JUL - 6 2004</b>	TERM (YEARS) <b>1</b>	DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL: <b>June 8, 2004, Questionnaire / June 6, 2004, Consent form / Contact letter</b>
CERTIFICATION:  <p>The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.</p>  <p><i>Approval of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board by one of the following:</i></p> <p><b>Dr. James Frankish, Chair,</b> <b>Dr. Cay Holbrook, Associate Chair,</b> <b>Dr. Susan Rowley, Associate Chair</b> <b>Dr. Anita Hubley, Associate Chair</b></p> <p>This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures</p>		



## APPENDIX TWO

### Interview Questions

#### ***Beginning***

How long have you been involved in this work you are doing?  
How did you become involved?  
How would you describe your work at present?  
From when you started, what stories stand out in your mind?

#### ***Objective 1: Elements of “social transformation”***

What are the critical issues you are addressing?  
What is your understanding of the term social transformation?  
Would you use this term or would you have another term? Please explain.  
When would you consider your work as “socially transforming” or contributing to “national change”?  
When did you feel your work did not contribute to social change?

#### ***Objective 2: Transnational nature of efforts***

What is your understanding of the reasons why large numbers of Filipino women leave the country?  
How has this migration affected your work [within the country, outside the country], if at all?  
What do you know of the work Filipino women are undertaking [in the Philippines/abroad]?  
What experiences have you had working with Filipino women [abroad/in the Philippines]?  
What do you think about the work they are doing?  
If the critical issues are ‘local,’ that is, within the borders of the Philippines, how does the work of women abroad help? When does it not help?  
What do you see as consequences of women inside and outside the country working together?  
How would you describe the connections between Filipino women in the Philippines and women abroad in the work you are doing? How necessary is this connection, or not?

#### ***Objective 3: Women’s praxis***

Where have you put most of your efforts in the work you do? Is your work focused on women? Please describe what you have done that relates to transnationalism and gender.  
What experiences and needs of women are most important that influence your work?  
How do women you work with reflect and analyze their experiences and needs?  
What do you consider are the most effective action(s) taken by yourself, your community and/or organization?  
How do you celebrate your efforts? How do you grieve them? How do you deal with obstacles or disappointments?

**Objectives 4 & 5: Models of governance and democratic communities**

How do you sustain this continuous effort to change your local community, and your country of origin? What helps you keep going?

How are decisions made to decide which efforts and directions to take?

How do you feel a sense of community when you are engaged in so much daily struggle and long-term work?

**Closing**

How do you know that what you are/were doing is/was effective?

What effect do you think your or you're your organization's work has had on your community? On the Philippines? In the country where you live (if abroad)?

What, if any, short-term or long-term vision do you carry that makes you feel your efforts are worthwhile?

# APPENDIX THREE

## CODING FORM

Interview Site \_\_\_\_\_ Subject \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Code	Data	Comments
Ab		
Acad		
Act		
Adv		
Age		
Agri		
Aom		
Asmt		
Astrg		
Bar		
Brcy		
Brg		
Chgs		
Clas		
Clg		
Coll		
Comm		
Cmst		
Cscz		
Cslt		
Cult		
Dec		
Dem		
Dfch		
Disp		
Dw		
Econ		
Educ		
Efa		
Emp		
Eom		
Fam		
Fdl		
Fem		
Fmig		
Food		
Gen		
Gend		
Govt		
Hlth		
Hrts		
Hsg		

Hx		
Id		
Imp		
Indy		
Lref		
Migi		
Migw		
Mwk		
Nlib		
Ndem		
Num		
Org		
Par		
Parl		
Pch		
Pol		
Pov		
Prin		
Psnt		
Rel		
Res		
Rev		
Rst		
Ru		
Scol		
Scst		
Serv		
Sfdl		
Strf		
Strfp		
Strfc		
Strg		
Strgi		
Strgn		
Suc		
Sust		
Time		
Tnl		
Tprt		
Uni		
Univ		
Vlt		
Vst		
Wact		
Wage		

War		
With		
Wiss		
Wmvt		
Wro		
Wrts		
Wst		
Wstrg		
Y		

## KEY TO CODING FORM

### KEY:

#### *Participants Interviewed*

P	Philippines
UP	Urban Poor
RP	Rural Poor
Y	Youth
MO	Migrants Organization
A	Academia
G	Government
N-01	Netherlands National Office
N-02	Netherlands Women's Organization
N-03	Netherlands National Organization
V-01	Vancouver Women's Organization
V-02	Vancouver Women's Organization
V-03	Vancouver Women's Organization

Int. Code	PUP	P-Y	PMO	P-A	PG	P-R	N01	N02	N03	V01	V02	V03

#### *Coding*

Ab	Abuse
Acad	Academia
Act	Activism, activist
Adv	Advocacy
Age	Age
Agri	Agriculture
Aom	Arouse, organize, mobilize
Asmt	Assessment
Astrg	Armed Struggle
Bar	Barrier
Brcy	Bureaucracy
Brg	Bourgeois
Chgs	Change situation
Clas	Class, hierarchies
Cig	Counselling
Coll	Collective
Comm	Community
Comst	Communist
Cscz	Conscientization
Cslt	Consultation
Cult	Culture, cultural
Dec	Decision-making

Dem	Democracy, genuine democracy
Dfch	Disenfranchise (from country's wealth)
Disp	Displacement, forced internal migration
Dw	Domestic worker
Econ	Economic
Educ	Education
Efa	Effective action
Emp	Employment, unemployment
Eom	Educate, organize, mobilize
Fam	Family, children, partner
Fdl	Feudal, colonial
Fem	Feminism
Fmig	Forced migration
Food	Food
Gen	Generation
Gend	Gender
Govt	Government, policies, role
Hlth	Health
Hrts	Human rights, workers rights
Hsg	Housing
Hx	History
Id	Identity
Imp	Imperialism, U.S.
Indy	Industry, industrialized
Lref	Land reform
Migi	Migration issues
Migw	Migrant worker
Mwk	Mass work
Nlib	National liberation
Ndem	National democracy
Num	Numbers
Org	Organize, organizer, organization
Par	Participatory action research
Parl	Parliament
Pch	Patriarchy, patriarchal
Pol	Political
Pov	Poverty
Prin	Principles
Psnt	Peasants
Rel	Religion, church
Res	research
Rev	Revolution
Rst	Resistance
Ru	Rural
Scol	Semi-colonial
Scst	Socialist

Serv	Services, social services
Sfdl	Semi-feudal
Sol	Solidarity
Strf	Social transformation
Strfp	Social transformation personal
Strfc	Social transformation community
Strg	Struggle
Strgi	Struggle international
Strgn	Struggle national
Suc	Success
Sust	What sustains
Time	Time
Tnl	Transnational, transnationalism
Tprt	Transportation
Uni	Unity
Univ	University, colleges
Vlt	Vision long-term
Vst	Vision short-term
Wage	Wages
Wact	Women's action
War	War, militarization
Wiss	Women's issue
Wlth	Wealth
Wmvt	Women's movement
Wro	Women's role
Wrts	Women's rights
Wst	Women stereotype
Wstrg	Women's struggle
Y	Youth

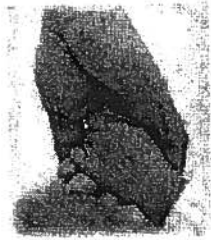


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Home Placement Services Specializing in  
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- Encourage Independence where appropriate while providing sufficient Privacy to maintain Individual Dignity.
- Continuously support physical and emotional well being on a one-to-one basis.



## Live In Care vs Live Out Care

Pertinent Data	Live - In	Live - Out
Average Salaries	\$900 - 1000/mo - Canada \$700 - \$900/mo - USA	\$1200 - 2000/mo - Canada \$1000 - \$1500/mo - USA
Education & Experience	Nurses, Doctors, Therapists, Teachers, Social Workers.	Inevitably Lower skills level
Commitment	Minimum 2-year contract (According to LICP criteria)	No contract = No commitment
Quantity	Abundant Supply Internationally	Very few available locally
Time schedules	24/7 help. Flexible time schedule	Generally prefer 9am - 5pm shift, No flexibility
Other Talents	Many languages, music, literature, many arts, mathematics, etc...	Few available
Taxes	Most or all tax deductible	Partially deductible... But non-deductible portion is higher
Legal Status	<b>Care Match Inc.</b> Supplies legal Caregivers With proper Immigration	Many available in Canada are illegal (a <u>criminal</u> violation for Employers!)

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Elderly Care &  
Disabled Child or  
Adult



Housekeeping  
Services

	papers	
Job Fidelity	Foreign Caregivers are authorized to work for only one specific Employer.	Most will not sign contracts. Often little or no notice before The Caregiver leaves – (A serious problem for the employer)
Work Ethic	Foreign Caregivers work harder	Local Caregivers are often not Prepared or willing to work as hard

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## **APPENDIX FIVE**

### **Marcos-Martial Law 1972 and Macapagal-Arroyo State of Emergency 2006 Proclamations**

NOW, THEREFORE, I, FERDINAND E. MARCOS, President of the Philippines, by virtue of the powers vested upon me by Article VII, Section 10, Paragraph (2) of the Constitution, do hereby place the entire Philippines as defined in Article I, Section 1 of the Constitution under martial law and, in my capacity as their commander-in-chief, do hereby command the armed forces of the Philippines, to maintain law and order throughout the Philippines, prevent or suppress all forms of lawless violence as well as any act of insurrection or rebellion and to enforce obedience to all the laws and decrees, orders and regulations promulgated by me personally or upon my direction. In addition, I do hereby order that all persons presently detained, as well as all others who may hereafter be similarly detained for the crimes of insurrection or rebellion, and all other crimes and offenses committed in furtherance or on the occasion thereof, or incident thereto, or in connection therewith, for crimes against national security and the law of nations, crimes against public order, crimes involving usurpation of authority, rank, title and improper use of names, uniforms and insignia, crimes committed by public officers, and for such other crimes as will be enumerated in Orders that I shall subsequently promulgate, as well as crimes as a consequence of any violation of any decree, order or regulation promulgated by me personally or promulgated upon my direction shall be kept under detention until otherwise ordered released by me or by my duly designated representative. IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the Republic of the Philippines to be affixed. Done in the City of Manila, this 21st day of September, in the year of Our Lord, nineteen hundred and seventy two.

NOW, THEREFORE, I Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President of the Republic of the Philippines and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, by virtue of the powers vested upon me by Section 18, Article 7 of the Philippine Constitution which states that: The President...whenever it becomes necessary,...may call out (the) armed forces to prevent or suppress...rebellion..., " and in my capacity as their Commander-in-Chief, do hereby command the Armed Forces of the Philippines, to maintain law and order throughout the Philippines, prevent or suppress all forms of lawless violence as well any act of insurrection or rebellion and to enforce obedience to all the laws and to all decrees, orders and regulations promulgated by me personally or upon my direction; and as provided in Section 17, Article 12 of the Constitution do hereby declare a State of National Emergency. IN WITNESS HEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the Republic of the Philippines to be affixed. Done in the City of Manila, this 24th day of February, in the year of Our Lord, two thousand and six.

GLORIA MACAPAGAL-ARROYO  
President  
Republic of the Philippines

Source: [http://news.inq7.net/breaking/index.php?index=1&story\\_id=67303](http://news.inq7.net/breaking/index.php?index=1&story_id=67303)