

# Feminism and the Women's Movement in the Philippines: Struggles, Advances, and Challenges

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- The Filipino women's experiences and the roles they played in different historical conjunctures reflected the character of the times and determined the nature of their struggle.
- The women's movement in the Philippines has achieved numerous gains in terms of economic, political, and social equality. Nevertheless, a lot of things remain to be done like inequality in political representation and economic opportunities, and aggression and violence brought by the specter of patriarchy that persists up to the present.
- While the women's movement in the Philippines demonstrated perpetual growth and momentum, women in the minority like the lesbians, bisexual and the transwomen still grapple for the place of their struggle in the movement.
- Feminism and the women's movement in the Philippines face new challenges at the dawn of a new government and the present conditions of the time. The challenge is to persevere and adapt to these changes in order to sustain the women's struggle for freedom, equality, and social justice.

## Foreword

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is a German non-profit, public interest, political-educational foundation active in the Philippines since 1964 to promote participatory democracy, social justice, and international understanding. In the Philippines, FES works with men and women feminists in the areas of politics and governance, labor movement and migration, academe, rural development, and youth empowerment. Gender equality has always been at the core of FES commitment in all its engagements. FES recognizes the value of horizontal and vertical assertions and interventions in the defense and promotion of gender rights. There is urgency in asserting women involvement and leadership in politics and governance to challenge contexts that diminish the value of women contribution to society. Women engagement in policy making and policy-implementation are effective instruments in confronting the continuing proliferation of sexism and misogyny, and in pushing for passage and enforcement of gender responsive policies.

In continuing its work on gender and feminism, FES hopes to foster unity among women from different backgrounds; to strengthen women capacities to engage in political and economic development; and to integrate gender rights in the strengthening of institutions both in the economic and political development spheres.

The study at hand traces the impact of women movements in historical events and their roles in the passage of landmark policies like the Reproductive Health Law and the Magna Carta of Women. Amid the struggles for freedom, justice and equality, gender rights

continue to be an issue even within what could have been considered as progressive organizations. The work towards gender justice in trade unions remains to be the sole responsibility of women trade unionists. Political organizations do not necessarily uphold gender or women rights agenda. Political parties are largely dominated and headed by male members of political dynasties, which is reflective of the dominance of patriarchy and patronage system in Philippine politics. This study, thus, gives emphasis on the importance of asserting women involvement in the socio-economic and political development areas, challenging neo-liberal policies that reinforce gender inequalities.

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We hope that this study will enhance conversations and debates to help find possible areas for collaboration among feminists in the Philippines and in other parts of the world.

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# Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>Foreword</b> .....  | i  |
| <b>Historical roots and evolution of the feminist movement</b> .....                       | 1  |
| The Bayan and the Babayan: Women in Pre-Colonial Philippines .....                         | 1  |
| Chains of Chastity: The Colonization of Women's Body in Hispanic Philippines .....         | 1  |
| Sisters in Arms: Revolutionaries, suffragists and guerillas .....                          | 1  |
| Women Comrades: Resisting A Dictator and Persisting with the Struggle .....                | 3  |
| <b>Contemporary Period: From the Ramos Presidency (June 1992)<br/>to the Present</b> ..... | 8  |
| Women's Political Participation .....  | 8  |
| Women in trade unions and in the labour movement .....                                     | 10 |
| Fighting for pro-women legislation .....   | 11 |
| <b>Reflections and Continuing Challenges</b> .....   | 19 |
| <b>List of Abbreviations</b> .....   | 21 |
| <b>References</b> .....  | 23 |
| <b>Authors Profile</b> .....   | 27 |

## Historical roots and evolution of the feminist movement

The dynamic women's movement in the Philippines is the product of a long history of struggle and participation in various historical conjunctures. As a nation rigged by a difficult colonial past, it is important to locate the role of women in the quest for independence. As a society embezzled by unequal power relations between the masses and the ruling class, it is crucial to place the women's movement in the struggle for democracy, equality, and social justice. As part and parcel of the whole array of social movements in the Philippines, the women's movement developed and responded to the needs of the time. The changes in the nature of the women's movement from one historical period to another were apt responses to the social conditions and to the status of their struggle at different points in the past. Thus, in understanding the present characteristics of the movement, we need first to illustrate the position of women in the history of the country, and their role in shaping the history of their movement in particular, and the nation in general.

### The Bayan and the Babaylan: Women in Pre-Colonial Philippines

In the pre-colonial Philippine society, the *babaylan* was the major representation of the status accorded to women in a *balangay* or *barangay*.<sup>1</sup> The *babaylan* was mostly concerned with culture, religion, medicine and other theoretical knowledge crucial to the conduct of pre-colonial Philippine society. Salazar (1994) called the *babaylan* the 'proto-scientist' among the ancient Filipinos. Although the role was often given to women, Salazar noted that there were also biological males who performed the role of *babaylan* albeit most of them were effeminate or blatantly homosexual. The *babaylan* was not subservient to the *datu*, who was considered the wealthiest, the strongest, the wisest, and often the bravest, member of the clan – which made him the rightful head. Instead, the *datu* and the *babaylan* worked together on important social activities. Being the spiritual leader, the *babaylan* was in charge of rituals, including those of agricultural significance. Through her knowledge in astronomy, she determined the right time to clear the land, as well as the planting and harvest cycle. She also studied and took charge of medicine, developing her knowledge and passing this on. Thus, the

*babaylan* was not just a priestess or a cultural figure, but also a community doctor or healer (Salazar, 1994: 213-216). The persona of the *babaylan* embodied the traditional role of women in pre-colonial Philippine society: They performed vital functions, and were recognized for their social and cultural leadership.

### Chains of Chastity: The Colonization of Women's Body in Hispanic Philippines

With the arrival of the Spaniards, the status of the *babaylan* was drastically transformed, as they and their philosophy were seen as anathema to the colonizers' religious beliefs and therefore had to be eradicated for the sake of the Christian faith (Gaborro, 2009). The Spanish friars demonized them and claimed that the *babaylan* were endowed with powers from the black magic. Alongside aggressive Christian indoctrination, the friars did not just police the religious and spiritual belief of women, but also took control of their bodies and libido: their sexuality was suppressed and controlled through practices like the confession. The friars took the liberty to widen the scope of the Christian doctrine on prohibitions of adultery and labeled other sexual activities as sinful, unclean and thus must be confessed to a priest. These included masturbation, homosexuality, sexual touching ('foreplay' in colloquial terms), among others (Gealogo, 2010: 69-70).

Gealogo (2010: 80) concluded that the issue of sexuality in the colonial context can very well be assessed as an issue of creating perception and consciousness on sex and women's body. The Catholic Church, in hoisting itself as the only source of morality for its subjects, transcended the public sphere and penetrated even the most private and individual aspect of the locals' lives. In such endeavor, the woman's body was one of the most vulnerable targets, especially in the context of feudal and patriarchal Spanish Catholic Church.

### Sisters in Arms: Revolutionaries, suffragists and guerillas

Women's participation in affairs dominated by men can be traced back to the Philippine Revolution against Spain (1896-1898) and the Filipino-American War in the years

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<sup>1</sup> A settlement organized around the principle of kinship

that followed. Camagay (1998: 56) cited the *Asociacion Filantropica dela Cruz Roja* (also known *Junta Patriotica dela Cruz Roja*) as an important association founded in aid of the revolution, collecting funds for the war and treating wounded revolutionary soldiers. The membership of the Cruz Roja was noticeably composed of prominent *ilustrado*<sup>2</sup> families and were attached to important men in the revolution. One of the most notable but often unnoticed contributions of women in the revolution can be found in the realm of literature. They published poems in revolutionary publications like *El Heraldo de la Revolucion* and *La Independencia* (Camagay, 1998: 65). This implies that the contribution of women in the revolution was not only logistical but also intellectual, as seen in the literature that they produced. Aside from this, women also led troops into battles themselves. Women who actually fought in the battlefield during the Filipino-American war hailed from various parts of the country like Aguada Kahabagan of Laguna, Trinidad Tecson of Bulacan, and Teresa Magbanua of Iloilo (Camagay, 1998: 68-69). Still, it would be wrong to assume that because women actively participated in the revolution, they were no longer vulnerable to abuse in a society that was steeped in patriarchal and feudal mindset. Revolutionary leader Apolinario Mabini for example, strongly deplored Filipino revolutionary soldiers who raped Filipino women (Camagay, 1998: 70).

The dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed more interesting developments in the history of the women's movement in the Philippines. In 1905, Concepcion Felix de Calderon founded the first organization which called itself feminist - the *Asociacion Feminista Filipina* (AFF). Concepcion Felix was from the working class, although she was joined by women from the elite such as Trinidad Rizal, Librada Avelino, Maria Paz Guanzon, Maria Francisco, the Almeda sisters and Luisa de Silyar (Estrada-Claudio, 2005). The *Asociacion Feminista Ilonga* was founded a year later, headed by the elite woman Pura Villanueva-Kalaw, and engaged in the struggle for women's right to vote. The women's right to suffrage was approved in a plebiscite on April 30, 1937 with a record 90% in affirmative votes (Quindoza-Santiago, 1996: 165).

The AFF founded the *La Proteccion de la Infancia, Inc.* and later ran the *Gota de Leche*, which concerned itself with women and children's health based on the recognition of the high maternal and infant mortality rates prevalent especially among the poor (Estrada-Claudio, 2005). A mass-based women's organization was also created in the name of the *Samahang Makabayan ng mga Babaing Pilipino* or National League of Patriotic Women in 1937. It was composed of women members of the nationalist, pro-independence, anti-American *Sakdalista*<sup>3</sup> organization. The *Samahang Makabayan* was a curious case. They were of the belief that women should refrain from participating in politics. They believed that women's empowerment and gender equality were western values (Terami-Wada, 2014: 100-101).

During the Second World War, Filipino women were subjected to war crimes. A number of them became comfort women and became victims, not just of rape but of the heavier crime of sexual slavery. This phenomenon was among the worst cases of systematic rape suffered by women in war time (Kimura, 2003: 2). Some were promised jobs, and subsequently brought to 'comfort houses' where they experienced repetitive rape by tens of Japanese soldiers per day. The youngest comfort woman was aged at around nine years old (Kimura, 2003: 7-8). Most were forcibly abducted, raped repetitively, and were made to do chores for the Japanese soldiers (Yap, 2016).

Amidst rampant victimization, there were women who actively participated in the armed resistance against the Japanese oppressors. Among these women the most popular was Felipa Culala, who was popularly known by her alias, Dayang-dayang. Culala was a female guerilla commander who led one of the earliest guerilla forces against the Japanese in 1942 as part of the popular armed resistance by a group called HUKBALAHAP or *Hukbong Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon* (People's Army Against the Japanese). She led a successful ambush of combined Japanese and Filipino forces, killing some 30-40 Japanese forces and 68 Filipino police, and capturing their armaments. Women guerrillas were stereotypically labeled as Huk Amazons by the press and the post-war

<sup>2</sup> The term '*ilustrado*' or '*ilustrados*', Spanish for 'enlightened' or 'learned', referred to middle-class Filipinos who were educated in Europe and who subscribed to European ideals of nationalism and liberalism.

<sup>3</sup> The *Sakdal* movement started as a newspaper that heavily criticized the traditional politicians. It later evolved into an armed organization. Its only woman member then was Salud Algabre, who hailed from the municipality of Cabuyao. She was hunted by the Philippine Constabulary after the failed *Sakdal* uprising in 1935 and was imprisoned more than once because of her subversive activities (Kintanar & David, 1996: 77-79).

Philippine government. Lanzona (2009: 134) argues that the existence of female guerillas, of rank commander no less, altered the discussion and the gender dynamics of the Huk rebellion in the Philippines and other peasant uprising in Southeast Asia. Further, the story of women guerillas showed that, in times of oppression and deceit, women could also be found fighting in the frontlines.

### **Women Comrades: Resisting A Dictator and Persisting with the Struggle**

As the postwar years were, relatively speaking, years of peace for the Filipinos, many of whom considered the establishment of the electoral process as a manifestation of democracy, there seemed little need for women to agitate for new reforms, much less for structural changes within society (Santos, 2004: 34). Generally, the women's organizations that time were concerned with becoming social partners of men. It was in the late sixties that another social upheaval formed. The Vietnam War galvanized students into protesting against imperialism, while Vatican II gave rise to progressive Catholic activists (priests, laity, students) who demanded social justice and who started questioning authoritarianism in the classroom. Internally, there was the widening gap between the rich and the poor, intensifying economic distress and political instability bred by the country's dependence on foreign capital, and unbridled graft and corruption (Santos, 2004: 35). Things got worse after the 1969 elections – supposedly the dirtiest in Philippine history: Protests escalated in multiple folds, and the government was threatened with the momentum of organizing led by the newly established Communist Party of the Philippines or CPP in 1969 (Abinales, 2005:193). Then came the First Quarter Storm (FQS) of 1970 — a period of ferment characterized by massive protests marches and violent confrontation with the police, and propelled largely by a radicalized student movement whose agenda called for drastic changes in societal structures by means of raising the collective consciousness of the Filipino people with respect to the 'three evils' supposedly plaguing the exploited masses, namely, 'imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism' (Santos, 2004). Various nationalist organizations were established precisely to rally around the cause and to call for genuine sovereignty and democracy (Santos, 2004: 35).

Along with the rise of the students, workers, peasants and other social movements, the women's movement gained new momentum as it started to develop along

Marxist-inspired lines. The Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan (Movement for Freedom by Progressive Women) or MAKIBAKA, established in July 1969, 'attempted to situate women's liberation within the context of the struggle against foreign domination and class oppression' (Valte, 1992: 53). Elumbre (2010: 212) related that the most memorable act of MAKIBAKA was the protest it staged against the annual Miss Philippines beauty pageant in 1970. MAKIBAKA was reorganized sometime in the late 1970s by the Communist-led national democratic movement, and the original autonomously-formed organization was reoriented into an 'arm' of the National Democratic Front (NDF) (Estrada-Claudio, 2005). The organization dwindled due to the dilution of the women's issues in the national democratic framework of the CPP, which asserted that women's empowerment would come only when the class revolution had been won. MAKIBAKA found itself primarily occupied with national issues, and attempts to forge a link between women's concerns and national issues, 'proved to be ambitious, and perhaps, untimely' (Santos, 2004: 36).

In 1975, the Katipunan ng Bagong Pilipina (KABAPA) was founded by women who had been active in the HUKBALAHAP and subsequent peasant-based formations. KABAPA's constitution had the flavor of Third World feminism in that it addressed national, class, and gender issues under its goals of equality, development, peace, freedom and the happiness of children (Estrada-Claudio, 2005). In the eighties, two more women's organizations were founded: the *Kilusang Kababaihang Pilipina* (Philippines Women's Movement) or PILIPINA in 1981, and the *Katipunan ng Kalayaan para sa Kababaihan* (Organization of Women for Freedom) or KALAYAAN in 1983. Both of these new organizations saw the need for a separate and autonomous women's movement with respect to the national democratic framework (Elumbre, 2010: 211-212). Sobritchea (2004a: 46-47) noted that:

PILIPINA and the KALAYAAN were the first groups to focus on women's issues, both on the personal and societal levels. Both groups launched study sessions and campaigns against sexism in media, the violation of women's reproductive rights, gender violence, prostitution and gender inequality in access to employment as well as income. By tackling these issues, discourses on the

woman question" expanded to include in-depth analysis of the various manifestations of patriarchy. More importantly, women's groups underscored the need to resolve gender problems at the personal level. They provided support to friends, both within and outside the movement, who were either victims of sexual abuse by the military during the Martial Law period or who had problems with their marriages and family members.

PILIPINA, founded by social development advocates, envisioned a 'Philippine society where women possess dignity, autonomy, and equality' (Santos, Perrena and Fabros, 2007: 11) and proactively engaged in social work and capacity-building for women. It has always seen development work as an arena for its advocacy, where the private issues of women intersected with the public realm (Santos, et al., 2007:11). PILIPINA defines women's liberation in many ways: liberation from sexual and domestic violence, 'liberation from the dominance of global capitalism, which relegates Third World countries to the status of wage labor, and Third World women to the lowest end of this labor: piece work, sexual services;' liberation from unemployment; liberation from the prospect of environmental disaster (Estrada-Claudio, 2005). The leadership of the organization was instrumental in the formation of the Women's Action Network for Development (WAND)<sup>4</sup> and of the party-list Abanse! Pinay.

KALAYAAN, on the other hand, was more similar to MAKIBAKA in its active engagement on issues of national importance. Estrada-Claudio (2005) noted that 'the major call "*Kalayaan ng Bayan, Kalayaan ng Kababaihan, Sabay Nating Ipaglaban!*" (Let us simultaneously fight for the freedom of the land and of women) was to a large extent a veering away from the primacy of class struggle and a broadening and deepening of the Marxist/socialist perspective that had imbued the national democratic struggle.' Further, Estrada-Claudio (2005) observed that while the founders were all activists and cadres of the national democratic movement, it accepted members from various political streams as well as women from neutral political positions. These broad types of members contributed to a 'delightful tension of politics'

(Estrada-Claudio, 2005) that later on led to its feminist politics of 'the personal is political', which meant that the personal experiences of the members could form the basis for the various issues and problems that feminism would like to address such as discrimination, exploitation and oppression of women. KALAYAAN was indeed a direct predecessor of the largest women's network alliance in the contemporary history: GABRIELA (Elumbre, 2010: 213-214).

GABRIELA or General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership, and Action was founded in 1984 by women's groups of various political persuasions and class composition from the politically and ideologically inclined, to civic associations. It was the first attempt at unifying the women's organizations around a feminist agenda, 'even as political differences [were] recognized and yet disallowed to derail the effort towards the building of an autonomous women's movement' (Valte, 1992: 54). Estrada-Claudio (2005) noted that GABRIELA 'faced the challenge of sharpening and deepening of feminist issues as opposed to merely integrating women's issues into its dominant class-oriented political perspective.' GABRIELA's membership began to dwindle when some members questioned how the coalition was managed. From the original 41 member-organizations, at least half decided to leave and only those closely identified with the national democrats remained. Valte (1992: 55) observed that '[w]hat was originally envisaged as a genuine coalition of forces of women, became reduced to simply another association of organizations influenced by a single ideological tendency.' GABRIELA is now referred to as the GABRIELA Women's Network with a party-list group called Gabriela Women's Party. It 'has maintained the position that class oppression remains the primary enemy of the people even as it has taken on feminist issues like violence against women' (Estrada-Claudio, 2005).

With the toppling of the dictator Marcos in 1986 and the subsequent restoration of democracy under the Corazon "Cory" Aquino administration, civil society organizations and non-traditional political parties blossomed. Political activists decided to set-up non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or social development agencies as an extension of their commitment to democratic

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<sup>4</sup> The Women's Action Network for Development (WAND) was founded as a coalition of NGOs and POs working on women's issues in January 1990. Its precursor, the "Women's Forum" had convened a year earlier to provide women NGOs and POs with venues for information exchange, support and collective action (<https://wandphilippines.wordpress.com/wand-profiles-2/wand-history/>)



this time in the arena of development work. At the same time, women's groups benefitted from the popularity of Cory Aquino, who attracted huge amounts of foreign and local funding for development projects (Constantino-David, 1990 cited in Valte, 1992: 55). By the late eighties, many women's organizations emerged and took on specific issues that, according to Estrada-Claudio (2005), could be understood based on the following general observations:

(1) There was a need to translate feminist theoretical understanding into concrete programmatic actions, (2) The issue-focus approach was a necessity since there was a felt need to put emphasis on feminist issues, e.g. sexual violence/rape, reproductive rights, sexuality, legislative reforms for women — issues that social movements would usually consider as being outside of the broad national concerns, and (3) interests of donors to address gender issues also propelled a number of women's groups to set-up programs addressing these issues, propelled and inspired by the declaration of the UN Decade of Women in 1995, and with the massively attended Beijing Conference in 1985.

In 1990, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), one of the first foreign agencies to direct aid to Philippine NGOs, decided to establish a Women in Development (WID) Fund. After a year of discussions and negotiations, it was resolved that the Women's Forum (later on transformed into the formal network WAND) co-manage the WID Fund with the Group of 10 (G-10), another women's network (WAND, n.d.). This joint venture was institutionalized under the foundation called Development Initiative for Women's Alternative and Transformative Action or DIWATA. WAND and Lakas ng Kababaihan (Women's Strength) Group of 10 or G-10 'influenced the nature and type of discourse generated by feminist activists' (Sobritchea, 2004a: 50). These two formations which had, at one point, some 200 organized women's groups as members, including approximately 30 women's networks, initiated the formation of other issue-specific alliances (Sobritchea, 2004a: 51) such as SIBOL for legislative advocacy and the Alliance for

Women's Health for reproductive health and rights issues, which strengthened the capacity of the movement to respond to specific problems of women. The campaign for reproductive rights generated interest in other gender-related issues, such as sexuality, sexual orientation and sexual preference.

Specific concerns were also taken up by women's organizations in urban poor communities, rural areas, among migrant women, and the like. In the same period, feminist advocates gained a critical mass and started conducting regular gender sensitivity seminars for communities, schools, government offices, and NGOs that led to increased awareness on women's issues and women's rights. By the early nineties, some colleges and universities had established women's studies. Meanwhile, the national government adopted gender mainstreaming as a strategy to make the bureaucracy gender-responsive, which led to a number of feminist academics and women's rights advocates becoming consultants to government's programs on gender mainstreaming (Estrada-Claudio, 2005).

At the policy level, the post-dictatorship years was marked by significant achievements as well. The 1987 Philippine Constitution mandates that the State 'recognizes the role of women in national building and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men' (Art. 11, Sec 14), recognizes women's maternal and economic role (Art. XIII, Sec. 14) and women's special health needs (Art. XIII, Sec 11), and allows Filipino women married to aliens to retain their citizenship if they chose to do so (Art. IV). Not long after the ratification of the Constitution, President Aquino issued Executive Order 227 (s. 1987) or The New Family Code of the Philippines, which eliminated many of the discriminatory provisions in the Civil Code of the Philippines that had been based on Spanish colonial law.

Also in 1987, the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW),<sup>5</sup> held various consultation-workshops among different women's groups that resulted in the crafting of the Philippine Development Plan for Women (PDPW) 1989-1992, which became a companion volume to the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP) 1987-1992. The PDPW served as the government's blueprint for integrating

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<sup>5</sup> Now the Philippine Commission on Women or PCW

women in development processes. The single statement in the MTPDP ('Women, who constitute half of the nation's population, shall be effectively mobilized.') provided the base upon which the PDPW could spring (National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, n.d.: 19). The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) provided crucial support not only in integrating portions of the PDPW into the 1990-1992 update of the MTPDP, but also in including the NCRFW in various development planning sub-committees as well as in mainstreaming the Country Program for Women through various mechanisms that expanded access to resources (National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, n.d.: 30).

The formulation and subsequent adoption of the PDPW as well as the broader effort to mainstream gender in government were championed by several feminist officials inside the Aquino administration: Remedios Rikken (NRCFW Executive Director), Solita Monsod (NEDA Director-General and Economic Planning Secretary), Jurgette Honculada (NRCFW Commissioner for Labor) and Patricia Licuanan (NRCFW chair who succeeded Leticia Ramos-Shahani<sup>6</sup> after the latter's election to the Senate in 1987).

The growing concern to improve the conditions of women during the first Aquino administration resulted in the enactment of important laws, shown in Table 1:

**Table 1. Legislative Victories, 1989-June 1992**

| Year | Republic Act (RA) Number | Description  |
|------|--------------------------|--|
| 1989 | 6725                     | An Act Strengthening the Prohibition on Discrimination Against Women with Respect to Terms and Conditions of Employment                |
| 1990 | 6949                     | An Act To Declare March Eight of Every Year as A Working Special Holiday To Be Known As National Women's Day                           |
|      | 6955                     | Anti-Mail Order Bride Law that outlaws the practice of matching Filipino women for marriage to foreign nationals on a mail-order basis |
|      | 6972                     | Barangay-Level Total Development and Protection of Children Act that mandates the establishment of day care centers in every barangay  |
| 1991 | 7160                     | Local Government Code of 1991 which introduced a mechanism for women's participation at the local government level                     |

<sup>6</sup> Senator Leticia Ramos-Shahani authored landmark laws (otherwise known as the "Shahani Laws") such as 'Strengthening the Prohibition of Discrimination Against Women in the Workplace', the 'Anti-Rape Law of 1997', and the 'Rape Victim Assistance and Protection Act of 1998', among others. She also introduced the mandatory five (5%) percent allocation for gender and development (better known as the 'GAD budget') in the budget of every government department and agency. Her advocacy began much earlier in her career, when she joined the Philippine Mission to the United Nations (UN) in 1964, and later the UN Secretariat. She was the first co-author of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in her capacity as a member of the Philippine Mission. Shahani held various positions at the UN, including Assistant Secretary General for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, and chair of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

|      |      |  |
|------|------|--|
| 1992 | 7192 | Women in Development and Nation Building Act provided the legal basis for equal opportunities for women and men  |
|      | 7322 | Act increasing maternity benefits in favor of women workers in the private sector  |
|      | 7600 | Rooming-in and Breast-Feeding Act that provides incentives to all government and private health institutions with rooming-in and breastfeeding practices |

It is worth emphasizing that Republic Act (RA) 7192 or the Women in Development and Nation-Building Act of 1992 provided the legal basis for equal opportunity for women and men in political and civic life. It specifically mandated the formulation of a Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development (PPGD) 1995-2025. Designed to continue the initiatives under PDPW, the PPGD provided development strategies that would guide government investment and expenditures, and laid the foundation for the establishment of a Gender and Development (GAD) Budget to address gender inequality within the bureaucracy and in various government programs and services.

The period following the overthrow of the dictator showed how feminists found spaces for feminist articulation with state and civil society; thus, political democratization was also about feminists trying to push the bounds of patriarchal liberal democracy. Feminist organizations flourished and became more productive when they were no longer hindered by the dominant Left movement that prioritized national and class-based agenda. The post-Marcos transition enabled feminists to conduct their activism independent from other movements and gave them space for more creative and innovative actions (Sobritchea 2004b: 49). While some groups continued to use class and ethnic concepts as the main analytical tools to understand the manifestations and reproduction of patriarchy, others, especially the young feminists, explored other equally important issues such as sexual and identity politics, and the inscription of sexism in language, communication, discourse, and the production of knowledge (Sobritchea, 2000 cited in Sobritchea, 2004b: 48). Indeed, the feminist movement has evolved, yet the legacy of history (both political and ideological) and the feminist activists' contemporaneous responses to the unfolding of history continue to generate tensions that prevent 'strategic unity' of key feminist groups even as substantive gains have been made.

## Contemporary Period: From the Ramos Presidency (June 1992) to the Present

### Women's Political Participation

Women in positions of power or decision-making structures remain crucial in advancing women's empowerment, to the extent that the United Nations (UN) encourages member-states towards equal participation of women in decision-making bodies. However, the dominant patriarchal framework of politics and governance has made it hard for women to assert themselves in traditional centers of power like states, courts of law, congresses, and even local governments. Globally, the gender gap in political leadership remains high, with the UN reporting that only 22.8% of all national parliamentarians in the world are women. As well, only 10 women serve as head of states. This goes to show that globally, men continue to dominate politics (Firmalo-Fabic, 2016). In this regard, the Philippines has done fairly well. For a developing, Catholic, and patriarchal society, the Philippines exceeded expectations when it ranked 7th in the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2016) which measure factors like gender equality, health, economic and political opportunities, and political empowerment. Analysis of these figures in relation to previous global gender gap reports may lead to the conclusion that the gap will finally close in a span of 82 years (World Economic Forum, 2016).

The succeeding sub-sections will examine women's participation in government, political parties, and trade unions, as well as the representation of women's interests in the legislative arena.

### *Women in national and local elective offices*

The Philippines elected not one, but two women presidents in a span of less than 20 years. The first was Corazon "Cory" Cojuangco Aquino, who was installed in 1986 following the snap elections orchestrated by the dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. Cory Aquino, the widow of slain anti-Marcos senator Benigno Aquino Jr., ran for the presidency after a petition for her to oppose the dictator garnered a million signatures from Filipinos nationwide. The second was Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, a former senator and vice-president, was the daughter of Former President Diosdado Macapagal. Coincidentally, both women were swept into office through people power. Did having a woman president significantly promote the women's agenda and the women's movement? Although the women's movement made certain gains during the said presidencies, it can be argued that such happened in spite, and not because of them. Although it was during Cory's presidency that spaces were opened for the women's movement to grow and allow for the progressive participation of women at different levels of society, Aquino stayed on the conservative path vis-a-vis reproductive rights. The same may be said of Arroyo.

From 1998 to 2013, the Philippines showed a continuous increase of elected officials from 16.15% in 1998 to 19.92% in 2013 (see Table 2 below). Considered a good indicator of increasing women political participation in the country, two out of the five presidential candidates in the 2016 elections were women. Women legislators are

Table 2. **Percentage of Elected Officials in the Philippines**

| Election Year | Women | Men   |
|---------------|-------|-------|
| 1998          | 16.15 | 83.85 |
| 2004          | 16.63 | 83.37 |
| 2010          | 18.56 | 81.44 |
| 2013          | 19.92 | 79.75 |

Source: COMELEC cited in Rodriguez (2016)

seats in the Senate and the House of Representatives held by the former. However, women lag behind in local government elective positions, occupying not more from 20%-25%.

In the civil service, the gap narrows in the bureaucracy, as the Philippine Commission on Women reported that 42% of third-level (senior executive) positions in the government are occupied by women (Firmalo-Fabic, 2016). In the judiciary, on the other hand, President Benigno Simeon Aquino III appointed the first woman Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (Maria Lourdes Sereno), the first woman Ombudsman<sup>7</sup> (Conchita Carpio-Morales), and the first woman presiding Justice of the Sandiganbayan<sup>8</sup>(Amparo Cabotaje-Tang) during his term of office in 2010-2016.

It must be emphasized that the election of women generally conformed to constraints posed by dynastic and patronage politics that characterize the Philippine system. Almost all women who occupied the highest positions in government – from the two women presidents to several prominent women legislators – either came from political families or were associated with prominent politicians by marriage. Although these women tended to favor conservative policies, several made their mark as champions of pro-women legislation, often working diligently with their progressive counterparts in order to advance critical advocacies.

In the Philippine Congress, for instance, the first Reproductive Health Bill was filed and defended in the House of Representatives by upper-class women legislators from political dynasties in the provinces such as Bella Angara-Castillo, Lualhati Antonino and Malou Acosta, along with progressive women legislators such as Loretta Ann “Etta” Rosales and Ana Theresia “Risa” Hontiveros of the Akbayan Party. Fast-forward to the memorable 2016 elections, when strong women legislators emerged as fierce leaders of the opposition against the controversial Duterte administration. Leading the charge were elected Senator and former Justice Secretary Leila de Lima, elected Senator Risa Hontiveros and elected Vice-President and former congressional representative, Maria Leonor “Leni” Gerona Robredo. Despite low-handed attacks through character

assassinations and trumped-up charges, these women persevere to make progressive women's voices heard against misogynistic and vindictive tactics and rhetoric that characterize the governance style of the current administration.

#### *Women in political parties and in the grassroots*

More than a decade after the EDSA People Power Revolution, the efforts of activists to push for electoral reforms resulted in the passage of Republic Act 7941 or the Party-list Law of 1998, a landmark legislation that allocated 20% of the total number of seats in the House of Representatives to 'marginalized and underrepresented sectors, organizations and parties'. Despite the law's limitations, the party-list system enabled women's organizations to represent their constituencies in Congress. PILIPINA and GABRIELA created their respective party-list organizations, Abanse! Pinay and Gabriela Women's Party (Elumbre, 2010: 219). Abanse! Pinay had two congressional terms and was successful in passing key legislations such as the Solo Parent Act of 2000, and the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Law. Abanse! Pinay was also allied with the democratic left party founded in 1997, the Akbayan. When Abanse! Pinay failed to win in the 2004 elections, Akbayan continued the task of mainstreaming of gender in policymaking. Akbayan's platform on women's issues led to its sponsorship of important bills like the Reproductive Health Bill, Magna Carta of Women, and Gender Balance Bill. Likewise, Akbayan remained to be the only political party in the country to impose a gender quota on the party's leadership, assemblies, chapters, and congressional nominations (Elumbre, 2010: 219).

At the grassroots, women's organizations and NGOs mainstreamed gender issues in community organizing to ensure active participation of women in local government units and communities. Community-based NGOs and peoples' organizations played significant roles that enabled empowerment for women in the communities and articulate their interests in various levels of decision making. Significantly in conflict-ridden areas in Mindanao, the Alternative Center for Organizational Reforms and Development or ACORD serve as best

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<sup>7</sup> The Ombudsman is responsible for investigating government officials who are subject of criminal or administrative complaints.

<sup>8</sup> The Sandiganbayan is the specialized court that prosecutes erring government/public officials.

practice in organizing women in Basilan, Zamboanga Sibugay, and Zamboanga City to develop women community leaders active in local governance (Villarin and Ramos, 2009: 51). Involved in urban poor, trade unions, and community-based cooperatives, these women were able to influence areas of governance, like the allocation of the Gender and Development budget by the Zamboanga City government by coordinating with local politicians (Villarin and Ramos 2009: 52). Former ACORD Executive Director Angelina "Angie" Ludovice Katoh later became Akbayan! Party's representative in the House of Representatives in 2015.

ACORD and the *Barangay Bayan* Governance Consortium (BBGC) organized women in different communities and barangays through programs on gender mainstreaming in local governance, and barangay development planning through participatory resource appraisal (Villarin and Ramos 2009: 60-65). These efforts resulted in women's increased awareness of the overall development in their respective communities. Almost 80% of women in these communities believed that they should directly respond to the needs of the community through attending different community activities, and expressing their demands and needs to the local government.

### **Women in trade unions and in the labour movement**

In the Philippines, 'women hold half the sky', making up 49.6% of the population as against the men's 50.4% (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016). However, women's labour force participation rate (LFPR) has constantly been lower than men's LFPR, with a gap of 28%-32% since 1998 despite increasing female employment over the years. In the seventies, the export-oriented industrialization policy of the Marcos government created export processing zones (EPZs) that depended on a large supply of young women as cheap labor for the garment and electronics industries. Since then, an increasing number of women have joined the paid workforce. Presently, they still dominate the garments and electronic factories inside the EPZs, although many are also found in the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry as call center agents. The majority of women workers remain concentrated in lower paid and lower

status jobs in the formal sector, presumably because these are the only types of jobs made available to them or the only ones that allow them to balance work and family responsibilities. As a result, women workers often lack both individual and collective bargaining power.

Massive organizing of women workers in trade unions, especially in the garments industry, took place in the seventies primarily in support of the anti-dictatorship and anti-imperialist struggle. Nevertheless, as women's organizations flourished after the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, there was also a surge in the formation of women's committees in the unions. These developments emerged from a combination of different circumstances and motivations, such as the vigorous advocacy of the organized women workers themselves who had the support of the vibrant women's movement that urged unions to tackle women's issues, the pressure from the international labour movement that called on all affiliates to put gender equality in their agenda, and support from local and international NGOs to help raise consciousness on gender issues (Hega, 2009).

While innovative gender initiatives flourished within the Filipino trade union movement such as reforms in union structures to accommodate women's concerns (e.g., having two shop stewards, a man and a woman, in particular departments), adoption of policies against sexual harassment in the workplace, and inclusion of women's issues in Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) (e.g., menstrual break), 'gender work' remained relegated to women unionists. The continued separation of the union, the workplace and household made it difficult for women workers to participate in union activities and fragmentation of the Filipino trade union movement prevented women unionist from different unions to come together on common gender concerns. More importantly, women remained second in command and under-represented in the leadership, even in sectors where women outnumbered men as union members.

In the area of legislative advocacy, women trade unionists contributed significantly to the passage of Republic Act 7877 or the Anti-Sexual Harassment Law of 1995. This landmark law continues to influence workplace codes of

conduct and trade union advocacies to improve its coverage. In organizing strategies, the need to further gender equality within the labour movement contributed in the formation of the *Manggagawang Kababaihang Mithi ay Paglaya* (Women Workers Fighting for Freedom) or MAKALAYA in 1998, which started as a women workers' forum. The founding members of MAKALAYA were women trade unionists and women from community-based informal workers organizations who were by-products of the education and training program of the Gender Program (Department) of the Labor Education and Research Network (LEARN). This all-women organization was established to respond to the felt need of exploring organizing strategies that go beyond the traditional trade union way. Challenging the male-dominated trade union structures and unequal power relations within the movement, MAKALAYA opened a can of worms in the form of operational, cultural and ideological resistance from the mostly male trade union leadership.

Currently, various labour centers and federations still recognize the formation of the women committee as one of the standing committees of the union. They continue to allocate leadership roles for women using the gender quota and to provide budget for gender activities. Affiliates of IndustriALL in the Philippines are pushing for a 30% quota in the leadership, which was already adopted by some unions. The *Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa* (Center of United and Progressive Workers) or SENTRO, a labor center established in 2013, provides for 50% gender quota (as practicable) in the leadership. However, women trade unionists who were interviewed for this paper still lament the obvious gap between the written policies with what are actually being implemented. While there is a gender quota in the leadership, there is lack of program to build the capacity of women to hold leadership position, or the budget to support such a program remains inadequate. There are well-funded programs that took out women-specific components, using the argument that gender is already integrated into projects and will benefit both women and men, and therefore one or two activities are enough for an all-women gathering. In other words, gender mainstreaming in trade unionism remains a struggle within a struggle

### **Fighting for pro-women legislation**

For the past 30 years, Filipino women have been struggling to have their interests championed in the

legislative arena, particularly on matters concerning women's control over their bodies as well as protection from gender-based violence. The following sub-sections look back at some of the most memorable, and successful, legislative advocacies by the women's movement.

#### *Reproductive Health Rights*

Perhaps the most contentious and divisive legislative initiative in Philippine society in this decade is the Reproductive Health (RH) Bill, which took Congress 14 years to enact.

The legislative advocacy work and debate over the RH Bill was, in the beginning, particularly vicious between the Catholic Church and a small core of reproductive health advocates, with the former on the offensive and getting most of the media attention, and the latter unable to parry the blows from a mighty opponent (Natividad, 2012: 73). The prime mover in the advocacy for the passage and full implementation of the RH Law is the Reproductive Health Advocacy Network (RHAN), a coalition of health service providers, women's organizations, people's organizations, party list groups and academic institutions who believe in the need for the adoption of a comprehensive policy on reproductive health (Reproductive Health Advocacy Network, 2008). The height of the public debate as covered by mass media was during the filing of the RH Bill in the 14th Congress (2007-2010), when the authors of the bill and key leaders of the Catholic Church debated passionately in public (Casal de Vela and Ofreneo, 2015: 9). Subsequently, more voices from the different sectors such as the media, entertainment industry, academe, business sector and non-Catholic denominations came out in support of the bill and defended the importance of providing reproductive health services for women and their families. The Catholic bishops stepped up their attacks, denouncing the bill as 'anti-God' and 'anti-family' as well as labeling the RH Bill as part of the so-called DEATH legislation – referring to Divorce, Euthanasia, Abortion, Total population control and Homosexuality (GMA News Online, 2008 cited in Estrada-Claudio, 2015). But as the bishops became more vociferous to the point of threatening pro-RH legislators with denial of communion and even excommunication, 'even ordinary Catholics who would have kept silent, bristled at this vindictive stance' (Natividad, 2012: 82). Supporters of the RH Bill challenged the hegemony of the Catholic discourse by framing their arguments using diverse discourses such as

framing their arguments using diverse discourses such as rights, needs, social justice and development, which were utilized alongside each other and substantiated by empirical data from research coming from a range of disciplines (Casal de Vela and Ofreneo, 2015).

Aggressive lobbying by both pro-RH and anti-RH camps continued into the presidency of Benigno Simeon Aquino III, son of former president Corazon Aquino. Since assuming the presidency in 2010, Aquino consistently pushed for the RH Bill as an urgent priority measure (The Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2011 cited in Casal de Vela and Ofreneo, 2015). Among the legislators who championed the RH Law were Edcel Lagman and Risa Hontiveros from the House of Representatives, and Pia Cayetano and Miriam Defensor-Santiago from the Senate. The broader movement united on the RH Bill was composed of networks of activists from the non-government and government organizations, and civil society organizations were also instrumental in galvanizing public support for the passage of the bill. Ultimately, the driving force of the social movement for reproductive health were the women from the communities, who filled the plenary halls of Congress consistently for over 14 years (Casal de Vela and Ofreneo, 2015: 14). However, the divisiveness of the debate extended within the women's movement, as the prominent Gabriela Women's Party voted 'Yes, with reservation' for the passage of the RH Bill because, they argued, a specific provision of the bill 'smacks of population control' (GABRIELA, 2012).

Signed into law on December 2012 as Republic Act No. 10354, An Act Providing for a National Policy on Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health, the law seeks to provide maternal care, family planning and adolescent sexuality education, including education on contraception.

But opponents challenged the law's constitutionality before the Supreme Court, causing delay in the law's full implementation. When the Supreme Court eventually ruled that the RH law was constitutional except for eight provisions (which the Court struck down), another opponent successfully petitioned the Court to issue a temporary restraining order against the government's procurement, distribution and dispensation of contraceptive products and devices that are allegedly abortifacient. The latter case remains unresolved as of this writing.

Besides the foregoing, implementation of the law is encountering obstacles at the local level. Results of a national inquiry conducted by the Commission on Human Rights in 2016 showed that local government units (LGUs) had varying responses to the RH Law, 'ranging from full support to outright refusal' (Commission on Human Rights Philippines, 2016: 37). The Commission report recommended a review of the 1991 Local Government Code, which provided loopholes for some LGUs to reject outright the RH Law in the name of local autonomy. Recently, President Rodrigo Duterte issued Executive Order (EO) No. 12 on January 11, 2017 directing concerned agencies to fully implement a national family planning program as part of the government's poverty-alleviation programs. However, the EO is still constrained by the Supreme Court's temporary restraining order.

The fate of the RH Law remains a work in progress, both in terms of implementation and the existing gaps in the content of the law. Because lawmaking reflects the contending perceptions and politics around sexual and reproductive rights at a given time, all the current laws are flawed and should be considered as 'works in progress' in the evolution of sexual and reproductive rights in the Philippines (Melgar et al, 2015: 2). Although the current RH Law accords many concessions to opponents, it brings to the forefront issues regarding reproductive health rights, mandates the government to provide reproductive health services, and exposes and contests the positions of the Catholic Church on the matter. As one advocate asserted when the constitutionality of the law was challenged: 'If we lose at the Supreme Court, that's heartbreaking. But I don't think that it's crashing. I don't think that it's as if nothing happened or that we haven't won tremendous gains... We always have to look for the broader context... people are disagreeing with the Church in massive numbers on the issue of gender and sexuality. I think it's a victory that they can't take away' (Confidential Interviewee Identity 1, 2013 cited in Casal de Vela and Ofreneo, 2015:21).

### *Violence Against Women*

Philippine society assumes that men have a natural right to control their women, and, consequently, socialization patterns and traditions encourage male violence against the disempowered, who are the women (Monares, 1996: 145). For a long time, the issues regarding Violence Against Women (VAW) was largely ignored until



women's groups 'put this as a major problem in the vision for social change' (Monares, 1996: 141). Describing the magnitude of the problem, the Government's Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development (PPGD) 1995-2025 acknowledged that VAW has become a serious and urgent human rights concerns for countless Filipino women living in constant fear and insecurity over their lives and safety. For them, daily acts of violence, particularly as these happen in their homes and in the community, create a situation of helplessness and powerlessness that hinder their growth and potentials, oftentimes completely immobilizing them and effectively excluding them from any active participation in the development process.

Contributing to the increased awareness of VAW issues were women's NGOs and organizations that worked to address various forms of gender-based violence experienced in families, workplaces and communities, and integrated VAW issues into their advocacy through 'diverse strategies such as direct services, education and training, organizing, networking and coalition building, and legislative lobbying' (WWTSSVAW, 2009: 3). Monares (1996) noted a number of NGOs that worked to address VAW, such as the Women's Crisis Center (a pioneering NGO that provided shelter and counseling services to victims of violence), the Third World Movement Against the Exploitation of Women, GABRIELA, BATIS, Asian Women Human Rights Council, Women's Legal Bureau, KALAKASAN, and Congressional Research and Training Services.

A shining example and best practice in preventing domestic violence through a women-initiated and community-based response is that of *Bantay Banay* (Family Watch Group)<sup>9</sup> in Cebu City, which was pioneered by Lihok Pilipina Foundation (Lihok) long before the enactment of the Anti-Domestic Violence and Their Children Act in 2004.<sup>10</sup> Domestic violence had been considered a 'private trouble' or 'family matter' that prevented the local police from intervening in instances of domestic violence. The *Bantay Banay* advanced the

notion that the first responders to domestic violence should be located in the community where such violence occurred. The program was an accidental 'by-product' of a micro-enterprise initiative of Lihok. Alarmed by the frequent absences of some women-members and the slow loan repayment for microenterprises, Lihok investigated the reasons for such and learned that the women-beneficiaries had been having problems with their husbands that, in turn, impeded the women's livelihood activities. A study initiated by Lihok found that 6 out of 10 women were battered by their partners; in response, Lihok created *Bantay Banay* and pioneered the program in selected areas in Cebu City. Today, *Bantay Banay* is a nationally and globally renowned model of a community-based response to domestic violence. Its local advocacies resulted in the approval of Cebu City's Anti-Domestic Violence Ordinance, which was the first of its kind in the country. Cebu City was also one of the first local government units to install women's desks in city police stations, and enact a Gender and Development Code that provided a framework for the city's gender and development program. The city government likewise established the Cebu City Women and Family Affairs Commission that included the private sector and NGOs as members, and passed an ordinance creating the Committee on Decorum and Investigation at City Hall to look into cases of sexual harassment and abuse (Government Innovators Network, n.d.).

*The Anti-Rape Law: From crime against chastity to crime against person*

Among the landmark achievements of the Philippine women's movement in the 1990s revolve around the adoption of the Anti-Rape Law in 1997, overturning the colonial-era law on rape that defined the latter as a crime against chastity, not against person. Such narrow definition of rape prevented the effective prosecution of rape crimes and placed undue burden on the victim. Republic Act 8353 or the Anti-Rape Law of 1997 'expanded the definition of rape, de-gendered it and recognized the existence of marital rape. It provides that

<sup>9</sup> For *Bantay Banay*, Lihok Pilipina won in the institution category of the Ramon Aboitiz Foundation Triennial Awards in 2005. Cebu City was one of the three recipients of the Women Friendly City award in the Asia Pacific given by UN Habitat in 2004. The city government was also cited as a gender-friendly city by the national government's Galing Pook Program for Gender Responsive Governance. For this, Tessie was one of 14 awardees during the 41st Charter Day as an "Outstanding Cebuana" (Elape-Valeros, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Republic Act No. 9262 known as Anti-Violence Against Women and their children (VAWC) Act of 2004 became a law after almost a decade of policy advocacy. Considered as a significant victory for women, it defines VAW committed by their intimate partners as a public crime. The law provides for the immediate legal relief for the victim-survivors of abuse in the form of protection orders, redress for abuse experienced and stronger community mechanisms to respond to cases of domestic violence, among others.

rape is now a public crime, rather than a crime against chastity, expanded its coverage by recognizing acts such as insertion of any instrument into the genital or anal orifice of another person as "rape by sexual assault." (National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, 1999: 4.2.2) A companion measure to the Anti-Rape Law is Republic Act 8505 or the Rape Victim Assistance and Protection Act, which provides for psychological, legal, medical and health assistance towards rape victims, ensures the safety of victims, and mandates the training of local police, lawyers, social workers and the like on human rights, gender sensitivity and legal management of rape cases (Munez, 2004: 156).

At the forefront of this legislative advocacy was a coalition of 13 women's organizations formed in 1992 and who named themselves as the *Sama-samang Inisyatiba ng mga Kababaihan para sa Pagbabago ng Batas at Lipunan* (SIBOL)<sup>11</sup> [Collective Initiative of Women for the Transformation of the Laws and Society]. After the People Power Revolution in 1986, 'feminist-activists who formed SIBOL recognized the new environment for activism that gave them space to be heard and listened to' (Munez, 2004: 174). A core group composed of seasoned activists and human rights advocates like Aida F. Santos, Cecilia Hoffman, Eleanor Conda, Ana Maria "Princess" Nemenzo, Soc Reyes and Raquel Tiglao initiated the network. It took SIBOL countless debates, research and strategic planning to successfully push for the adoption of the 1997 Anti-Rape Law.

In 2016, Senator Risa Hontiveros filed an Anti-Rape Bill to amend and modernize the current law on rape such as increasing the age of statutory rape, introducing aggravating circumstances (e.g., use of video or other electronic device in the commission of the crime, the status of the offender as a person of public authority, etc.) and the repeal of the 'forgiveness clause' in the Revised Penal Code (Senate of the Philippines, 2017).

### *Embracing Intersectionality: The Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (LBT) in the Women's Movement and the Anti-Discrimination Bill*

Generally speaking, the feminist lens always situates the struggle of women against the backdrop of patriarchy that underlies women oppression. The latter is usually perpetrated by men and by male-dominated institutions and structures like family, church, government offices, corporations, and even civil societies. Recognition of patriarchy being at the root of women's oppression was the starting point of the growth and development of feminist groups and organizations.

However, the focus on patriarchy rendered Filipino lesbians invisible as a subsector of the women's movement who were experiencing and struggling against a unique kind of oppression and discrimination. In this regard, we can see that the Filipino lesbian confronts multiple layers of oppression: They are struggling as women in a society that favors patriarchal structures of powers, while struggling as women who do not conform to heterosexual norms and expectations. The latter is thus a struggle not just against men and the structures that imposes such rules, but also against other women in the movement who prioritize the broader socioeconomic disenfranchisement of heterosexual women over the largely unnoticed struggle confronted by lesbians.

Pineda (2001:137) lamented the invisibility of the lesbian narrative in the history of the women's movement in the Philippines. She argued that it was not until much later that lesbians were given space in the movement. It was only at the beginning of the nineties that lesbians were recognized as a sector in the women's movement. She rooted this seeming relegation of the lesbian struggle to the shadows of the women's movement from the latter's focus on socioeconomic inequality. This led to the

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<sup>11</sup> These include the Center for Legislative Development, GABRIELA, Institute for Social Studies and Action, KALAYAAN, *Kilusan ng Manggagawang Kababaihan*, Lakas Manggagawa Labor Center Women Committee, PILIPINA, *Ugnayan ng Kababaihan sa Pulitika*, Women's Legal Bureau, Women's Crisis Center, Women's Education, Development, Productivity and Research Organization, Women's Resource and Research Center, and WomanHealth Philippines. Two years later, three more organizations joined the network, namely, MAKALAYA, Democratic Socialist Women of the Philippines, and Kasarian Kalayaan (SARILAYA). However, the membership was reduced to nine in 1999, as seven members left the coalition due to various organizational difficulties and shifts in priorities. SIBOL drafted the bill on which the Anti-VAWC law was based, and actively lobbied for its passage (see Munez, 2004).

consequent sidelining of the problem of compulsory heterosexuality (Pineda 2001:139). This problem and the attempts to discuss it met resistance not just from mainstream Philippines society but also within the women's movement. Pineda (2001:140) argued that this resistance was caused by the vicious cycle of the issue being ignored and not talked about that consequently leads to the problem being unappreciated even by feminists.

Pineda (2001) and Marin (1996) locate the beginning of the lesbian movement during the Women's March in 1993. Prior to this, self-identifying lesbians in the movement had already started to coalesce and finally formed The Lesbian Collective (TLC) in 1992. The participants of the Women's March the following year witnessed the historic presence of a delegation under a lesbian organization. Ginney Villar delivered the first official statement of TLC for that year's celebration (Pineda, 2000: 143-144). Despite being short-lived, TLC served as the historic organization that opened up the space for the lesbian movement that developed in the later years.

Alongside the development of the gay movement, the lesbian movement started identifying under the LGBT umbrella. In 1996, the first Gay and Lesbian Pride March (which later became the LGBT Pride March) was organized and celebrated. This was followed by fora and further collaborations with the wider LGBT movement. The following year, the First Gay and Lesbian Leaders Conference was held. It was seen as the first official collaboration of gays and lesbians where lesbian issues were discussed in the same breadth and depth as other homosexual issues (Pineda 2000: 148-150). The momentum of lesbian organizing was apparent in different areas and locales. Grassroots organizations initiated different activities like peer-counseling, culture gathering, and other socio-civic and political activities that highlighted lesbian presence and legitimized lesbians as respectable members of the society (Pineda, 2001:152).

Marin (1996) explained how the rise of lesbian activism was anchored on the trope of human rights. Moreover, lesbian feminists assert that the lesbian issue must be considered a basic feminist issue because '(l)esbianism is seen as a rebuttal against a society that upholds and

rewards relations but does not protect heterosexual women who are abused by men' (Marin 1996). Lesbian relationships, especially in the context of the Philippines, is therefore more than a preference or a personal choice. Rather, these relationships are manifestations of resistance against a heteronormative mindset where women get control over their bodies and emotions.

In terms of government support, 'both the national and local governments still lack nuanced actions to address the intersectionality of gender, class, and other differentiating factors' (Ofreneo and Illo, 2015: 9). Recent studies show how women who identify or are perceived to be lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (LBT) are more exposed to violence and discrimination, and suffer different kinds of cruelty committed by family members. They are also often prevented from accessing social welfare programs of the government. Many transgender women fall victim to brutal killings that many describe as hate crimes. This includes the murder case of Jennifer Laude, who was killed by an American serviceman in Olongapo City in 2014.<sup>12</sup>

In recent years, women advocates have been stepping up for their LGBT sisters and brothers especially in the field of policy and legislation. In 2001, after consultations and discussions with LGBT advocates, Etta Rosales of Akbayan filed the Anti-Discrimination Bill (ADB) at the House of Representatives; Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago filed a counterpart bill (Talabong, 2016).

The ADB went farthest in the legislative mill in the 12th Congress when it reached third reading at the House through the efforts of Rosales, then chair of the Committee on Human Rights. This development was halted when Rosales was replaced as the Human Rights Committee Chair by Manila Representative Bienvenido Abante, a Baptist pastor who strongly opposed the bill.

Local expressions of the ADB were enacted in several municipalities and cities with women at the helm. In 2014, Quezon City passed the Gender Fair City Ordinance authored by Councilor Lena Marie Juico. The ordinance has been described as the most comprehensive policy to protect LGBT people (Gamil, 2014). The Province of Batangas passed a similar ordinance in 2015, authored by Board Member Divina Balba (Pahayagang Balikas, 2015). Mandaluyong City

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<sup>12</sup> The Olongapo Regional Trial Court ruled that the crime was homicide on December 1, 2015.

Councilor Charisse Abalos filed her version of the ordinance in 2016 but has not been signed into an ordinance yet (Charisse Abalos, 2016).

Other legislative efforts are being pushed by women legislators that should provide adequate protection and redress for LGBT Filipinos like Batangas District 6 Representative Vilma Santos' House Bill Number 2952. The bill seeks to expand the Women and Children's Desk on police stations nationwide, and accommodate cases and complaints by LGBT victims of crimes (Dalangin-Fernandez, 2016).

Seventeen years after the bill was first filed, things appear to be looking up for the ADB especially with election of Bataan District 1 Representative Geraldine Roman, who joined the roster of ADB defenders (Cepeda, 2016). With the leadership of women champions like Dinagat Island Representative Arlene "Kaka" Bag-ao in the House of Representatives and Senator Risa Hontiveros in the Senate, the ADB has been hitting milestones in the 17th Congress.

As seen in the foregoing, acknowledgment by the women's movement of the LBT men and women's issues as well as willingness to champion the latter happened gradually. Nevertheless, the movement has significantly progressed in terms of accepting how women from different contexts and circumstances struggle differently but are united in the cause of empowering women and emancipating them from systemic oppression and inequality.

*Gains of the Women's Movement*

The Philippine NGO Report on Beijing +20 (Pineda-Ofreneo and Illo, 2015) commended the significant gains

on women's empowerment in the last ten years. The report mentioned that 'women's studies in higher education have been recognized and institutionalized in many academic institutions, and have been instrumental in providing a pool of well-equipped gender advocates who can influence and implement gender-related policies and programs of local government units and national government agencies' (Pineda & Illo, 2015: 6). Such formal recognition and institutionalization was further strengthened through the Commission on Higher Education (CHED)'s issuance of CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 01, 2015, which provides for the nationwide mainstreaming of gender in all higher education institutions, private and public. With the CMO, the Philippines is the only country in the world or the first to undertake and promulgate gender mainstreaming in the academe (Manansan, 2015).<sup>13</sup> The report also highlighted the participation of grassroots women's organizations in government's flagship program, the Bottom-Up or Grassroots Participatory Budgeting, which enabled these groups to access support from and collaborate with LGUs on projects for women. Moreover, the report recognized the 'primacy of organizing, especially grassroot women' as an important component of 'women's empowerment and movement building.' What was new and significant, according to the report, was that organizations focusing on human rights, VAW, health, environment and disasters had formed community-based watch groups and other modalities to address increasing incidence of abuse in the context of calamities (Pineda & Illo, 2015: 6) Also, the use of social media was seen as an opportunity to 'strengthen and speed up advocacies.' (Ibid.)

The various efforts of women's organizations working on different issues and concerns also led to the passage of the following laws during the period:

Table 3: **Legislative Victories, July 1992 to present**

| Year | Republic Act (RA) Number | Description   |
|------|--------------------------|---|
| 1993 | 7655                     | Increases the minimum wage for domestic workers                         |
| 1994 | 7688                     | An Act giving representation to women in the Social Security Commission |

<sup>13</sup> The chairperson of CHED at the time was Dr. Patricia Licuanan, who had chaired the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 1994-1995 and was one of the conveners of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995).

|      |       |   |
|------|-------|---|
| 1995 | 7877  | The Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995 declared all forms of sexual harassment in the employment environment as well as in the education and training environment as unlawful   |
|      | 7941  | Party-list System Act   |
| 1997 | 8353  | Anti-Rape Law of 1997 broadened the definition of rape which may be committed by having carnal knowledge of a woman under certain circumstances or by committing acts of sexual assault   |
| 1998 | 8505  | An Act Providing Assistance and Protection for Rape Victims, Establishing for the Purpose A Rape Crisis Center in Every Province and City   |
| 2000 | 8972  | Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000 aims to develop a comprehensive program of social development and welfare services for solo parents and their children  |
| 2003 | 9208  | Amended Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act which strengthens the power of the authority to prosecute pre-empted acts of trafficking; eliminates the privacy clause previously enjoyed by traffickers; penalizes the confiscation of travel documents such as passports and working permits from trafficked persons |
| 2004 | 9262  | Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004 penalizes the commission of violence against women and their children (VAWC) in the context of domestic violence or violence in intimate relationships   |
| 2009 | 9710  | Magna Carta of Women is a comprehensive women's rights law that seeks to eliminate discrimination against women by recognizing, protecting, fulfilling and promoting the rights of Filipino women, especially those in the marginalized sectors   |
| 2012 | 10354 | The Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012 or the Reproductive Health Law provides for a national policy on responsible parenthood and reproductive health  |
|      | 10361 | The Domestic Workers Act or Batas Kasambahay institutes policies for the protection and welfare of domestic workers   |
| 2013 | 10398 | Declaring November 25 of every year as 'National Consciousness day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children'  |

As part of the progressive movement, Estrada-Claudio (2005) asserted that:

It cannot be denied that the women's movement remained vibrant even during the worst years of the Philippine Left. GABRIELA and its affiliate organizations continued to grow even during the time when other mass organizations of the national democrats were shrinking. While old organizations were dying or experiencing their splits in the legal front, women were putting up new feminist organizations. The flourishing of independent organizations working on various issues pre-figured the social movements' paradigm of the anti-globalization movements and the world social forum processes. Feminists began decades ago to build coalitions on various issues from legal reform, health and reproductive rights, prostitution and trafficking, migration, etc. While not dismissing the parallel growth of other social movements like the environmental movement or that of indigenous peoples, the feminist movements' diversity and scope was and remains remarkably noticeable.

## Reflections and Continuing Challenges

The Philippine women's movement is an organized national movement composed of women's NGOs and organizations of women workers, rural women, indigenous women, youth, survivors of violence against women; women committees in mixed organizations (Taguiwalo, 2013). Over the last three decades, the women's movement has provided services on sexual and reproductive health and victims of gender-based violence, facilitated mainstreaming of gender perspective in government and academic communities, and achieved significant gains at the policy level for the advancement of women's rights.

The women's movement has also collaborated with other social movements, and has been able to mainstream feminist analysis in different political blocs. The dialogue among feminists and the social movements dealing with issues of class and imperialism has been facilitated by the presence of feminists who maintain that the liberation of women from patriarchal oppression cannot occur without liberation of the entire people from imperialist oppression, and vice versa (Estrada-Claudio, 2005).

In the spirit of solidarity, the Philippine feminist movement has built linkages with other women's organizations from different countries and regions, with individual feminists contributing to the global feminist struggle. Common opposition to neo-liberal policies, political repression, non-recognition of women's rights as human rights, the pervasiveness of violence against women, among others, are the shared platform of women, whether in the Philippines or in other parts of the

world (Taguiwalo, 2013: 13-14). Filipino feminist organizations are active participants in regional formations such as the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development<sup>14</sup>, the Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW)<sup>15</sup>, and Committee for Asian Women (CAW)<sup>16</sup>, among others.

Yet, there are more challenges to hurdle.

It remains to be seen whether or not laws for the protection and advancement of women's rights are implemented properly, and whether they result in the overall improvement of the lives of women.

Given the experiences of our sisters in the trade unions, it is imperative to revisit the concept and understanding of "gender integration" in union work. What does it mean for trade unions when they assert that gender work should benefit both women and men? Will this change the gender power relations? Perhaps women's solidarity within the labour movement, regardless of individual affiliations, would be a timely strategy that should be pursued by women leaders to protect the gains of the past, develop young leaders, and craft a new agenda that will lead to the creation of more spaces for women and gender concerns as core workers' issues. Also, since informal work is continuously expanding, the link between women in trade unions with autonomous organizations of informal women workers and rural women's organizations should be explored and strengthened as well.

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<sup>14</sup> APWLD developed from dialogues among Asia Pacific women lawyers, social scientists and activists, which began at the 1985 Third World Forum on Women, held in Nairobi, Kenya. The women participating in the dialogues recognised that while law is used as an instrument of state control over resources, rights and even women's bodies, it can also be used to help effect political and socio-economic changes in our societies. In 1986, women-delegates from across Asia met in Tagaytay, Philippines to discuss the most pressing socio-legal issues facing women and to explore possible areas of collaborative action. The outcome of this meeting was the formation of APWLD, the first regional response to the challenges of Nairobi ([www.apwld.org](http://www.apwld.org))

<sup>15</sup> Established in 1993 upon a needs assessment arising out of a regional women's health project, where the originating vision was to create a resource center that would 'enable women to better define and control their lives', ARROW is a regional non-profit women's organization based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. We have consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC) of the United Nations. We work closely with many national partners in countries, regional and global networks around the world, and are able to reach stakeholders in 120 countries ([www.arrow.org.my](http://www.arrow.org.my))

<sup>16</sup> The Committee for Asian Women is a network that brings together women's rights groups and labour unions from across Asia. Using training and learning exchanges, the network contributes to developing the potential and skills of women leaders in trade unions and labour organisations, with the aim of increasing the individual and collective bargaining power of women workers in Asia ([www.caw-asia.net](http://www.caw-asia.net))



The movement should be able to overcome the challenge of recruiting the youth in feminists causes at a time when politically charged issues turn off most of them from being involved. The current disinterest is not because of apathy of the youth, but because there is difficulty in capturing their imagination (Cendaña, 2016). One platform which the young are actively using is social media. Hashtags/online campaigns are effective tools in raising awareness on the plight of other women, spreading feminism, and increasing women's voices on various issues affecting their lives. But, it should be emphasized that 'clicking' and 'liking' something posted on social media are not enough. 'Digital' solidarity should be coupled with human interaction that could provide more political impact. The information age has generated unprecedented growth in the spread of information and speed of interaction: gaps in spaces and generations were narrowed, and formerly elusive information became a click away. Indeed, there has never been a better platform to capture the imagination of younger people toward engaging the women's movement, and the specific agenda that it advances.

While Left organizations have turned their attention to women's issues and recognized the equal importance of the reproductive and productive spheres, women's issues – especially those dealing with sexuality – are still marginalized in the discourse on social transformation. Divorce and abortion are issues that remain to be absent in the debates among other social movements.

Developments in the national political scene pose new challenges for the women's movement. Newly elected president Rodrigo Duterte has made crass and misogynist statements and actions the 'new normal' in the daily conduct of the highest official of the land, spewing 'jokes' about rape and sexist remarks about the Vice President's body, and bragging about numerous extramarital affairs. He called his own daughter 'drama queen' after the latter claimed that she had been a rape victim. Although some women's groups and feminists never failed to call him out, other women political figures like former Senator Pia Cayetano brushed aside such instances of misogyny, and claimed instead that Duterte, as mayor of Davao City, advanced women's rights and welfare (Gutierrez, 2017).

In her welcome remarks during the 'Women Defend Democracy' forum held on 8 March 2017, former presidential peace adviser and feminist leader Teresita Quintos Deles cited the crises of the current

administration in various facets of governance and democracy. While acknowledging the strides that the women's movement has made, Deles (2017) lamented the rampant human rights violations, the 8,000 deaths brought about by the administration's 'war on drugs', and the efforts to revive the death penalty. She made a point of how a general vulnerability of the poor is even worse for women, since they are already a vulnerable sector to begin with. She beseeched women of all ages to take up the challenges of time, space, and clarity and integrity in battling these persisting problems. Indeed, women should take the past into account in order to analyze present problems. Likewise, Deles (2017) emphasized that the struggle should not be suppressed by the limitations of space; it should be archipelagic not just in geographic scope, but more importantly in depth. It should permeate the capillaries of the society in order to take on the roots of the problems as experienced by women and other sectors. Lastly, the truth should take the center stage in our democracy. Truth is the foundation of change, for how can change be truly achieved if there is not a truthful picture of the things that we intend to change to begin with? Change, after all should be based on facts and logic for democracy cannot flourish in lies and deceit.

The Filipino women's movement has come a long way, but still has miles to go, so to speak. Problems had been surmounted in the past, battles had been won, but each generation faces new challenges peculiar and unique from the last. Nevertheless, each generation is also provided with new resources and new strengths. Indeed, each challenge and each resistance gives birth to new kinds of resilience. Each battle fought, no matter whether won or lost, is a victory nonetheless. And for the Filipino women's movement, every day is taking a step toward the envisioned equality, empowerment, and social justice. #



## List of Abbreviations

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| ACORD      | Alternative Center for Organizational Reforms and Development                          |
| ADB        | Anti-Discrimination Bill   |
| AFF        | Asociacion Feminista Filipina  |
| Akbayan    | Akbayan Citizens' Action Party   |
| BBGC       | Barangay Bayan Governance Consortium   |
| BPO        | Business Process Outsourcing   |
| CBA        | Collective Bargaining Agreement  |
| CEDAW      | Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women             |
| CHED       | Commission on Higher Education   |
| CMO        | CHED Memorandum Circular   |
| COMELEC    | Commission on Elections  |
| CPP        | Communist Party of the Philippines   |
| DEATH      | Divorce, Euthanasia, Abortion, Total population control and Homosexuality              |
| DIWATA     | Development Initiative for Women's Alternative and Transformative Action               |
| EO         | Executive Order  |
| EPZ        | Export Processing Zone   |
| FQS        | First Quarter Storm  |
| GABRIELA   | General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership and Action |
| GAD        | Gender and Development   |
| G-10       | Lakas ng Kababaihan Group of 10 (Women's Strength Group of 10)                         |
| HUKBALAHAP | Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon   |
| KABAPA     | Katipunan ng Bagong Pilipina (Collective of New Filipinas)                             |
| KALAYAAN   | Katipunan ng Kalayaan para sa Kababaihan, or the Organization of Women for Freedom     |
| LEARN      | Labor Education and Research Network   |
| LFPR       | Labor Force Participation Rate   |
| LBT        | Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender  |
| LGBT       | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender   |
| LGU        | Local Government Unit  |

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>MCW</b>      | Magna Carta of Women   |
| <b>MAKALAYA</b> | Manggagawang Kababaihang Mithi ay Paglaya or the Women Workers Fighting for Freedom  |
| <b>MAKIBAKA</b> | Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan, or the Movement for Freedom by Progressive Women  |
| <b>MTPDP</b>    | Medium Term Philippine Development Plan  |
| <b>NCRFW</b>    | National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women  |
| <b>NDF</b>      | National Democratic Front  |
| <b>NEDA</b>     | National Economic and Development Authority  |
| <b>NGO</b>      | Non-governmental organization  |
| <b>PCW</b>      | Philippine Commission on Women   |
| <b>PDPW</b>     | Philippine Development Plan for Women  |
| <b>PILIPINA</b> | Kilusang Kababaihang Pilipina, or the Philippine Women's Movement  |
| <b>PPGD</b>     | Philippine Plan for Gender-responsive Development  |
| <b>RA</b>       | Republic Act   |
| <b>RH</b>       | Reproductive Health  |
| <b>RHAN</b>     | Reproductive Health Advocacy Network   |
| <b>RPRH</b>     | Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health   |
| <b>SENTRO</b>   | Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa<br>(Center of United and Progressive Workers)  |
| <b>SIBOL</b>    | Sama-samang Inisyatiba ng mga Kababaihan para sa Pagbabago ng Batas at Lipunan, or the Collective Initiative of Women for the Transformation of the Laws and Society |
| <b>TLC</b>      | The Lesbian Collective   |
| <b>VAW</b>      | Violence Against Women   |
| <b>VAWC</b>     | Violence Against Women and Children  |
| <b>WAND</b>     | Women's Action Network for Development   |

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#### **List of persons interviewed:**

Teresita Borgoños, Building and Woodworkers International (BWI), 15 January 2017

Bernice Coronacion, SENTRO, 5 January 2017

Lorna Ferrer, IndustriALL Philippines, 10 January 2017

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**Meggan Evangelista** started her LGBT advocacy work when she joined the University of the Philippines Babaylan- the pioneering LGBT student organization based in UP Diliman campus in Quezon City. She is currently the Executive Director of Babaylanes Inc.- a not-for-profit, non-government organization that provides assistance to LGBT youth groups in universities. Meggan is also the Secretary General of LAGABLAB Network- a broad alliance of LGBTQ organizations in the country whose core work is lobbying for LGBT-friendly legislation. She is an incoming Masters student in the Gender Studies program of the Central European University in Budapest, Hungary.

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