

INTRODUCTION

The last issue of RWS sounded the call for women to take back history in order to make Philippine history whole. But as the articles gathered for this issue point out, even if women were to take back history, wholeness is far from being a reality. Ideological apparatuses still produce and reproduce patriarchy which (a) privileges men over women and children, (b) considers heterosexual relations as the only acceptable form, and (c) condemns all forms of homosexual relations.

Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB expounds on the privileging of men and the marginalizing of women in her article, "Religion as a Socializing Force in the 'Woman Question'". While the Christian Churches, and for that matter, other churches' manifest function is to save people from evil so that they can have a good after-life with God, latently and without intending to, they promote patriarchy by making it appear that inequality between men and women is part of God's plan. Practices guided by this value has made the trip to heaven for women a bad trip: They are made to take much more pain and hardship than men to obey God's law. Indeed, it cannot be denied that organized religion that posits the Alpha and the Omega as a male God who created Eve from Adam's rib (which makes her a derivative and an afterthought) for the purpose of providing the first man a helpmate and a playmate (which makes her a serviceable appendage), functions as a socializing force in the construction of a gender system which places men in positions of ascendancy over women and children.

So internalized is patriarchal ideology that gender roles inscribed by it are so resilient, persistent and self-maintaining. This is documented by Alice Pingol's study, "Absentee Wives

and Househusbands: Power, Identity and Family Dynamics.” Husbands and wives who experience a role reversal due to overseas employment do not amend their social assignation of specific gender roles: Husbands, even when they are relegated to the underworld of women or the private sphere where unpaid and socially unrecognized reproduction work takes place, or no longer the major economic providers of the family, nevertheless still manage to construct themselves as masculine subjects who are the masters of women. Wives, on the other hand, who have entered the upperworld of men or the public sphere where paid and socially recognized production work takes place, and who are the sole bread earner or for some in the study, the bigger contributor to the family coffers, not to mention their exposure to other cultural constructions of gender, nevertheless still construct themselves as feminine subjects who see to it that their husbands do not get castrated/decapitated as masters of the home. This, despite the fact that women OCWs have been officially proclaimed by the national government as “heroes of the Philippines.” What is said when a baby girl is born is true—*Ay, pambayad ng utang!**—not only in the context of a patriarchal society where a daughter is regarded as payment for her father’s sin of taking away the virginity of another man’s daughter/s, but also in the context of the huge external debts of the Philippines which is largely paid for by the dollar earnings of women OCWs.

Patriarchal ideology does not only reside in the church and the family. It is also at home in the dance. Rina Angela P. Corpus in her “Reading ‘Mariang Sinderela’: Towards a Feminist Discourse of Dance” discusses why the students who produced the staging of “Mariang Sinderela” for fulfilling an academic requirement for graduation, could not appropriate

*Tagalog phrase which means “She is for paying a debt.”

the production for liberating colonies from their masters as it should be. The unequal power relations between the North and the South, the white and non-white, the upperclass and the underclass, and men and women produced and reproduced by westernism, patriarchy and capitalism were inscribed in the dancing bodies, not to mention the music, the libretto, etc. that went into the stage presentation of the dance. Though this inscription was not seen by perceivers whose two eyes have been blinded by their western/patriarchal/capitalist ideological interpellation, the third eye which Rina constructs through feminist theory and practice makes us see what is behind the curtains: The three female students were just directed executors of an unfeminist agenda and consequently the executed. Alas, the opportunity offered by the dance to slay the “Law of the Father” that is the master signifier of language, through movements that “write/rite the body” (to borrow Helene Cixous’s words) in accordance with the maternal semiotics that resides in the unconscious was lost. So was the opportunity to liberate the dance from western colonization. Let it not also be forgot that lost, too, was the opportunity to take away the dance from elitist control, and for once give it to the masses who need it, to put to good use Henri Bergson’s words, as a mirror to look at so they could “be brought before their own presence.”

The story of Princess Urduja, first told in written form as history by men of the elite class (Ibn Batuta, Jose Rizal, Conrado Benitez and academicians), and later, as myth told orally by the nameless masses, is problematized by Maria Crisanta Nelmidia-Flores in her article, “Princess Urduja: A Symbolic Subversion” as discursive space where the spontaneous and quiet revolt of a people against Spanish colonization finds a hospitable home. Images of the princess assume revolutionary potential: There is the image of Urduja as an empowered woman who was not

the subject but the ruler of men, a counterpoise to the image of the colonial woman whose status in society has been downgraded as a consequence of the functioning of patriarchal institutions such as the Church and State. For another is the image of Urduja as a sovereign ruler of a prosperous kingdom which provides the counterpoise to an impoverished Philippines ruled by foreigners. Yet another image is that of a kingdom which provides the counterpoise to a non-western nation considered as “barbaric” and in need of cultural upliftment through western colonization. In short, the story of Princess Urduja, no matter how and when told, keeps the dialectical process going in the construction of subjects. Hopefully, it will lead to the construction of viable selves who will be beyond the catch of sexism, racism, classism and ethnocentrism — all obstacles to the making of holistic Philippine history.

Flaudette May V. Datuin’s “Why Gender Does Not Matter in Southeast Asian Politics: Towards a Feminist Retelling of Southeast Asian His/Herstories” subjects to rigorous analysis the works of feminists like Elizabeth Eviota and Rosalinda Pineda-Ofreneo. While there is the manifest intention of these two feminist scholars to feminize masculinized disciplines by using a woman-centered mode of inquiry and analysis, their success in attaining their mission, while substantial, is nevertheless not fully accomplished. The social sciences, like religion, the family, the dance, and even the myth which pictures Urduja as a masculinized woman, are, alas and alack, also patriarchal ideological apparatuses. Elizabeth’s attempt to appropriate political economy for women by including reproduction work as part of the national and global economy, attains only limited success due to structural constraints. Rosalinda’s conception of the feminist life history approach, on the other hand, “promises much but does not deliver,” according to May who claims not to have heard what she was made to expect to hear — the authentic

voices of the women homeworkers. The deplored patriarchal mode of “mastering” the subject under study, while admittedly minimized, is however still there gasping for breath. In view of the inability of analytic tools and modes of research to render a full accounting of women’s history, gender which should matter, in fact, still does not matter in Southeast Asian politics, hence the rendering of herstory not in full but merely in parts.

Another reason why the whole of Philippine history is still in the offing is the erasure of the history of the neither feminine nor masculine. Charlie Veric’s “Que(e)rying the Nation” laments the non-inclusion of the homosexual male in Philippine history. What if the *bakla* writes the nation? he asks. Will the account include what has been left by previous account makers, who were/are hampered in telling the whole of it by confusing the nation (a cultural entity) with the state (a political entity), and by universalizing the particular? Take the case of Neil Garcia. Charlie says that while the contribution of this acclaimed pioneering *bakla* writer cannot be denied, it cannot also be denied that there is a shortfall in his effort to include all of *bakla* history in Philippine history: Neil failed to see the undersides of the underside — the lower-class, outside the metropole *bakla*.

If *bakla* history is not fully accounted for, much more so is lesbian history. Lesbians have been subsumed in women’s history which should not be the case. Jennifer Curry Josef’s “Sexual Identities and Self Images of Women Loving Women” tells us why. Lesbians may have female bodies but not the socially acceptable feminine sexual orientation which is heterosexual. Their history cannot be accounted for by those contented with “women” as a social and cultural category no longer amenable to further refined classification. Thus, in art history lesbian artists are made invisible. To make them visible so that they can take

their rightful place in Philippine art history, Roselle Pineda articulates the need for "scratching the surface" in order to see who of the women artists are in fact lesbians. This means "breaking the thick screen (put there indiscriminately by eyes that do not see differentials in the gender construction of female bodies) "that hides the flesh, the minds and the voices" of the "other" women.

May Datuin's lament that gender does not matter in Southeast Asian politics receives partial documentation in the list of theses and dissertations submitted to the Department of Sociology, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines–Diliman prepared by Marcia Ruth Gabriela Fernandez. The list is short. It will be even much shorter if inclusion demands that gender is treated as the main variable. And, if gender as the main variable is to be studied from the point of view of feminism that leaves no patriarchal stone unturned, the already short list may not be safe from further clipping.

If only to make all of us ponder on our very own gender construction, we ask this question: When does awareness of gender construction start? For Catherine Carandang Comia it was at bath time when she saw the absence of what is a presence in her brothers' bodies; for Rolando Tolentino it was a boys' game played with a circle drawn in a dried river bank where what was made to go inside it in simulation of an imagined adult act was soon subjected to the ritual of circumcision not long after that very hot summer day's game in Nueva Ecija; for George Pudadera it was the realization that it was not the beautiful daughter of his mother's friend but the boy next door who could excite him; for Alma Fernandez it was the realization that she could not be what she wanted to be unless she be born again as her own beloved daughter.

We found it fitting and proper to focus on gender construction for this issue, the last for the 20th century, because we are convinced that it is the understanding of the why and how of it that is crucial for us Filipinos to make Philippine history neither his nor hers but ours.

To all of you, the best of wishes for the coming century.

The Editor

