

WOMEN'S WORK NEVER ENDS

Carolina S. Malay

In the Philippines we understand the term “peace process” to mean the dialogue and negotiations that have been going on between the Philippine government and several organizations that have posed a political-military challenge to it.

In the past, I did indeed take part in the peace process as a member of the National Democratic Front delegation engaged in negotiating a settlement of the armed conflict with the Philippine government. That was in 1986, just after the Filipino people had successfully ousted a dictatorial regime, and hopes were high that the country's problems might finally begin to be seriously tackled at the roots.

All too quickly, however, that initial euphoria settled into a truly disappointing realization. *Plus ça change, et plus c'est la même chose*, as the cynical French aphorism goes. . . the more things seem to have changed, the more they actually remain the same.

The Philippines' first president after Marcos hesitated, fatally, to make that leap of faith required that would have set our nation on a different course. Instead, she and the succeeding heads of state gave us, the people, the impression that their main concern was to control, to rein in, the powerful democratic impulses that had built up from below.

And so, while the state-sanctioned assassinations and the unspeakable tortures have abated over the years, the fundamental structures of society continue to operate today as

they did during the fourteen years of one-man rule. These are the structures that keep Filipino women and men in poverty, several dozen millions of them, even as they work heroically, day after day, to make life better for themselves and their children.

The armed revolutionary movement of which I was a part refuses to go away for as long as those repressive structures are not decisively dismantled. I myself, however, am no longer actively involved in it. For the past six years, I have been a full-time teacher of journalism, and a full-time mother, wife and daughter as well.

Strangely enough, it doesn't feel like my life has taken a 180-degree turn at all. It feels more like a constant, pulsating flow. . . from inquisitive childhood to carefree girlhood; on to an interesting career in journalism; then, luckily, the few years spent in Europe just when the spirit of "*contestation*"—of critical, militant advocacy—seemed to be standing the whole world on its head.

I am proud to say that yes, I did take a leap of faith in deciding to cast my lot with the revolution in the early '70s. But in the doing so I was really just externalizing the values that had been taking shape all those years. I realize now that society was changing me, just as it did all of us all over the world whose lives during that crucial time suddenly locked onto a vision more compelling than family and career.

For nearly two decades, the Philippine revolutionary struggle absorbed all my energies as a woman, a journalist and a citizen of my country. Many of my original values were reaffirmed—such as patriotism, commitment to the truth, personal integrity—while new ones took root, like feminism and simple living. Most importantly, it developed in me a

deep love for the humble folk on whom my life or death depended in so many ways. I, a middle-class woman, joined the people in defending their rights and got so much from them in return. Sturdy peasant women, laborers and their wives and daughters, tribal fighters beautiful as the statues of ancient goddesses—they were all my teachers.

Now that my turn has come to be a teacher myself, their lessons flow so naturally out of my being. Let me share one significant lesson I learned from the people in common struggle: "Woman's work is never done." But it's not woman's work alone, actually, that goes on from one stage to the next, in a constant flow of needs and responses. It must be a male illusion that life processes are marked by clear boundaries, that they are to be measured as victories or failures. We women know that it is not so. Woman's work is never done, and that means to say that it is indispensable. It's the process that counts. As in our daily lives, so is it in our communities and societies, and even in those societies, like the Philippines, where social change is happening from below. Will this work ever get done? No, it will not. What's important is not to have finished one's tasks, but to take up the work with courage, with imagination, and love.

Carolina S. Malay, born in Manila in 1940, studies at the University of the Philippines and the Institut Francais de Presse in Paris, France before joining the underground during the period of the Marcos dictatorship. In 1989-91, she was detained as a political prisoner together with her husband, fellow journalist and activist Satur C. Ocampo (who had already been arrested and imprisoned once before, for more than nine years during 1976-85). They have two children. Since 1995 she has served as chair of the journalism department of the UP College of Mass Communication.