

# INTRODUCTION

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If we will rely on just the numbers, then the Philippines can be seen as one of the best examples in Asia in terms of gender parity. According to the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report* (2017), the Philippines has consistently ranked among the top ten performers worldwide since 2006 "with 79% of its overall gender gap closed" (p. 15). The report measured the following areas: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment (p. 4). The Philippines is the only East Asian country to make it to the top ten and for all appearances is a good model of gender progress.

Most Filipinos or scholars studying the Philippines will not be surprised by this data on the strong economic or political participation of Filipinas in society. Some historians and sociologists have actually gone so far as to describe the Philippines as being predisposed to a matriarchal society because in most single-income households with the male as primary earner, the husband would give his wife a portion of his salary and let her manage the household budget with minimal input on how it is to be spent. Clearly, this would mean that the wife/mother holds power over the family's economics decisions.

Filipina feminist and scholar Lilia-Quindoza Santiago, has, however, questions this "power" that women have at home. She argues that if, "the salary handed over to them by their husband is insufficient... [then] women are forced to be entrepreneurial" (2012, p. 167). She provides this practice of managing household money an alternative frame: most Filipino households earn barely enough to scrape by, so "this economic power of woman is meaningless in... a society where a majority of the population do not earn enough to enable their families to live comfortably" (p. 167).

Context, then, is integral to an analysis of how much progress we've made towards gender equality and equity. As the world changes, systems of inequality also morph and manifest differently. Oppression also takes on various forms across different social and cultural groups. Feminist scholarship has long acknowledged the plurality of identity and how different vectors of identity intersect in an individual. Further sharpening of this analytical tool has led to what Floya Anthias calls "translocational positionality" (2002) that encourages the awareness of particular circumstances and conditions — how our sociocultural locations are not fixed, are always in flux, and that individuals may enjoy privilege in one category but experience oppression in another (Anthias, 2002, 2011; Evans, 2005).

Veronica Gregorio's exploration of the stubbornly high incidence of teenage pregnancy in the Philippines in spite of a steady decline worldwide employs the photo-elicitation method, which enabled "the research participants to take and use photographs to identify their individual and community concerns and to promote a dialogue to openly discuss and reflect on it". Her work explores how poverty forces early adulthood in teens, which shapes the way they view their life trajectories. A whole generation of caregivers, which in other areas of the world is called the "sandwich generation", is the focus of Excelsa Tongson's research. Here, she describes how the service and care provided by women who are part of this group are so taken for granted and normalized that there is no local term for it in any of the Philippine languages, and the group is still untallied in number. In as much as it "highlights the experiences of women living at the margins – women who are suffering from different types of oppressions", it also is an account of the resilience and strength of the women in her study.

Prevalent traditional gender systems associate women with the home. Rowena Laguilles-Timog's article highlights how even in this space, specifically urban poor housing, women can be disenfranchised from ownership due to outdated and gender-insensitive government housing policies and programs. The Philippine government's insensitivity to women's burdens due to social expectations of managing and keeping house and home intact is further discussed in Jesusa Francisco's study

on women left behind to keep everything together while their husbands or partners are incarcerated in the President's drug war or "Oplan Tokhang". And as with any kind of war, women and children are the most victimized, and Aida Santos' contribution to this journal issue problematizes the drug war through poetry.

Also part of this issue are Catherine Lourdes Dy's review of Firouzeh Nahavandi's book on transnational inequalities, a poem on relationships by Praksis Miranda, and a beautiful suite of photographs documenting the work of Ina Jardiolin. All these give added value and awareness to the myriad ways by which we can experience gender and its mostly invisible demands.

The articles and creative work in this issue have explored the contexts behind and beyond the numbers. Most of them used case studies or ethnographic methods to give deeper insight into complex, everyday experiences of women that seek to shed light on certain phenomena when viewed together with the statistical data—for although the numbers may not lie, they do only tell a small part of the whole story.

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