

INTRODUCTION

One of the foundations of feminist theory is the awareness of how women are subject to structural oppression on the basis of their sex. Intersectional feminist theory holds that the forms these oppressions take, though, are not homogeneous and that some women are subject to multiple lines of marginalization together with gender, such as socio-economic class, race, and ethnicity. These continue to be pervasive in today's society, and inasmuch as there have been advances made towards increased equity for women and non-normative gender identities and towards challenging harmful representations, oppressive structures still exist. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how discourses on structural inequality remain relevant with the increase of gender-based violence and harassment in quarantine, the way male populist leaders have handled the containment of the virus and management of their countries' available resources, and the need for a gender lens in environmental and disaster risk reduction and management programs, among others.

In this issue of the *Review of Women's Studies*, we look at different areas of life where women continue to interrogate and actively contest oppression, demeaning representations, and their subjugated roles. Three articles in this issue are the fruits of the UP Center for Women's and Gender Studies Research Grant: "Politicizing Homemaking" by Chester Arcilla, "Exploring Political Participation and Leadership Approach of Women Political Leaders in Mindanao" by Raymundo Pavo and Himaya Tamayo-Gutierrez, and "Defying Gravity and Conventions" by Adrienne Maguddayao. The UPCWGS Grant funds cutting-edge research on women and gender in the Philippines and the ASEAN region.

"Defying Gravity and Conventions" is a pioneering study on pole dancing in the Philippines. The study focuses on the benefits of pole

dancing as a fitness activity, while at the same time being cognizant of pole dancing's sexualized status in Philippine society. This baseline study reveals the motivations of different people who engage in pole dancing and the different ways they reject and challenge negative stereotypes. The primary contribution of Maguddayao's research, however, is how it creates a space for discussing how women and non-heteronormative bodies navigate the masculine world that is the fitness industry.

More than 50 years after Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, where the state of a housewife is described as "life-restricting, future-denying," Arcilla questions the belief that emancipation from the home and carework to enable economic participation is the only form of political resistance, as this concept further disenfranchises women who do not have access to "care commodification and outsourcing." In "Politicizing Homemaking," he explores how subaltern women have reconstructed the home as a political site that enables activist endeavor and production and that resists "neoliberal enactments."

Focusing on women political leaders in District II of Zamboanga del Norte, the study of Pavo and Tamayo-Gutierrez explores the entryways of women into politics, what their particular brand of leadership stands for, and how they interrogate and differentiate their type of leadership from traditional, male-dominant, dynastic ones. "Exploring Political Participation and Leadership Approach of Women Political Leaders in Mindanao" also highlights the balancing of "reproductive, productive, and community work" that has, on one hand, increased the burden of women political leaders (with male leaders not being expected to deal with all three), but has also given rise to women leaders "becoming more attuned to and circumspect in their roles and responsibilities in the communities that they serve", which can pave the way for a more feminist transformative type of leadership. This research also challenges the representation of women political leaders as mere "benchwarmers" for male family members or relatives in politics.

The rise of populist leaders such as Trump, Bolsonaro, and Duterte has made feminists and human rights activists question the "gains" of social justice movements. Rowena Laguilles-Timog's "Populism, Patriarchy, Protest" explores feminist protest during the first three years of Duterte's

presidency. The study reveals how the problem is beyond just Duterte and his populist style but is rooted in “the patriarchal system that manifests in our development agenda, laws, policy implementation, institutional mechanisms, the home, and even popular culture” and how this system will continue to undermine the positive transformations toward greater equality unless it is addressed and challenged directly.

Popular culture is a battleground where a multitude of narratives try to bring themselves to the awareness of an audience and be possibly part of that audience’s consciousness or reality. “Courting the Gaze, Romancing the Margins” by Jolo and Chua Manansala examines the work of Emiliana Kampilan and how she brings to the fore marginalized identities, positions, and stories in her graphic fiction. Kampilan makes space for queer figures in her work and returns to the queer imaginary that has been present in a lot of indigenous Philippine myths and narratives for “in the braiding of myth, of political, natural, and personal histories, such works suggest that the renovation of the imagination is groundwork for making other changes possible.”

This issue of the journal is also very lucky in being able to showcase the work of Yllang Montenegro. Her prints, mixed media work, and sculptures bring a stunning visuality to the social issues that continue to impinge on the ability of women to lead full, meaningful lives—such as poverty, gender-based violence, coloniality, and environmental degradation.

The contents of this issue, as well as recent events including the rise of misogynist, populist leaders and the revelation of persisting inequalities by the pandemic can hopefully shake us out of complacency. The work towards interrogating and challenging gender norms, harmful practices, and systemic oppression and their ever-changing forms continues.

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