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Women and the Democracy Project: A Feminist Take on Women's Political Participation in the Philippines

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Chapter 9

WOMEN AND THE DEMOCRACY PROJECT:

A FEMINIST TAKE ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza

Feminism both as a social movement and as an academic field, which struggles to penetrate and cut across all disciplines, was ushered in as a critique of what it saw as a world discriminatory of women. As an intellectual/academic pursuit, one of the greatest challenges that it continuously faces is the masculine enterprise of the study of politics. This is because the whole domain of the 'political' was traditionally seen as a 'man's world' both in theory and in practice. Hillary Charlesworth notes that the public-private '(…) dichotomy is central to liberalism – the dominant political, and legal, philosophy of the West' and it '(…) assumes a public sphere of rationality, order, and political authority in which political and legal activity take place, and a private, "subjective" sphere in which regulation is not appropriate' (1994: 69). For Asian feminists, however, the public-private dichotomy is inadequate in the analysis of women's situation in Asia for it tends to delimit the experiences of women into a generic schema – women marginalized in the public sphere and women defined as the 'other'. What is needed is to locate women's experiences within their own context without falling into the tyranny of generalization, thus recognizing that women are both the same and different.

This study is an attempt to describe women's political participation in the Philippines within its own context and peculiarity. The country's experience of democracy is specifically used as a frame of reference and women's political participation the measurable element. As such, the present chapter will broadly:

- Look into the recurring patterns/practices of Philippine politics and how these have neglected women in the narrative of the country's political history;

- Discuss the political participation of women both in the realms of formal and informal power and additionally within the context of the experience of democracy in the Philippines; and

- Make some feminist inferences on the connection between the democracy project in the Philippines and women's political participation.

SOME CONCEPTUAL GROUNDING: DEFINING DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Its Greek origins suggest that democracy is the 'rule of the people'. How this 'rule' is operationalized and by whom will yield quite a rich exchange of discourses. Thus, to make it more manageable, David Beetham suggests a look at democracy as '(…) a mode of decision-making about collective binding rules and policies over which the people exercise control' (quoted in Richards, 2002: 4). Long before Beetham, Joseph Schumpeter already viewed democracy as '(…) that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which the individual acquires the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for people's votes' (1943: 269). According to these constructions, it would seem that democracy operates on the assumption of people's participation in decision-making, specifically through elections. This is to say that political participation is a given in a democracy for it aims to affect public policy on two fronts: through the determination of public policy itself and through choosing the people who make public policy. However, if the latter merely serves as a legitimizing ritual for political leadership and thus, no substantive democratization actually takes place. When political participation is defined as '(…) the process of any voluntary action, successful or unsuccessful, organized or unorganized, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate methods, and inte1nded to influence the choice of political leaders at any level of government', the foci are the people's action and the result of their actions (Winer and Chowdhurry in Kabir, 2003: 1). Political participation gives the people a stake at democracy, which is why it is critical to have due recognition for congruent transformations in both institutions/structures and actors in the political system. Drawing on the ideas of Huber, Rueschemeyer and Stephens as well as combining the key tenets of formal democracy, participatory democracy, and social democracy, Nathan Quimpo has noted the following as concrete manifestations of democracy in contemporary times:

1. regular free and fair elections
2. universal suffrage
3. accountability of the state's administrative organs to the elected representatives

4. effective guarantee of freedom of expression and association as well as protection from arbitrary state action

5. high levels of participation without systematic difference across social categories (e.g. class, ethnicity and gender)

6. increasing equality in social and economic outcomes (2002: 5).

Parameters such as these are important in order to gauge the meaning of democracy as concretely felt by the people. Though a minimalist interpretation of election may be a rather convenient way to increase the number of democratic countries in the world[1] (and thus justify democracy's hegemony as a sign that it is an ideal political system), it does not guarantee, however, a meaningful improvement in the lives of the people. Human dignity, after all, is an imperative of democracy; if this is not authentically felt by the people, then the promise of democracy has not gone beyond mere rhetoric.

Unfortunately, democracy has not fully worked for the women of the world. The right of suffrage itself, for example, was not readily guaranteed to women as it was for men. Across most of the political history of liberal societies, the right to vote was tied to the whole notion of citizenship and the privilege of the citizen-man. The women were excluded because they were mere appendages of the men in their lives (i.e. father or husband), not being allowed to own properties or define their identities for themselves. In the notion of the citizen-man, '(…) "duty" is what defines the citizen – the duty to put the "common good" or the good of the community over and beyond oneself' along with the assumption that '(…) a woman can never take on this duty for she cannot act beyond herself' since she can '(…) not be able to act for the "good" of the community' (Veneracion-Rallonza, 2004: 27). With this unquestioned and unchallenged assumption came the belief that women need not participate politically through elections, as they have no business there in the first place. They neither need to be represented since it is accepted that their husbands or fathers represent them. By the end of the 20th century, there still remains five per cent of countries in the world that has not granted the right to vote to its female population nor the right to run for elections. For those countries that have democracy or a semblance of it (i.e. minimum requirement: elections), the endemic problems that plague them are the unequal political representation and participation of women. Carole Pateman reiterates this with the observation that '(…) for feminists, democracy has never existed; women have never been and still are not admitted as full and equal members and citizens in any country known as a democracy' (quoted in Eschle, 2000: 1).

Women comprise half of humanity and with the consolidation of their numbers in the form of women's votes, social changes can be effected in society. That is, if we assume that women think differently than men. However, '(…) women do not carry a "gene for democracy" primarily because of gender socialization – the subordination of women to men, relegation of women to the "private" sphere as well as their marginalization in public/political life' (Jaquette, 2000: 6). With such effective depoliticization, women who were initially able to claim and practice their right to vote looked to men as models for political actions, and as tutors in political decisions. In running for elections, women likewise referred to the male-paradigm of raw, coercive and competitive politics, thereby not differentiating themselves as women political leaders. Given this reality, the real test of democratization must go beyond the project of increasing the number of women who participate politically. A Western feminist standpoint '(…) encouraged the expansion of the political into the personal and of democracy into intimate life and emphasized the need to participate themselves in shaping their destiny rather than delegating that capacity to others' (Eschle, 2000: 13). But this liberalist frame is not enough, and that is why from the experiences of Black and Third World feminists, the critical project is to put forward some kind of 'transversal politics' that '(…) aims to be an alternative to the universalism/relativism dichotomy' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 125). Eschle aptly points to the negotiated space between feminists to see the logic of transversal politics as '(…) a process of coalition building through dialogue in which participants must recognize the historical and specific nature of their own identities, acknowledge the partiality of their perspectives and attempts to be open to exchanges with others' (2000: 16).

To guide democracy away from a universalist (i.e. beyond demand for institutional changes to expand women's 'public' presence) towards a transversalist form (i.e. pluralizing the 'public' into many 'publics' and reconceptualizing it as multi-tiered and heterogeneous), it is necessary to mitigate what Caryn Mctighe Musil says are two contradictory truths:

> (…) as women, we are the same and different. The bridges, power, alliances and social change possible will be determined by how well we define ourselves through a matrix that encompasses our gendered particularities while not losing sight of our unity (quoted in Yuval-Davis, 1997:126).

Women are indeed the same by virtue of shared experiences and women are also different because of the varying contexts and conditions of their lives. Women are part of the story of democracy of each society – not simply just under a social

category of gender but as an agent and facilitator of change. Unfortunately, the dominant interpretations of democracy and the narratives of Philippine politics have not comprised a feminist analysis and that is why Filipino women are excluded and marginalized in the re-telling of the country's political history. To mitigate this politics of exclusion, a feminist re-reading of Philippine democracy must include all the arenas where women are located and look at their contribution through a political lens. This means that women's presence in the traditional practice of politics (i.e. involvement in the revolutionary/anti-colonial struggle, suffragist movement, civil society actions, electoral politics, etc) as well as in the non-traditional political domain (i.e. exercising their gendered roles as daughters, wives, mothers and mistresses) should be recognized as a factor in shaping the country's political life. Women's stories should be weaved along with the depiction of institutional structures, the societal practices and norms. Building on the idea of transversal politics, the alternative discourse would now be the interface of dichotomies – private-public, universal-relative, same-different – in the re-telling of Philippine democracy.

RECURRING PATTERNS/PRACTICES IN PHILIPPINE POLITICS: A CONTEXTUALIZATION

The Philippines is an archipelagic state of about 7,100 islands located in the South China Sea. It has approximately 84 million people with about 54 per cent living on the island of Luzon, approximately 32 per cent in the Visayas, and the remaining 14 per cent in Mindanao. Fifty-five per cent of the population lives in urban areas while the rest live in rural areas. It is a republic under a presidential system with a (weak but functioning) multiparty system. As reflected in the 2000 The Philippine Report, the country has 15 regions and is further subdivided into 78 provinces, 87 cities, 1,534 municipalities, and 42,000 barangays; there are also three political units, namely the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA), the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), and the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) (2000: 2).

Owing to its historical experience under Western powers, the country has identified more with its former colonizers than with its Asian neighbors. The Philippines is the only country in the region that is predominantly Catholic – a colonial inheritance from the three centuries of being under Spanish rule. From an agglomeration of diverse groups of people in its pre-state form, the colony was consolidated under the rule of the Spanish crown that had a unique mix of civil, military, and religious authority. In the context of electoral contests (on the

municipal level), the Spaniards restricted electoral participation to the local elite – a practice that continued during American colonial rule. In fact, the pacification of the country under the Americans was effected through the consolidation of the elite in which they were guaranteed roles in the future self-governance of the Philippines. Temerio Rivera explains that 'The American strategy of gradually putting the native elites into power through electoral contests (…) legitimized elite rule, further entrenching the power of local elite families who were able to control the electoral process' (2002: 2).

As a consequence of this historical-political backdrop, the Philippines experienced a democracy plagued with elite politics, familial/kinship power and influence, and a patron-client system. In looking at the recurring patterns in Philippine politics, Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza summarizes them as:

1. The Philippine political system, though democratic, is characterized as largely elitist.

2. It operates on a clientelist tradition where the patron-client system figures prominently.

3. The breeding ground and the strongest root of this clientelism is the family – more specifically, the political families reigning in dynastic continuity and clustered into clans.

4. Political families largely form the elite base of Philippine politics and their major instruments are both political and economic power (2003: 6)

The recurring patterns of Philippine politics as well as the recurring themes of the country's quest for democracy intersect with the dominant analytical frameworks of patronage politics and patrimonial schema. What happened for women was interpreting elite democracy or using the patrimonial view with the conscious effort of women's involvement, and advancing the idea of familial/kinship politics and the patron-client system with the conscious effort of depicting what women have done - as a dutiful wife/daughter who takes on the political career of an assassinated husband/father or of a husband/father who has utilized his maximum term of office for an elected position. Interestingly, it is the very practice of elite democracy, familial/kinship politics, and a patron-client system that has enabled women to struggle and negotiate space for their inclusion in the practice of politics, both through the use of informal and formal power.

Through the channels of formal politics, women have been active as organizers, campaigners, fund-raisers, voters, political protesters, letter-writers, candidates for elective office, and even as national liberation fighters. They have belonged to political parties, to activist and religious groups, and to the bureaucracy itself.

Through the way of informal politics, women have been present as politicians' wives or daughters who would carry the family name or the family tradition of holding on to political power – especially if the term of office of the incumbent male-figure had expired. These women would take it upon themselves to run for public office if only to perpetuate their families' political power.

In both the formal and informal arenas, women have been significant actors; however in fact women have been conveniently removed from the depiction of Philippine politics – falling into what Saskia Sassen terms as a '(…) narrative of eviction (…)' (1998: 82).

THE DEMOCRACY PROJECT AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Some have observed that women in the Philippines are relatively better off than women from other Asian countries. During pre-colonial times, there were women who took on functional roles in society by virtue of being a *babaylan* (Visayan term) or *katalonan* (Tagalog term).

On the one hand, as part of the pre-colonial community, women had freedom and enjoyed what the men had. In fact, a woman:

> (…) was her brother's equal in the home, society, in government. She could hold position of honor and prestige like him; born to a ruling family, she could succeed to her father's rule; born to less, she still had as much as her brother might inherit; her dignity as an individual was recognized, before and after marriage; her rights to own property were upheld even after marriage; she could divorce her husband for cause; her judgement heeded; her person respected (Subido, 1955: 1).

On the other hand, there were also many instances of inter-*barangay* raids to capture women in order to serve as additional wives for the 'datu' [chieftain] – where the number of wives reflected the wealth and status of the male political leader.

Nonetheless, it is believed that women occupied an equitable position in society prior to the coming of the Spaniards – they had power both formally (as *babaylan* or priestess) and informally (as *may bahay* or equal of the husband). These positions were lost with the coming of the colonizers and women were reduced to a status of perennial dependence in all aspects of their lives. In fact, with the relegation of the indigenous population to non-citizens, women were placed lower than the lowest status. The country's two major colonizers (namely Spain and the USA) imposed their cultures and their attendant biases on it

through effective methods of religion and education, which gave it a strongly western pattern of patriarchy (Tapales, 1992: 13).

As the Philippines marched on its quest for democratization, women have been part of the process. But since politics, public life, and state affairs have been perceived to be paradigmatically male and (more importantly so) run by men, women tended to be pushed out of this arena. Men come up with all sorts of 'justifications' that women have no place in politics – especially the kind of politics that depict '(…) state power as organized, formal political power, and conventional politics as limited to the formal processes and structures of winning and exercising state power' (Tancangco, 1990: 325). In this regard, the narrative of women's political participation and contribution to democracy should not be only a story of what happened in the formal echelons of power, in the formal practice of politics**.** For example, equal importance must be given to the figures of Gabriela Silang who took over the reigns of her revolutionary husband, Diego, Melchora Aquino who earned the title Mother of the Philippine revolution, Trinidad Tecson who was the prominent female figure at *Biak-na-Bato*, Gregoria de Jesus who was the spouse of the *Katipunan's supremo*, and Teresa Magbanua who came to be known as 'the Joan of Arc of the Visayas' (Maranan quoted in Tancangco, 1990: 326), and to all the un-named women revolutionaries who have struggled for independence. Women who have contributed to the struggle both as members of the revolutionary movement and as individuals assisting the revolutionaries should be given due recognition as facilitators for change. In this regard, women primarily from the *illustrado* or the middle class who engaged in socio-civic organizations like the 1893 *Logia de Adopcion* (Masonic Lodge of Filipino women), the 1899 *Associacion de Damas de la Cruz Roja* (Women's Red Cross Association) founded by the wife of General Emilio Aguinaldo, and the 1905 *Associasion Feminista Filipina*[2] (Feminist Association of the Philippines) founded by Concepcion Felix-Rodriguez that sought prison reforms for young women/girls should also be categorized as political involvement and participation.

In analyzing the activities of women, a limited notion of politics has to be expanded to capture women's political contribution, found to be at the periphery of the formal seats of state power, but very much part of its structure and dynamics (Tancangco, 1992: 61). This is to say that women's actions should be documented beyond the androcentric definition of political participation. The year 2005 marks the centennial of the women's movement in the Philippines, but the first organized women's political participation is the Suffragist Movement's campaign (1898–1937). This was in the context of formal politics that women came into the political front with their mobilizing to work for extending the

right to vote to women. The Suffragist Movement is seen as the first instance of women organizing politically. Though many, including women themselves, believed that 300,000 women saying 'yes' to the provision would be impossible to meet and also that the law would not materialize, the suffragettes' unwavering resolve launched an intensive campaign to win the ballot. Women came together to organize themselves for this task. As narrated by Tarrosa Subido:

> Weeks before plebiscite day, the Council[3] and provincial women's clubs sought new converts to the suffrage cause, by press, radio, posters, student rallies, house-to-house appeals, speaking tours, distribution of sample ballots and informative lectures (…) On plebiscite day, members of the Junior Federation of Women's Clubs did their baby-sitting for mothers who needed to go to vote; club women who can afford it held open house and served meals to out-of-town women voters; car owners loaned their cars to those who needed transportation. The net result of all these efforts: some 500,000 women registered during the two registration days, far exceeding the quota, and of this number 447,725 voted 'Yes' (1955: 33).

Because of the unprecedented organizing of women and the systematic attempts to popularize the struggle for women's right to vote, women's right of suffrage was finally legalized on September 17, 1937. Note that the actual law came four months after the plebiscite held on April 30, 1937 and that it came two years after the 1935 Philippine Constitution stipulated that woman could be granted the right of suffrage. Nonetheless, it came to be known that the Philippines was one of the first countries in Asia to grant women the right to vote. Indeed, this was a huge milestone for the women in the Philippines – not only because women were successful but also because this was the first political event that women voted as women.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PARTICIPATING IN FORMAL POLITICS/POWER: CONTESTING THE STATE

The narrative of women's experience of political participation in Philippine democracy is one colored by the many contestations of various women's groups with the running of state affairs and the formulation of policies that directly affect women. Although women's right to vote was one of the greater achievements of the women's movement, one must note that the women's movement itself was not a monolithic one. A key critique of the women's Suffragist Movement is the notion that it was a colonial construct embraced by middle and upper class educated women who fought for this right within the 'equality frame' of liberal

democratic demands – in the quest for 'equality with men', women must have everything that men have and the right to vote was a step in this direction. In comparing the Philippines and Sri Lanka, Kumari Jayawardena observes that the women:

> (…) did not move beyond the sphere of limited and selected reforms: equality for women within the legal process, the removal of obviously discriminatory practices, the right to vote, education and property, and the rights of women to enter professions and politics, etc. These were reforms which had little effect on the daily lives of the masses; neither did it address the basic question of women's subordination within the family and society (quoted in Tapales, 1992: 110–111).

The class element of the Suffragist Movement casts a shadow over those involved, for the very simple reason that they belonged to the upper echelons of society. It was felt that through the Suffragist Movement, the Filipina women (or so-called 'bourgeois' women) were transformed in the image and likeness of 'emancipated women of Western society'. The class element tainted the Suffragist Movement as a colonial construct and thereby alienated the majority of poor women in society.

The women of the elite class saw the electoral process as a pillar of democracy and thus became comfortable with the system. The significance of their contribution was great, but as a consolidated group they failed to see other substantive structural and institutional changes that needed to happen in order to authentically improve the conditions of women. This may have been the reason why the 1951 National Political Party of Women[4] was not as successful as it intended to be. In the pervading political landscape of that time, it was a pioneering and noble idea; but without an adequate integration of critical social and gender analysis within the political platform, it did not differentiate itself from existing political parties then.

There has been a proliferation of women's organizations in pre- and post-independence Philippines. Most, if not all, really helped women. But just as 'woman' as a category cannot be homogenized or standardized, so is true for these organizations. However, from the vantage point of radical or marxist feminism, women's organizations that do not go to the root of women's conditions, simply perpetuate the status quo. Without any ideological line or feminist critique, organizations will not go as far as challenging the state. It was to challenge the state that the modern women's movement emerged. Particularly, militancy with an ideological frame meant a more meaningful and substantive political participation

of women. Such was the case of women's groups that fought dictatorship during the Marcos regime:

> Activism during the First Quarter Storm as it came to be called in the universities were led by young intellectuals, fascinated with the Cultural Revolution in China and the heroism of the Vietnamese people. From among the myriad of activist groups that sprang during this period was the 'Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan' (Makibaka – Free Movement of New Women) (…) It would be the first time that a woman's organization openly subscribed to an ideological framework. Its inaugural activity was most fitting and had maximum impact – it picketed the annual Miss Philippines contest as a crass commercialization of sex and a debasement of the Filipina (Javate-De Dios, 1992: 146).

But the greatest factor that nearly defeated this critical effort was the very male-centric arrogance of the national democratic movement's failure to recognize women's concerns as part of the liberation struggle from imperialism, bureaucrat-capitalism, and feudalism. Just like any national liberation movement, women's issues were seen as too specific for the cause to be struggling for. In an interview[5] cited by former National Democratic Front (NDF) leader Satur Ocampo, a member of the MAKIBAKA was quoted as saying:

> During the early years of MAKIBAKA, our existence was widely questioned by comrades in the movement. Aside from asserting that our particular problems were only secondary to the movement's concerns, and that they were capable of carrying these issues without having to set-up a separate organization, they also labeled us as divisive 'Western' and petit bourgeois' (1993: 68).

There was tension between '(…) feminism and nationalism, the priority of national liberation down-played women's issues and prioritized issues of social injustice, dictatorship, class struggle, democracy, violence and revolution (…)' as if they were all not related to the conditions of women (Roces, 2000: 122). Nathan Ocampo himself acknowledges '(…) that while the revolutionary movement provides conditions for women's liberation, patriarchy is still pervasive in the revolutionary ranks (…) ergo, all revolutionaries are called upon to combat patriarchy within the movement' (1993: 68).

At any rate, whether women were confronted in various arenas – be it by elements of the state or by their own comrades – this does not erase the reality that women have fought for national liberation alongside men; women have been part of the armed movement and as such were subjected to gender-based violence more than their male comrades (i.e. rape as a form of torture). In the context of grave

human rights violations as well as deepening economic and social deprivation, several other women's groups, particularly those affiliated with the Church[6] such as the Association of Women in Theology (AWIT) and 'Kapisanan ng mga Madre sa Kamaynilaan' [Organization of Women in Manila] emerged to protest against the state. The challenge against the state became more pronounced with women's concerns of finding a voice in the media, and with this critical issue taken on by Women in Media Now (WOMEN). Women workers also banded together to use the power of trade unionism against exploitative capitalism and thus was created 'Samahan ng Kababaihang Manggagawa sa Pilipinas' [Organization of Philippine Women Workers] and 'Kilusang Manggagawang Kababaihan' [Movement of Women Workers]. On the other side of the fence came the exclusive grouping of women entrepreneurs, business executives, teachers and housewives to form the Alliance of Women for Action towards Reconciliation (AWARE) and sectoral as well as youth women established the 'Samahan ng Malayang Kababaihan' [Organization of Free Women]. It has been observed that the impetus for the increased growth and reach of the women's movement was the socio-political and economic crises experienced during the Marcos regime. These groups needed to be consolidated so as not to divide their strength. In 1984, the General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Equality, Leadership and Action (GABRIELA) was formed as an umbrella organization to unite all politically active women's groups and organizations '(…) regardless of ideological color into one big co-alition (…)' with a (short-term) goal of removing Marcos from power. Events and mobilizations leading to the 1986 People Power Revolution sa. women – organized or otherwise and for with ideological line they subscribed to – coming together to work for a common end. When the time arrived for the movement to reclaim Philippine democracy from the dictator and to succeed, a number of women became part of the formal institutions of politics, while most continued contesting the state from outside the state structures.

With respect to a critical engagement with the state, it has been observed that on the average it takes about six to eight years to pass a law in the Philippines. Politicking, bureaucratic and administrative work inefficiency (or the guise of being 'overworked') and bumping off bills to an unprioritized oblivion may account for the slow pace of legislation. This is the main reason why women's groups have remained vigilant in their engagements with the state – through practical experiences, continuous lobbying, protesting, contesting, and negotiating, all in aid of the passage of law. The much delayed Anti-Rape Law (RA 8353) was a product of seven years of legislative work thanks to the help of women's organizations. The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003 (RA 9208)

was a product of five years work and the Anti-Violence Against Women and the Children Law of 2004 (RA 9262) was lobbied for in Congress soon after the first EDSA People Power convened. In this regard, it cannot be denied that the women's movement has introduced gender issues and awareness to Philippine society, as well as gender advocacy and gender analysis in policy making.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PARTICIPATING IN FORMAL POLITICS/POWER: NEGOTIATING WITH AND NAVIGATING THROUGH THE STATE

In theory, the right to stand for elections or to become a candidate and to get elected is based on the right to vote. The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) has projected that women's political participation and representation are necessary for the strengthening of democracy while Part II, Article 7 of the Convention Against the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has declared that 'State parties shall take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and in particular, shall ensure on equal terms with men, the right:

1. To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;

2. To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;

3. To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with public and political life of the country'.

Despite these international conventions around the world, '(…) the fundamental problem facing the process of democratisation is the continued lack of gender equality in political leadership' (Norris and Inglehart, 2000: 1). Obstacles to the full and equal participation of women in politics remain.

While examining women's political participation in South Asia, Farah Kabir identifies women's involvement in mass mobilization and their '(…) supportive role in enabling male leadership in the forefront of political struggles (…)' as part of the negotiation of political spaces created for women by the state (2003: 2). She further continues:

> Even when women do become part of the formal political process as members of elite political groups, they are usually assigned to soft portfolios 'appropriate' for women's concerns. The many barriers to political participation that South Asian women face exist at different levels, both formal and informal, and they arise from socio-cultural values and practices that are firmly entrenched in systems and structures in society (Kabir, 2003: 2).

In the Philippines, electoral politics is seen as the primary mode for political participation. Drawing from the provisions stipulated in the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Marlea Muñez summarizes the key ideas of the Philippine electoral system:

- The President and the Vice President are elected nationally for a six-year term with no re-election allowed.

- The Philippine Congress is bicameral, with a lower house of at least 200 representatives elected in single-member district constituencies for 3 years, plus "Party List" representatives that address "sectoral" or specific concerns. Representatives are limited to three terms. The Senate has 24 members elected for a six-year term nationally, with half of the members elected every 3 years. Senators are limited to two terms.

- Local government officials (governors, provincial councils, municipal and city mayors, municipal and city councils) are elected for a three-year term, with a three-term limit or a maximum of nine years service.

- Senators, representatives and local government officials are elected in mid-term elections. During presidential election years, they may also be elected.

- Those with the most number of votes are declared winners.

- The Commission on Elections (COMELEC), a constitutionally mandated, independent body, supervises the elections. A Political Party that would join the electoral process is required to register with the COMELEC with a verified petition that presents the party's organization through its constitution, by-laws, platform, and other information. Each party is required to have chapters in the majority of the regions and provinces, down to towns and barangays (2004: 132).

Ever since women won the right to vote and began exercising it in the elections to follow, voter turnout among women has been slightly higher (by 0.77 per cent) than men as Figure 9.1 (p. 224) shows.

Out of 26 election years, a total of 20 elections showed more women voting than men. The election years where men voters outnumbered the women were in 1947, 1949, 1959, 1961, 1965 and 1970.[7] Nonetheless, the general trend is that there are more women voters than men. Hypothetically, the continuity of such a trend may see the point where a critical mass of women voters may find the courage to change the leadership in government through electoral politics. As Luzviminda Tancangco assumes, '(…) constituting almost half of the total electorate, sheer number can be power if women so desire' (1990: 340). Never mind if they voted dictated to by the man of the house; the mere exercise of the right to vote may transform into authentic empowerment of women as direct sources of changes in the polity.

Figure 9.1: Trending of Filipino voters' turnout rates by sex (1947–2001)
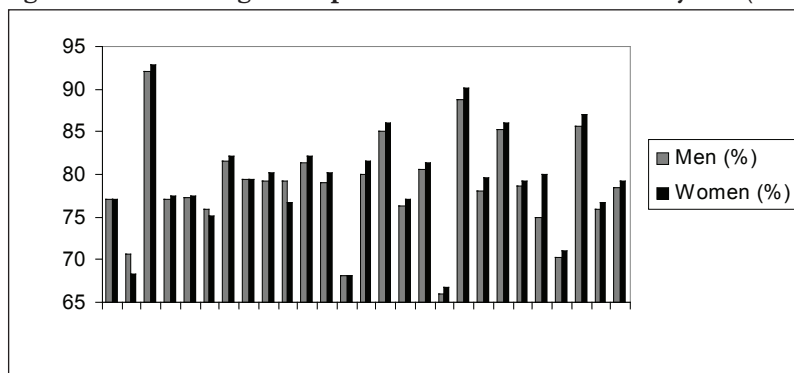
Source: COMELEC, Official Website of the Commission on Elections, Republic of the Philippines.

But there is a long way to go because there is no authentic 'women's vote' just yet. For example, election data from 1946 to 1987 (Table 9.1) show that despite 11 election years having more women voters, women being elected into public office was trivial – a total of 63 out of 1284 positions to be filled or 4.98 per cent.

Thus, it can be inferred that the higher voter turnout of women is not really a cause for celebration, for the simple reason that women do not differ in their voting patterns from men. More women vote because they perceive that this may be their only way to meaningfully participate in politics; but it does not translate into having a different voting preference from men. A woman will not generally vote for another woman because of her gendered socialization that continues to echo in her psyche.

> The non-existence of a solid women's vote can be traced to our cultural make-up. Filipinos generally believe that men are superior to women especially in the field of politics. It is also generally believed that public life is a man's domain and familial and private concerns are the woman's (Tancangco, 1990: 342).

In explaining the cultural dimension of Filipino women's political behavior, Proserpina Tapales cites a 1983 study on Filipino women's values conducted by the University of the Philippines College of Education and the National Commission on Women where the Filipino women's political values are listed as:

1. Filipino women are politically aware and knowledgeable.
2. However, they refrain from participating in political discussions; do not have direct contact with government leaders; and are not members of political organizations.

Table 9.1: Number of women in the Philippine senate and house of representatives, 1946–1987

Election Year	Position	Number of Women Elected	Number of Positions to be Filled
1946	Congresswoman	1	8
1947	Senator	1	8
1949	Congresswoman	1	100
1953	Congresswoman	1	102
1955	Senator	1	8
1957	Congresswoman	1	102
1961	Senator	1	8
	Congresswoman	2	104
1963	Senator	1	8
1965	Senator	1	8
	Congresswoman	6	104
1967	Senator	2	8
1967	Senator	0	8
	Congresswoman	3	109
1971	Senator	1	8
1978	IBP Member	9	165
1984	Mambabatas Pambansa	10	181
1987	Senator	2	23
TOTAL		63	1284

Source: Luzviminda Tancangco, 'Voters, Candidates and Organizers: Women and Politics in Contemporary Philippines' in *Filipino Women and Public Policy* (1992), ed. Proserpina D. Tapales, Manila: Kalikasan Press, p. 101

3. Moreover, their political activity is voting in elections and attending rallies.

4. They regard government positions as basically for men, preferring to engage in economic activities. All other things being equal, they would rather vote for a man than for a woman (1992: 112).

In the same vein, Cortes observes that '(…) because of deeply-rooted biases, male and female voters have a prejudicial outlook against female candidates such that between a man and a woman candidate with equal qualifications, they exhibit an irrational preference for the former' (1983: 9). It is for this reason that the greater number of women voters additionally has not led to more women in public office. Despite the experience of several political upheavals and opportunities for social changes after the post-Marcos years, both female and male voters remain biased against women candidates. For example, as the data from 1987, 1992, 1998,

2001, and 2004 national/local elections (Tables 9.2, 9.3 and Figure 9.2) suggest, women voted into public office account for a startlingly low percentage.

Table 9.2: Women elected to public office: executive branch: national

|	1987–1992		1992–1998		1998–2004		2004–2010	
	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man
President	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
Vice President	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0

Sources: COMELEC, Official Website of the Commission on Elections, Republic of the Philippines

Table 9.3: Women elected to public office: legislative branch: national

	8th Congress 1987–1992		9th Congress 1992–1995		10th Congress 1995–1998		11th Congress 1998–2001		12th Congress 2001–2004		13th Congress 2004–2007	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
Senators	2	22	4	20	4	20	4	20	3	19	4	19
Representatives	19	195	23	192	23	192	27	193	36	175	37	200
TOTAL	21	217	27	212	27	212	31	213	39	194	41	219
%	9%	91%	11%	89%	11%	89%	13%	87%	17%	83%	16%	84%

Sources: COMELEC, Official Website of the Commission on Elections, Republic of the Philippines

Figure 9.2 Trending of women elected to public office: bicameral legislature
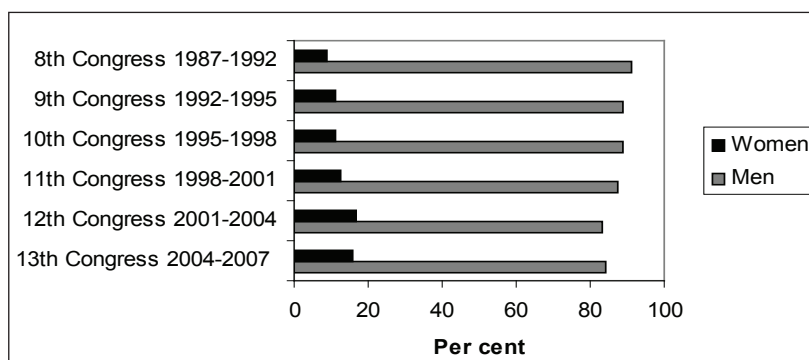
Table 9.4: Women elected to public office: executive and legislative positions at the local government levels

EXECUTIVE	Governor	Vice Governor	Mayor	Vice Mayor	Total
8th Congress 1987–1992					
Women	4	8	118	96	226 (7%)
Men	69	66	1,460	1,495	3,090 (93%)
9th Congress 1992–1998					
Women	5	–	101	–	106 (6%)
Men	68	–	1,459	–	1,527 (94%)
10th Congress 1995–1998					
Women	9	13	129	132	283 (8%)
Men	67	89	1,469	1,465	3,090 (92%)
11th Congress 1998–2001					
Women	13	9	233	179	434 (13%)
Men	62	69	1,374	1,428	2,933 (87%)
12th Congress 2001–2004					
Women	15	10	241	192	458 (14%)
Men	59	67	1,394	1,356	2,876 (86%)
13th Congress 2004–2007					
Women	15	6	293	232	546 (16%)
Men	64	73	1,366	1,377	2,880 (84%)

LEGISLATIVE	Provincial Board	City/Municipal council	TOTAL	TOTAL executive and legislative
8th Congress 1987–1992				
Women	62	1,305	1,367 (10%)	1,593 (10%)
Men	1305	11,101	11,665 (90%)	14,755 (90%)
9th Congress 1992–1998				
Women	68	1644	1712 (12%)	1,818 (12%)
Men	579	11,408	11,987 (88%)	13,514 (88%)
10th Congress 1995–1998				
Women	76	1,840	1916 (14%)	2,199 (13%)
Men	601	11,423	12,024 (86%)	15,114 (87%)

11th Congress 1998–2001				
Women	93	2,141	2,234 (17%)	2,668 (16%)
Men	629	10,570	11,199 (83%)	14,132 (84%)
12th Congress 2001–2004				
Women	120	2,198	2,318 (17%)	2,776 (17%)
Men	607	10,457	11064 (83%)	13,940 (83%)
13th Congress 2004–2007				
Women	102	1,,718	1,820 (17%)	2,366 (17%)
Men	514	8,283	8,797 (83%)	11,677 (83%)

Sources: CLD International – Center for Legislative Development International. Online resource. COMELEC, Official Website of the Commission on Elections, Republic of the Philippines. Online resource.

The same trend is manifested at the local government level from 1987 to 2004. Though higher percentages are posted for women elected into positions compared to the national level, the data still depict a great gap between women and men (Table 9.4 and Figure 9.3).

Figure 9.3: Trending women elected to public office: executive and legislative positions at the local government levels
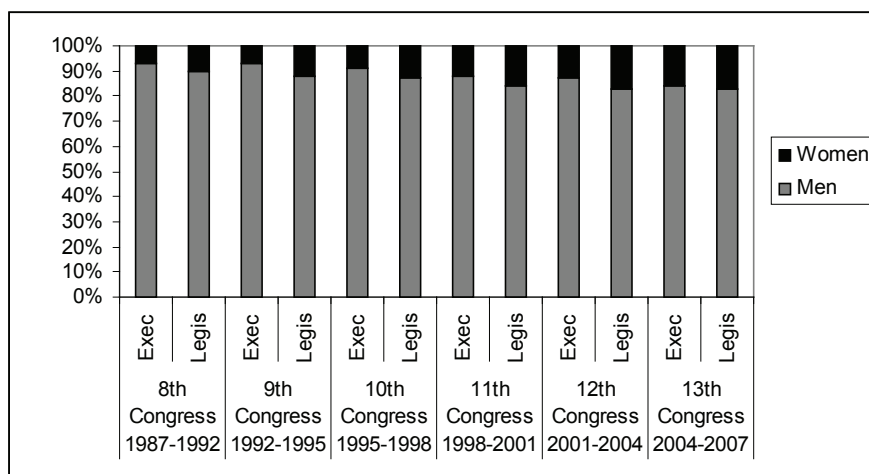
Inferring from the data during the post-Marcos years, it is quite evident that more women are entering politics through the electoral contest (Figure 9.4). However, the general trend of more women going out to vote does not manifest itself in putting more women in public office. In fact, there is a possibility that

there is no gendered dimension in the voting preference of women – thus, there is no 'women's vote' to speak of at all. In other words, the additional number of women elected in public office is not significant enough to deduce that there is a trend towards either the feminization of political leadership or an equalization of political representation. These women come to occupy elective positions not by virtue of the 'myth' of the 'women's vote' but through other factors such as political party machinery, patronage politics, familial and kinship ties and an elitist type of democracy.

Given this information, it is quite logical to presume that despite the country's commitment to improving the status of women, significant changes for broader structural/institutional transformations will be very difficult to attain. With men dominating these positions, can we confidently believe that men are able or even willing to represent women? And even for the women who are elected themselves – are they willing to categorically state that will represent women's issues? For both men and women candidates, such acts and statements would lead to political suicide. In the case of women candidates, very few of them will seek political office with the intention of representing women's interests per se. Female candidates tend not to initiate discussions on women's issues so as not to be branded as having a narrow intent. Furthermore, women who eventually are placed in office do not automatically take on women's concerns because they themselves have been catapulted to power by patriarchal politics. In addition, they have also been socialized in the system of patriarchy and thus will also have a male mind-set. Dr. Farzana Bahari reflects:

> It can be said that women's presence in formal politics will not bring a qualitative change by putting social issues on the national agenda. It can be argued that women, because of their gender alone will not place gender issues on the national agenda (…) women in the upper echelons of politics are more likely to become an elite group among women and develop their own vested interest (as quoted by Karam, 1998: 10).

If mere numbers alone were enough to ensure the improvement of women's lives, then the Philippines would be in relatively good shape. Although proceeding in small steps in terms of increasing the number of women in public office, this is nevertheless a political opening that still must be recognized. However, it is also very important to note that if we are concerned with deepening women's participation in politics, then '(…) one has to look not only at the quantitative increase in women power-holders but its impact on the qualitative transformation of women's lives' (Reyes, 1991: 1). Thus, the dual approach consists of broadening

the space for political participation as well as making it work for the women in the general populace.

Figure 9.4: Trending of women elected in public office: executive and legislative branches: national and local elections, 1987–2004
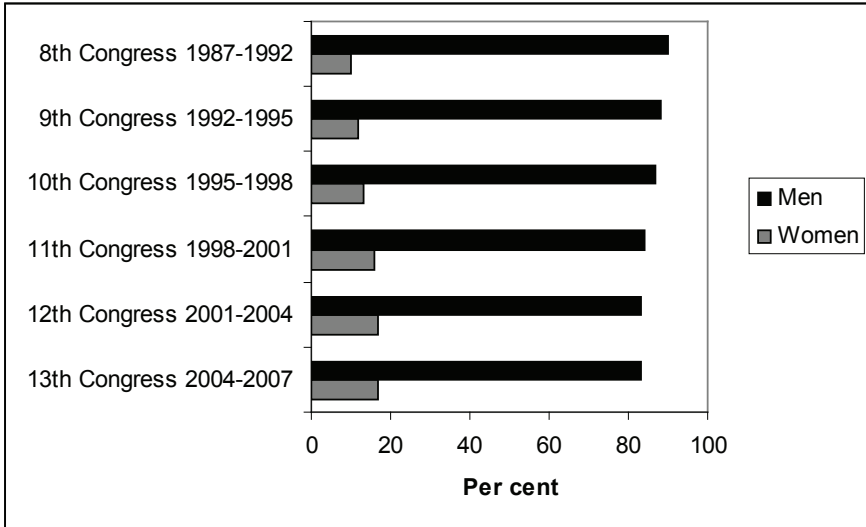
THE OTHER SIDE OF FORMAL POLITICS: THE CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND ITS CONVERGENCE WITH MAINSTREAM POLITICS

In the domain of formal politics, the mainstream view of political participation is that which involves taking part in electoral exercises (e.g. voting or running for public office) as well as being part of organized interest group actions (e.g. rallies, demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, lobbying or running electoral campaigns). Hague and Harrop consider both modes as within the framework of political participation – where orthodox political participation is largely concentrated on the electoral exercise while the unorthodox mode is actions '(…) built on disenfranchisement within the existing political structures' (1987: 90). Within the framework of the democracy project in the Philippines, women have been involved in politics. The method or strategy for engaging the state may vary but this does not diminish the fact of their significance in Philippine political history. In discussing organized women's groups participating in the electoral contest, Josefa Francisco distinguishes women's groups based on their orientation:

1. *Socio-civic oriented women's organizations* are those that are (a) generally less critical of the status quo; (b) tending towards the prioritization of the elimination of discrimination against women in politics; (c) less involved in the community organizing of grassroots-women's specific political or economic objectives; and (d) less concerned with the feminist line.

2. *Activist oriented women's groups* are those that (a) call for reforming the existing political and economic system; (b) address equality issues in connection with the need for broader social equity; (c) engage themselves with grassroots organizing; and (d) are conscious of their feminist identity (1998: 5).

The women's movements in the Philippines converge at the idea of the shared experience of women's disempowerment but their framework for action diverges in terms of priority – where on the one hand priorities are inclined towards a political empowerment agenda (socio-civic) and on the other hand energies are concentrated on economic empowerment (activist). In discussing organized women's groups as change agents, Socorro Reyes categorized them into groups by:

- *sector* or women's organizations cutting across various sectors in the country such as the rural peasantry, urban factory workers, the studentry, the urban poor, church workers and university-based intellectuals;

- *issue* or groups differentiated by specific issues they carry such as reproductive health, women's rights, non-discrimination of women, protection of the welfare of prostitute women, gender education and counselling for women victimized in domestic violence;

- *ideology* or having varying shades of political line from conservatism to radicalism; and as

- *research/resource organizations* providing valuable information for advocacy (1992: 8).

Interestingly, these women's organizations converge within the formal structures of the polity and serve as a vehicle for mitigating the inefficient performance of legislators on women's concerns. These elected women officials have not fully realized the intent of women's organizations. As a result, laws and policies on women have been quite difficult to come by. In a Congress dominated by men, it is obvious that it will not serve the interest of women; and in a Congress where the elected women think like men, we find a hopeless scenario for improving women's conditions. A focus on the legislators themselves reflects the sorry state of women placed in critical decision and law-making positions because they have not made an issue of women's concerns. As Table 9.5 shows, women's concerns do not even comprise a significant percentage of bills filed in Congress.

Table 9.5: Data on Women-Related Bills Filed in the Bicameral Legislature: Comparison of the 11ᵗʰ and 12ᵗʰ Congresses.

	11ᵗʰ Congress[8]	12ᵗʰ Congress[9]
Senate	101 of 1,627 (6.2%)	197 of 2,957 (6.7%)
House of Representatives	108 of 7,706 (1.4%)	168 of 7,389 (2.3%)
TOTAL	209 (2.2%)	365 (3.5%)

Sources: CLD International – Center for Legislative Development, 1999 Occasional Paper, online resource. 2004 Legislative Women's Watch.

In the 11ᵗʰ Congress, out of 9,333 bills filed, only 209 or 2.2 per cent pertain to women's concerns. The percentage went up by 1.3 per cent with 365 pro-women bills filed out of 10,346 in the 12ᵗʰ Congress. With such a low number of proposed legislations contrasted with a slow increase of women legislators, in can be inferred that there is no direct correlation between the two – more women does not translate into more laws for women. In fact, the legislative performance of law-makers is locked within the framework of their party affiliation. This is to say that the force behind the proposal and passage into law of women-related bills is the commitment and vigilance of women's organizations. Women legislators themselves are not keenly sensitive to women and gender issues and thus women being in power does not necessarily mean the empowerment of women (CLD Fact Sheet, 2000: 1).

> Based on the experience of network organizations such as 'Sama-samang Inisyatiba ng Kababaihan Para sa Pagbabago ng Batas at Lipunan' (Collective Initiative of Women for Transformation of Laws and Society) and AMEND (Alliance of Migrant Workers and Advocates to amend RA 8042), senators are inclined to take their parties' stance on issues which are usually discussed in caucuses outside the formal senate sessions (Muñez, 2004: 137).

In other words, women's organizations lobby and negotiate with women legislators or male legislators sensitive to gender concerns. This is an acceptable way of ensuring that the interest for pro-women legislations is sustained within the halls of congress. Though the engagement is quite cautious because of possible politicking, women's organizations along with their sponsors in congress were able to reflect the importance of women's concerns. Table 9.6 shows the typology of women's issues as well as the number of bills filed within each category.

In all likelihood, these bills were filed as a matter of responding to the country's commitment to both CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). However, judging from the composition of the legislative branch, it was not inevitable for the legislators to pick up the struggle for improving the status of Filipino women.

It is even safe to assume that the efforts came from the lobbying, monitoring and strategizing of women's groups.

Table 9.6 Categories of women-related bills filed in the bicameral legislature: summary between the 11th and 12th Congresses

|	11th Congress	12th Congress
Education/Training	3	20
Girl-Child	47	55
Health	22	28
Human Rights	26	70
Institutional Mechanisms	12	23
Media	9	10
Violence Against Women	54	99
Women in Armed Conflict	–	–
Women in Poverty/Economy/Work	30	49
Women in Power and Decision-Making	6	11
TOTAL	209	365

Sources: Center for Legislative Development (CLD) 1999 Occasional Paper and 2004 Legislative Women's Watch

Prior to CEDAW and BPFA, a very small number of women-related laws were drafted during the Commonwealth period and the post-World War II years such as 'An Act to Amend Section 431 of the Administrative Code, by Granting the Right of Suffrage to Women and Making them Eligible to All Public Offices, and for Other Purposes' (1933), 'An Act Providing the Manner in which the Option to Elect Philippine Citizenship Shall be Declared by a Person whose Mother is a Filipino Citizen' (1941), 'An Act to Grant Maternity Leave to Married Women who are in the Service of the Government or of any of its Instrumentalities' (1941), 'The Revised Election Code' (1947), 'An Act Granting Maternity Leave to Women in Government under Temporary Appointments who have Rendered Two Years of Service, by Amending Commonwealth Act Numbered 647 as Amended' (1956), 'An Act to Establish in the Department of Labor a Bureau to be Known as Women and Minors Bureau' (1960), and the 'Law on Registry of Civil Status' (1963). During the administration of the Marcos government, the following pro-women laws were passed: 'Amending Further certain Sections of R.A. Numbered 679 as Amended, Commonly Known as the Women and Child Labor Law' (1973), 'Further Amending Republic Act Number 1161 Otherwise Known as Social Security Law' (1977 and again in 1979), 'An Act Further Amending Numbered R.A. 679, as Amended by R.A. Numbered 1131' (1971). It was also during this period that the government agency for the advancement of women was established:

The National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) was established on January 7, 1975 through Presidential Decree 633, as an advisory body to the President and the Cabinet on policies and programs for the advancement of women. It is mandated "to review, evaluate, and recommend measures, including priorities to ensure the full integration of women for economic, social and cultural development at national, regional and international levels, and to ensure further equality between women and men (NCRFW – National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women. Philippine Machinery for the Advancement of Women. Info Resource – Laws on Women. Online Resource).

Despite the marked increase, it is still unfortunate that within the span of 17 years only 55 women-related laws were enacted. Of this number, the 8th Congress passed the most laws followed by the 9th Congress; a downward trend was reflected in the 10th and 11th Congresses and it only picked up (albeit in a small scale) during the 12th Congress (Table 9.7, p. 235). Furthermore, most of the laws were in the category of women in poverty/economy/work, followed by health and (women's) human rights, then violence against women, and finally, women in power/decision-making, institutional mechanisms, the girl-child and media. Interestingly, these laws were not the children of women legislators. While looking into the 8th Congress, Soccoro Reyes notes the irony that '(…) men not women, took the initiative in the introduction of legislation on child care, domestic violence, mail order brides, divorce, birth control, amendment of the Family Code to protect women's health and guarantee their property rights, amendment of the Penal Code to ensure equality between women and men in the dissolution of marriage, etc' (1991: 2).

Figure 9.5: Women in national legislature vis-á-vis pro-women laws: from the 8th to the 12th Congresses
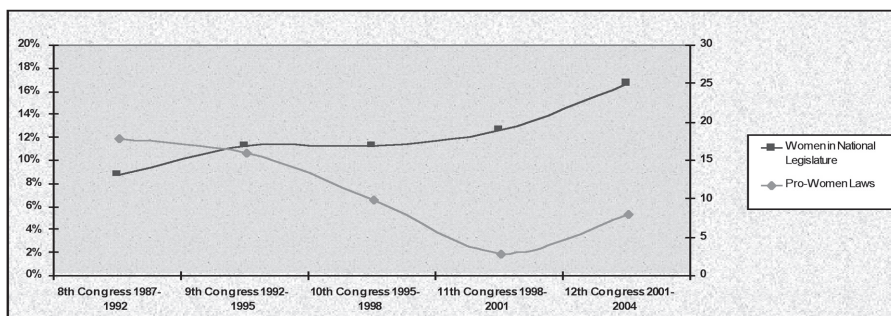
In comparing the trend of an increasing number of women in the national legislature side by side with the number of women-related laws passed, it

Table 9.7: Tabulation of women-related legislations passed into law: from the 8th to the 12th Congresses: by categories

Categories	8th Congress 1987–92	9th Congress 1992–95	10th Congress 1995–98	11th Congress 1998–2001	12th Congress 2001–04	Total per Category
Education/ Training	2	2	–	–	–	4
Girl-child	–	1	–	–	1	2
Health	3	5	–	–	1	9
Human rights	2	–	2	2	3	9
Institutional mechanisms	2	–	–	–	–	2
Media	–	–	2	–	–	2
Violence against women	2	2	2	1	1	8
Women in armed conflict	–	–	–	–	–	–
Women in poverty/ economy/ work	6	5	4	–	1	16
Women in power and decision-making	1	1	–	–	1	3
TOTAL/ CONGRESS	18	16	10	3	8	55

Sources: http://www.election2004.ph/main/candidates.php, NSCB – National Statistical Coordination Board. Philippines policy making and coordinating body on statistical matters. Online resource. NCRFW – National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women. Philippine Machinery for the Advancement of Women. Info Resource – Laws on Women. Online resource.

is important to note that despite the relative increase in women in power no substantive increase was seen in policy making. As Figure 9.5 illustrates, there was even a decline in enacting pro-women laws when there was a relative increase in women legislators. although by the 12th Congress the trend was mitigated possibly because of women's groups learning to negotiate the potential of the party list system.

But before moving on with the discussion on how the party list mechanism has assisted in the critical engagement of women's groups, some key ideas concerning the Executive Branch must be looked at. The Philippines, like most presidential forms of government, has a President who approves the law passed

in the legislative branch.[1.] Drawing on Table 9.7, it is interesting to point out that the term of Fidel Ramos (1992–1998) saw the most number of pro-women laws enacted, with a major concentration on women in development and economic empowerment. Credit must also be given to the Ramos presidency for Executive Order (EO) 273 and the adoption of the Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development (PPGD) from 1995 to 2025. According to Muñez:

> This is the successor of the Philippine Development Plan for Women (PDPW) with some instructional content. Aside from implementing the PPGD, the government was tasked to institutionalize Gender and Development (GAD) programs. Authority, such as the creation of interagency committees, issuance of orders, circulars, or guidelines was vested in the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) (2004: 134).

Ramos can likewise be credited for many gender-responsive executive orders and proclamations such as:

- E.O. 329 or 'Designating the National Council of Women in the Philippines (NCWP) as One of the Leading Monitoring Arm of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) for the Effective Implementation of the Global Platform for Action and the Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development in the NGO and Private Sector';
- E.O. 368 or 'Amending E.O. 356 Dated 12 August 1996 which Provides for the Implementing Guidelines on the Institutional Arrangements to Fast Track SRA Localization to Include the National Council on the Role of Filipino Women in the Membership of the Social Reform Council';
- Proclamation No. 731 or 'Declaring the Second Week of February of Every Year as National Awareness Week for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation';
- Proclamation No. 759 or 'Declaring the Fourth Week of March 1996 as protection and Gender-Fair Treatment of the Girl-Child Week'; and
- Proclamation No. 1105 or 'Declaring October 15, 1997 and of Every Year Thereafter as National Rural Women's Day' (NCRFW – National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women. Philippine Machinery for the Advancement of Women. Info Resource – Laws on Women. Online resource).

Corazon Aquino comes in second for the enactment of women-related laws. Her term also saw the approval and adoption of the Philippine Development Plan for Women for 1992 (Executive Order 348), which explains why most of the pro-women laws were along the lines of economic empowerment. Joseph Estrada's term, cut short by three years because of being ousted from office, saw the enactment of only one pro-women law (i.e. Rape Victim Assistance

and Protection Act). Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo took over from Estrada and was elected for a full term of the presidency in May 2004. From 2001 to 2004, only eight pro-women laws were enacted; these laws materialized '(…) not because she pushed for their passage, but because of the efforts of advocates from government and the NGOs' (Muñez, 2004: 135).

In the context of a functioning democracy, the quality of legislation '(…) is the hallmark of a people's sense of justice; in many instances, it has proven to be the touchstone by which inequalities in society are addressed and redressed' (Santos, Conda and Natividad, 1999: 1). In working towards the goal of increasing the laws enacted for the benefit of women, women's organizations should be engaged in multi-dimensional engagements – on the one hand, utilizing and supporting the electoral process in order to place 'pro-women minded' women in office and committing to sustain their energy in negotiating with other powers in congress; and on the other hand, training, educating, organizing and mobilizing other women for a more meaningful participation in politics. In other words, there is a need to advance an alternative paradigm of politics.

An opportunity for engendering alternative politics arose through the enactment of the Party List System Law (RA 7941). As per definition, '(…) a party list system is a mechanism of proportional representation in the election of representatives to the House of Representatives from national, regional and sectoral parties or organizations or coalitions thereof registered with the COMELEC' (R.A. 7941). The law stipulates that 20 per cent of the 250 seats in the House of Representatives will be allotted to 'small' political parties and sectoral groups. Party-list groups have to get at least two per cent of the total votes cast for party-lists to obtain a Congressional seat.

Drawing from the provisions of R.A. 7941 and the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Adriano Fermin lists the salient features of the party list system as:

- *Twenty per cent allocation.* The party list representatives shall constitute 20 per cent of the total number of representatives including those under the party list.

- *Two per cent threshold.* For a party or organization to be entitled to one seat, it must obtain at least two per cent of the total votes for the party list system.

- *Three-seat limit.* Section 11 of RA 7941 specifies that a qualified party would be entitled to a maximum of three seats.

- *Proportional representation.* The additional seats that the party is entitled to is computed in proportion to its total number of votes (Fermin, Adriano (2001) 'Prospects and Scenarios for the Party List System in the Philippines').

When it was enacted in 1995, positive reactions toward it revolved around its intent of ensuring that '(…) legitimate representatives of small parties and sectoral groups would have some voice in the policy-making process that is dominated by traditional politicians' (Calimoso quoted in Francisco, 1998: 1). The law's main aim is to bring into the fore and mainstream the otherwise marginalized peoples of Philippine society.

> A party-list system can help create a healthy democracy, providing a citizens' voice in Congress and in local government. The Philippine party-list system aims to increase the representation, particularly of 'marginalized and underrepresented' sectors and enhance transparency and accountability, leading to more efficient government. Political parties are strengthened, encouraging program and platform-based politics instead of weak affiliations between opportunists. This challenges moneyed and patronage politics that have bred corruption and inefficiency, hindering the country's development (KASAMA, the Quarterly Newsletter of SPAN – Solidarity Philippines Australia Network).

Twelve politically excluded groups were identified as benefiting from this law: urban poor, laborers, peasants, fisherfolk, war veterans, cultural minorities, youth, overseas contract workers, professionals, elderly, handicapped, and women. The first party list elections were held in May 1998, synchronized with the national/local elections, the second in 2001 and the most recent in May 2004.

According to the Center of Legislative Development (CLD), women's participation in the party list elections was (a) an opportunity for women to transform traditional male-oriented ways of party organizing, electoral campaigning and overall strategizing, and (b) a way for social activists and feminists to act on a massive education and popularization of women's issues. Though the political space was indeed opened for most marginalized groups in Philippine society, women and feminists groups were pushed to engage in a critical discourse of coming to terms whether 'women' should be defined as a separate sector or a category that is integral to all mass sectors. The conceptual debate led women's groups to reflect on the implications of varying definitions. For the socio-civic oriented women's groups, women comprise a political sector that is under-represented in Congress and does not have a voice in politics; the distinctiveness of women as a sector is based on the specificity of their problems and status in society; while for the activist oriented women's organizations, '(…) women cut across sectors and classes' (Francisco, 1998: 13). But rather than suffer an opportunity loss, divergence of views converged with a recognition that defining women as a sector (as defined by the party list law) serves as a tactical mechanism to enter formal political structures.

In 1998, a total of six groups were accredited to run under the women sector and these were: Woman Power, Abanse Pinay! (Advance Filipinas!), Ang Bagong Pilipina (The New Filipina), Babayi (Women), National Council of Women in the Philippines, and Gloria's League of Women (GLOW).[1.] Of the total of 123 accredited groups that ran in the party list elections, only Abanse Pinay! was the only women's party that was able to garner the required percentage vote to be allotted a seat in Congress. In retrospect, Agustin Martin Rodriguez and Djorina Velasco observe that rather than consolidate a women's vote in the first party list elections, '(…) many women voters dispersed their votes among other party-list sectoral and multi-sectoral groups that claimed to also bear women's issues' (1998: 21). This is not surprising particularly because of the tendency of voters to vote based on parameters other than gender. Though Abanse Pinay! was able to break into formal politics, the efforts of women's groups that ran for the party list election did not capture the political imagination of women voters. As a result, by the 2001 national elections, women's political parties were not able to gain ground. The women who actually came to sit in Congress in 2001 were from other multi-sectoral groups (such as Akbayan or the Citizen's Action Party and Bayan Muna or Country First) and not from a women's political party.

In the May 2004 elections, about sixty-six party list groups joined the electoral contest. Only two of these groups ran under the banner of women's concerns: Gabriela Women's Party and Abanse Pinay. On June 2nd, fifteen party list groups were proclaimed by the Commission on Elections: among them were Bayan Muna, APEC, and Akbayan with three seats each; Buhay and Anakpawis with two seats each; and finally, CIBAC, Gabriela Women's Party, Partido Manggagawa, Butil, AVE, ALAGAD, Veterans' Party, Coop-NATCO, Anak Mindanao, and Anwaray with one seat each. Gabriela ranked 7th in the overall rating with 464,586 or 3.6518 per cent of the total votes garnered. Abanse Pinay, on the other hand, ranked 33 with 115,855 or 0.9107 per cent of the votes.

At this point it is important to recognize that women's organizations were experimenting with ways to navigate through electoral politics. From their experience in the 1998 and 2001 elections, women's groups were now able to strategize their way to obtaining a seat in Congress – through multi-sectoral parties which are actually a kind of umbrella organization for various groups or a type of broad coalition of interest groups. Much like the experiences of women in the leftist/anti-dictatorship movement in the 1970s, they found themselves bargaining for a space within their own organization. The realization came that it is very difficult to run under the banner of a woman's political party; the better option is to join a broader alliance that also believes in the upliftment of

the status of women. Two cases in point are Etta Rosales, a three-term party-list representative from Akbayan; and Liza Maza, secretary general of Gabriela, who ran and won under Bayan Muna in 1998 and 2001 but returned in 2004 to consolidate Gabriela as a political party. Both Rosales and Maza have been active in filing for pro-women bills for the whole duration of their terms in Congress. Among other things, Rosales has been lauded for introducing House Bill 5708 or the 'Gender Balance in Political Participation and Representation Act'; interestingly, her party list organization, Akbayan, has been known to operationalize gender balance within the organization with thirty per cent of all leadership positions reserved for women. Liza Maza has been very prominent in flagging women's issues as a party list representative of Bayan Muna. She continues to do so now in the 13th Congress under Gabriela – to date, of the total 38 bills and resolutions filed on women's issues, Maza takes credit for filing 15.

To summarize, rather than consolidating the women's vote towards electing a female party list representative, votes were split among the several women's groups that were divided between women representing other women's socio-civic interests and women representing a more activist or militant stance. Likewise, it can be inferred the three party-list elections that women's groups were not spared from the practices that party politics sees as staple, hence party competition and conflict within the parties thwarted the efforts of the women that could have otherwise been an electoral force to be reckoned with.

It has been over sixty years since women were granted the right to vote, about 58 years since the first woman was elected to the Senate, and 18 years since the Philippines reclaimed democracy from an authoritarian regime. Within this period, most of the headway that came in legislating for pro-women laws came from the unwavering and tireless efforts of women's organizations. Ideas, frameworks and strategies for social reforms come from them. The formal structures of society are being utilized as just one strategy for effecting social changes. Working for a gender-balance in the country's political offices is no longer seen as an end-all or be-all of things. Women's organizations have realized that putting more women in office has not translated into more empowerment for the rest of Filipino womankind and thus they must simultaneously engage the state and other organized groups to negotiate within the democratic terrain.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICIZING THE INFORMAL ARENA OF POWER: USING WOMEN'S 'TRADITIONAL' ROLE EN ROUTE TO POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

In the Philippines, women's capitalization of their traditional role as wife or daughter en route to formal political power has been a phenomenon applicable only to the political elite within the dynamics of familial politics:

> Unofficial power has been the 'field of power' that so far has proved to have given women maximum empowerment in the Filipino cultural context. In this realm women's activities in their role as wives, sisters, daughters, mothers and mistresses of male politicians provided the power base from which to exercise power and practice kinship politics (…) kinship politics dictates that women function as a support system for the male politician (Roces, 2000: 29).

As wives of politicians, women engage in activities that their husbands would rather avoid – ceremonial ribbon-cutting, fund-raising, charity work, or dispensation of funds to aid their constituencies in times of great necessity (i.e. hospitalisation, burial of kin, etc.) – but are nonetheless important, especially in projecting the image of a 'caring' leader through the actions of his wife. Patronage is thus fostered and measured when it is recognized by the people that their leader has taken 'good care' of them (Filipinos refer to this as 'utang na loob' or debt of gratitude) and in return they will pledge that they will vote for him again. Come election time, the wife's presence on the campaign trail gives the male candidate a semblance of integrity and even a shadow of morality for it is perceived that women are more 'moral' than men. The wife's presence states that she is standing by her man, no matter what difficulty may come. In the same vein, a daughter's presence also gives an image of how the male candidate is as a father – through the commitment of daughters, voters are wooed with an idea of the male candidate[12].

The backstage activities of wives and daughters directly interact with the actors and structures of formal politics. In fact, most if not all their activities constitute political actions – the only thing that they do not do is enact actual legislation. It would be naïve to describe them as political neophytes. Further, with the Constitutional term limits[13] for public officials, the male figure has no other choice but to 'pass the torch' of his political career to a female member of the family. Under 'normal' circumstances, when the husband's term of office as mayor expires, he will run for another position (i.e. governor) and his wife will run for the position that he has vacated. More often than not, the formula works

because his family has already built a patronage relationship with the constituency through the work of his wife or daughter. For Mina Roces, these women are the most empowered political agents because they are able to juggle and transform themselves from informal to formal power (2000: 191).

Another way women enter formal politics is through the violent or untimely demise of the husband. When the male figure is assassinated, the female 'chosen one' gets all the sympathy – more often than not, as translated into electoral votes – and thus goes the story of the woman's metamorphosis from a politician's wife or daughter to a politician herself. In the Asian context, this is known as the 'over my dead body' syndrome or the practice where '(…) widows or daughters of dead charismatic male leaders acquire the legitimacy to take over the leadership in a culture of dynastic politics' (Kinkaid as quoted in Taylor, 2000: 100). Such has been the case of Corazon Aquino[14] who was catapulted to the presidency in 1986 with a combination of factors: (1) popular sympathy as the widow of Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino, staunch political rival of the then President Ferdinand Marcos; (2) the absence of choices from the current ranks of the political elite; and (3) the perfect opportunity for the middle-class and elite to revolt against the dictatorship. Much like other politicians' wives who have become politicians themselves, Aquino came from the traditional landed elite, growing up in a political family and marrying into another political family. However, she was not a political thoroughbred, as she preferred to stay in the background while her husband snatched the political limelight. 'She epitomized a woman engendered by society to accept her traditional role as a woman – a very pious daughter (being a devout Catholic), a very supporting and docile wife, and a very nurturing mother' (Veneracion-Rallonza, 2001: 76). In contrast with other wives of politicians, she did not engage in any civic organizing nor participate in organized protest actions. 'She was the quintessential housewife, uninterested, uninvolved, and almost detached from the political scene' (Roces, 2000: 75)

The most political thing she ever did was to stand by her man in his days as a political detainee, as a political exile, and as a political opposition leader. She did step into his shoes when her husband was assassinated and when the public clamor for her to run for the presidency became strong. In fact, there were women who organized themselves to serve as one of the political machines of Aquino when she decided to run for the presidency.

> With the participation of ordinary women, Cory's Crusaders became a people's movement. This made the group different from previous women's arms of political parties organized during elections which … were elitist. Cutting across the different levels of the social ladder, members of the Cory Crusaders were

greatly motivated to join the campaign not only for Aquino but more so for the country (Fiel as quoted in Tancangco, 1992: 345)

More often than not, women in developing countries rise as the alternative to an authoritarian political leader. In the case of Aquino, she was the perfect antithesis to Marcos. Combined with her coming from the educated and wealthy class and her being the Filipino ideal of a woman as being devout, morally upright and non-political, Aquino was the chosen messiah for the people suffering under a 20 year dictatorship. Of course, the ideal did not serve her well for her actual performance as woman political leader. Her task was to put the country on the road to democracy by creating the democratic space for groups that had been persecuted and illegitimized by the Marcos government; it was a period when good governance and economic and human development were paramount concerns. By and large, Aquino's six years in office were precarious – ruffled by the masculinized military in several coup attempts. Sadly, when a woman political leader has been perceived as a failure, all accounts point to her gender; when a male leader is inefficient, varied accounts will be utilized such as corruption, politicking, etc. Nonetheless, Aquino is a perfect example of a woman comfortable in the private domain but who was thrown into the highly-charged public world. Hers was an informal/unofficial power that negotiated its transformation into formal/official power not because it was her political project but because of political circumstances.

EPILOGUE: A FEMINIST AFTERTHOUGHT

Of 163 countries, the Philippines ranks 112 in terms of female candidacy; the country also ranks 32nd in terms of female ministers compared to 126 other states; it also has an average of 17.2 per cent of female parliamentarians compared to the overall world average of 17.84.[15] Based on statistics, women in the Philippines are better off than many: women won the right of suffrage in 1937 and the right to run for elections has been operational since 1946; major legislations against violence against women, trafficking, sexual harassment, discrimination in the workplace, and institutional mechanisms are being implemented with the perception of women as partners in the country's development. This is the picture of women in a democratic Philippines. Democracy is working in the country despite the fact that it has been criticized for being elitist. The institutions are working, elections are held, and the government increasingly works on being transparent and accountable to its citizens. But there will always be people who are not able to taste a slice of the pie – these are the people whose hearts along

with their stomachs have hardened with a poverty that is ever worsening; with the social benefits that are not trickling down to the ones who need them most. The hardest hit are women, with all their burdens even further complicated by their class or religion. This phenomenon is noted as the feminization of poverty. As assessed by party list Representative Liza Maza:

> We have a formal democratic institution, but really, it is not democratic…When you talk about real democracy, I believe it also starts with democratizing wealth, democratizing economic power, and democratizing political power (Aquino, Joann Natalia (2002) 'HerStory Series: Interview with Liza Maza, Philippine Congresswoman').

Philippine democracy is one that relies on the erection of formal structures of power and neglects the social inequities that they breed. In the context of women in politics, women have been involved in the democracy project in different arenas that have merged at certain historical moments. Some groundwork has been laid but actual and overwhelming social transformation has yet to be seen. A patriarchal mindset continues to frame a culture that perpetuates gendered realities detrimental to women; patriarchy has been entrenched in the political realm where men still possess the political authority. Women are an addendum, an afterthought, even perceived as an inconvenient requirement of the signed international women's conventions. Most headway in women empowerment has been great on paper. For Filipino women, '(…) the feminization of political power means more than increasing the representation of women in the formal structures of political power' (Reyes, 1991: 2).

In the Philippines, economic power begets political power. Those who have access to wealth have been the ones to use it to secure public office. According to Joel Rocamora, executive director of the Institute for Popular Democracy, '(…) if you are not rich – or do not have a rich patron – you cannot get elected in the Philippines'[16]. Those who choose to run for public office choose to do so because they can afford it. Those who want to run but have no funds to back them up, affiliate themselves with a political party that can provide the campaign machinery. According to Sheila Coronel, from the 8th to the 12th Congresses:

> The legislators elected to these bodies have hardly been representative of those they represent. In that sense, they have not been different from the past, when members of Congress were drawn from a narrow elite in terms of property, education (since 1898, they have been trained mainly in law) and social standin. (Coronel, Sheila (2004) 'How Representative is the House of Representative?'. Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism).

In both the 11th and the 12th Congresses, women legislators were mostly lawyers, medical doctors/practitioners and businesswomen/entrepreneurs prior to their new role as legislator. A clear majority of them likewise belonged to a major or dominant political party, which indicates that these women make use both of their financial resources (from their families) and of their affiliation with a political party. Women who do not run on a women's agenda nor campaign using a feminist/pro-women platform will not be expected to legislate for women as this is not a political thing to do. They will be representing and guarding the interests of the forces or agencies that placed them in power.

The majority of Filipino women who are trapped below the poverty line have not reaped the benefits of the promise of empowerment. Consider the following:

1. 'According to a study by the Center for Women's Resources (CWR), the unemployment rate of women increased from 9.9 per cent to 10.3 per cent in the first 11 months of 2001 (…) as of October 2001, 52 per cent of employed women were in the informal sector, as own account workers or unpaid family labour, such as housewives with sidelines or prostitutes. Only 48 per cent were in the formal sector as wage and salary workers.

2. The trend under globalisation is the promotion of a cheap, flexible and docile labour force. For women workers, this has meant the relentless implementation of contractualization schemes such as job and service subcontracting. The creation of the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) has intensified the exploitation of women workers who make up the majority (70 per cent – 85 per cent) of EPZ workers. Women are often hired over men in the EPZs for their 'natural' abilities for this type of work such as: manual dexterity, attention to detail and obedience.

3. Peasant women and children are also the hardest hit by militarisation in the countryside (…) Military operations against armed rebel groups like the New People's Army (NPA) and the Moro Islamic Front (MILF) as well as bandit groups like the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) have resulted in the evacuation of 173,004 families or 928,874 individuals in Mindanao alone (…) under these conditions, many peasant women are forced to migrate to the cities to seek work in factories or as househelp or to migrate abroad (i.e. feminisation of migration) or be forced into prostitution (i.e. sex trafficking of women), (Filipino Women under GMA, 'The Challenge Ahead', *by Hetty C. Alquitas from IBON Data Bank, Philippines*. Online resource).

This information is relevant to the period when Gloria-Macapagal Arroyo succeeded Joseph Estrada as President. As a woman political leader, she has been governing with the framework of *realpolitik* or politics of power and thus, has not shown any counter-pattern to her male predecessors.

To summarize, the experience of politically empowering women in the context of democracy in the Philippines has exhibited the following:

1. The nominal participation of women in the electoral exercise

As the electoral history has shown, there is a trend of more women voters than men. However, this pattern has not translated into more women being elected into public office. Thus, it can be inferred that there is no consolidated women's vote to speak of or feminization of support for women's groups negotiating their entry into mainstream and formal politics.

2. Women in power is not equivalent to the empowerment of women in society

Women are elected into public office not because they are women but because they are members of political families who would like to perpetuate power in the current and succeeding generations. They also come from the propertied classes – for the old elites or traditional politicians, power is based on land ownership, while for the new elite wealth comes from various entrepreneurial and business ventures – and as such they have access to the financing of their political ambitions through patronage politics. Patronage may come from an expansive familial kinship network or from cultivating relationships with those who are seen to be maintaining political power. In this light, women politicians, especially those who were bred in informal power, subscribe to the same cycle of self-perpetuation in power. Legislators will never legislate against themselves and will likewise never pass laws that will not benefit them. A gender balance in politics is no more than a good step forward. It may not necessarily benefit the Philippines because of its own inherent historicity and circumstances.

3. Men are trapped in women's bodies

Women in office have a male mindset because of their gendered socialization and because patriarchy is endemic in the system. It is hard enough that Philippine politics is highly bureaucratic and is submerged in endless political bickering. Add the complex inefficiency in passing laws and political grandstanding and you have the perfect formula to paralyze the passage of needed social, political and economic reforms. In this regard, it is difficult to pass pro-women laws because the policy-makers themselves are not imbued with the importance of gender in political decision-making. These women are no different from male political leaders as they follow the same political framework. What is needed is the commitment to devalorize patriarchy in social structures, political culture and practices.

4. Women's organizations have not escaped the sorry state of Philippine politics

Women's groups have experienced their own share of politicking in their critical and tactical engagement with the state and amongst themselves. Though women's groups generally accept the idea that women have been and still are disadvantaged, they pursue their goals in various ways. Not all of them subscribe to the idea of feminism. As a result, these groups fight for a women and gender agenda minus a feminist analysis.

The narrative of democracy often seems to be nothing but rhetoric, a political imagination conjured by the ones in power. Such a rhetoric can hypnotize people into being comfortable in the status quo and can, douse any incipient ferment for causing a social transformation. Women, both individually and collectively, must make democracy work for them – a democracy based on genuine precepts of peace, development and gender justice.

NOTES

1 Specifically, with the downfall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and the perceived increase in the number of countries 'shifting' to a democratic political system, it has been said that the triumph of liberal democracy has come.

2 According Luzviminda Tancangco, *Associasion Feminista Filipina* was the first women volunteer organization. Among its goals were moral education in schools, campaigns against prostitution and gambling, and the drive to have women appointed in municipal and provincial boards of education, polling precincts and municipal level committees.

3 This pertained to the General Council of Women was created by the suffragettes who composed the National Federation of Women's Clubs.

4 According to Luzviminda G. Tancangco in her article entitled 'Voters, Candidates, and Organizers: Women and Politics in Contemporary Philippines' (2005), the NPPW aimed to consolidate the women's vote and in the process attempted to cross party lines.

5 The interview came out in Laya (Freedom), a feminist quarterly, in 1992.

6 According to Mina Roces, although the political activist nuns '(…) did not challenge how power was gendered (…) they showed some signs of questioning and criticizing the cultural narrative that was oppressive to women, using the experience of living with the poor or supporting poor communities and society's victims – prostitutes, mail-order-brides, rape victims, pregnant teenagers, and juvenile delinquents'. For a more extensive discussion, see her *Women, Power and Kinship Politics: Female Power in Post-war Philippines.*

7   In 1947, the Philippines was fresh out of the World War II experience as well as out of the colonial administration of the United States; the 1970 election was against a background of economic instability and political repression under the government of President Ferdinand Marcos. With the cultural schema that expects women to be relegated in the private sphere as well as put the family as their prime concern, Filipinas were more or less discouraged to join any political exercise, especially during times of socio-economic and political instability.

8   The bills reflected here are those that were filed during the 1st regular session of the 11th Congress covering 1 July 1998 to 3 June 1999. For this period, a total of 9,333 bills were filed from the Senate and the House of Representatives.

9   The bills listed here are those filed for the whole duration of the 12th Congress or from 2001 to 2004. A total of 10,346 bills were filed in the bicameral legislature.

10 It must be recalled that in the Philippines the President serves a six-year term. Congress, on the other hand, spans a three-year time frame with a possibility of being re-elected twice for the members of the House of Representatives and once for the Senators.

11 This group was established to assist the Vice Presidential bid of then Senator Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

12 In the 1950s, Angelita Roces organized the wives of local leaders in congressional districts of Manila under the Checkered Ladies for Roces while in 1953, the Women's Magsaysay-For-President Movement was organized by Pacita Madrigal Gonzales, daughter of shipping tycoon Vicente Madrigal. In 1965, the battle of the 'presidential candidates' wives' occurred between the Blue Ladies of Imelda Romualdez Marcos and the Lakambinis 1865 of Eva Macapagal. In 1969, daughter Minnie Osmena of presidential candidate Sergio Osmena, Jr. led the Osmena Pearls and the Osmena's Women League (OWL). Come 1992, Gretchen Cojuangco, wife of presidential aspirant Danding Cojuangco led the Gretchen's Ladies Auxilliary for Danding (GLAD) and Cristina Ponce Enrile did the same that election year with her Pink Ladies supporting the senatorial bid of Juan Ponce Enrile.

13 The 1987 Philippine Constitution has stipulated fixed term limits for elected public officials as a safeguard against perpetuation in power and dictatorship. For example, a member of the House of Representative can only be elected for a maximum of 3 consecutive terms, with 1 term in a period of 3 years.

14 Widow of assassinated Marcos oppositionist, Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino.

15 NationMaster – World Statistics, Country comparisons. Online resource.

16 Quoted in CORIS – Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Online Research and Information System. Online Resource.

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