

FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF

- Research Papers
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- Creative Writing

FAMILIARIZE

**Fall 2020
Issue**

The Center for Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Florida Atlantic University is an interdisciplinary program that emerged from and has been sustained by concerted activism and advocacy by students, faculty, staff, and community members. Exploring feminist praxis - the meeting point of theory and practice - the program has a deep connection to social justice and social movements. As such, the Feminist Graduate Student Association has long been an important collaborator for the Center, and as Director of the Center since January 2020, it's been inspiring to work with feminist graduate students to promote feminist ways of thinking, researching, and being across the University.

The Feminist Agenda is among one of the most exciting initiatives of the Feminist Graduate Student Association in recent years, and it's an honor to be able to celebrate the publication of this volume of feminist writing, creativity, scholarship, and analysis. Initially conceived of in 2019 when the Feminist Graduate Student Association was lead by Annelyn Martinez and Elena Steinhaus, The Feminist Agenda was a student-driven publication from the beginning. Students proposed, organized, wrote, edited, and printed the first issue autonomously. It expressed current feminist thinking about contemporary issues through a medium that was powerfully resonant of 90s feminist zines and other alternative media production.

Late one evening after class in the Fall of 2019, I was grading in my office when Mx. Martinez and Ms. Steinhaus knocked on my door and dropped off a copy on my desk. The combination of poetry, essays, art, and fiction exemplified the diversity of cultural engagement that is possible within an interdisciplinary program. I can't wait to read this new issue of The Feminist Agenda - now named Femilarize Yourself, and to learn along with feminist students at FAU. Congratulations to Sonia Baron, Cristina Pimenta, and Anna Maldonado, and to the rest of the FGSA leadership for bringing together this outstanding publication!

Dr. Nicole Morse

*Director, Center for Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies
FGSA Advisor*

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FEMINISM LIVES AND BREATHES

Daniella Orias

I was first introduced to feminism academically in Dr. Caputi's Green Consciousness course in 2012. We studied Ecofeminism, a branch of feminism I feel deeply connected with. While I was academically introduced to feminism in 2012, I've come to realize after taking the course Feminist Theory and Praxis that I was introduced to feminism a very long time ago. Sarah Ahmed asks us to consider our origins with encountering feminism in *Living a Feminist Life*. She remarks, "When did feminism become a word that not only spoke to you but spoke you, spoke of your existence, spoke you into existence? When did the sound of the word feminism become your sound?" (Ahmed 4). I was introduced to feminism when my mother left my biological father when I was two years old.

My mother had to work 40+ hours a week teaching in a school, barely making ends meet, living on government assistance, and being a single mother because her relationship was unsafe.

Watching my mother's perseverance and strength to leave an abusive relationship and become a single mother was a radical act of feminism and one that is sometimes hard to define and often unacknowledged.

We often think of feminism in an academic sense with courses such as Introduction to Women's Studies, or we conceive feminists as angry radicals who protested in Vietnam marches in the 60's. **But what about the single mothers who have left abusive relationships? What about the untold stories of feminism in everyday life?** Who recognizes those feminists, those mothers, those often struggling to leave relationships they feel unsafe in? How can we begin to define the word feminism when it encompasses so many things? There are some words so big and complex they often feel hard to define; I believe feminism is one of those words. The definition of feminism will continuously morph and evolve for me as I continue my studies. I believe that in itself is the beauty of feminism: how liminal and dynamic the word truly is. As Ahmed points out, "Feminism is a movement in many senses. We moved to become feminists" (Ahmed 3).

Defining Feminism

Feminism is defined in the Oxford dictionary as "the advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes"

("Feminism: Definition of Feminism"). This definition looks at feminism from a macro perspective, and while I completely agree that feminism does fight for "the equality of the sexes" I think the term is so much more than a simple definition ("Feminism: Definition of Feminism"). As Ahmed notes:

[...] To think what [feminism] means to live your life by claiming that word as your own: being a feminist, becoming a feminist, speaking as a feminist. Living a feminist life does not mean adopting a set of ideals or norms of conduct, although it might mean asking ethical questions about how to live better in an unjust and unequal world. (Ahmed 1)

This idea of feminism being larger than a single concept is illustrated in my mother's story of leaving a marriage and becoming a single mother, struggling to make ends meet, yet knowing that leaving an abusive relationship was more important than the struggle of being a single mother. She was living and breathing feminism. In this struggle, she "acquire[d] feminist tendencies, a willingness to keep going despite or even because of what we come up against" (Ahmed 6). She decided that living in an unsafe space with an unsafe man was not acceptable, and she pulled herself and me out of that toxic situation.

've come to believe, upon reflection, that feminism is all-encompassing. Feminism is living and breathing. Feminism takes on different shapes and forms, depending on the time, space, and place. Feminism is not easily definable, which makes it so challenging to express what feminism means.

I believe within feminism lies the understanding that men and women should be treated equally and that within our current heteropatriarchal society, certain norms exist to keep women subordinate to men, turning women into property. As German and Power state in "A Feminist Manifesto for the 21st Century," "This objectification, alongside women's role as supposedly the property of men, leads to domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse" (German and Power 228). I also believe that agency and autonomy are essential for women's liberation, "To control their own lives, women must control their own bodies and sexuality" (German and Power 228). However, as I stated, feminism is a vast concept, and there are many different sections within the umbrella of feminism. Certain feminist theory, for instance, omits trans-women in the fight for women's liberation and equality. Some feminists refer to themselves as TERFs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists) who seek to force those who are not cis women out of the feminist movement.

This is precisely why defining feminism is so challenging because there are so many types of feminism. This exclusionary feminism is not my feminism. My feminism is all-inclusive. **My feminism seeks to lift up those who are objectified and disregarded. My feminism lets people in, as opposed to closing borders and policing, who is a feminist or not. My feminism is accessible.**

HOW TO BECOME A WOMAN

Jazly Pizzuti

“One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.”

– Simone de Beauvoir

Gender is constantly produced and reproduced through human interaction and social life. As a social institution gender can be produced through the assignment of sex category at birth, division of labor, classification, personality characteristics and lived experiences. “A sex category becomes a gender status through naming, dress, and the use of other gender markers” (Lorber, 120). With the concept of the construction of gender occurring from birth in mind, when a little girl looks in the mirror while wearing her mother’s heels, she is usually pretending to be her mother or imagining her future as a woman.

She looks at herself, at her biological body. What she cannot see in the mirror is her social body. She cannot see all of the societal gendered expectations that have been impressed upon her since birth. She carries these social markers on her social body, much like (invisible) tattoos, but without even knowing, as if her life and who she will be is already decided for her. As if her gender were her destiny.



BAD DRIVER
IT'LL BE HARDER TO GET MARRIED AT YOUR AGE

BOSSY MATERNAL
GOSSIP SWEET

OBSESSIVE *TOO LOW*
WOMEN ARE NOT AS SEXUAL AS MEN

EMOTIONAL
A WOMAN NEEDS TO LOOK GOOD

Drama Queen

FRAGILE PRUDE
TOO TALL

SOFT QUIET
EVERY WOMAN WANTS TO BE A MOTHER

TICK-TOCK CATTY

EAT LIKE A LADY
A WOMAN SHOULDN'T HAVE MANY SEX PARTNERS

YOU KNOW YOU WANT TO
YOUR WEDDING WILL BE THE HAPPIEST DAY OF YOUR LIFE

SMILE
PAMPER YOUR HUSBAND WHEN HE GETS HOME

DON'T PLAY WITH YOUR BROTHER'S TOY. PLAY WITH YOUR TOY KITCHEN INSTEAD.

How to become a woman

In *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir states "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman." It is in the becoming that much attention is needed. What does it mean to become a woman? It means that from birth women are told how they should behave, what their aspirations should be, how they should and shouldn't look, how they should eat, talk (or preferably not talk). "For humans, the social is the natural [...]" (Lorber, 120). **Because gender is constantly being produced it seems natural.** Because society constructs gender, both men and women included and beginning with both mother and father, a girl is born into a set of social standards and expectations that her parents will repeat for her over and over until she has learned them. The repetition will be reinforced by the things she hears from other men, women, boys and girls around her and from the things she sees, such as gender being modeled and perpetuated on TV when she watches cartoons, Disney movies.

The repetition will be reinforced by the things she hears from other men, women, boys and girls around her and from the things she sees, such as gender being modeled and perpetuated on TV when she watches cartoons, Disney movies, YouTube, when she reads nursery rhymes, when she plays with Barbie, etc., until she has learned them.

THE FIVE FACES OF OPPRESSION PERSONIFIED AS HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Alexander D. Veal



Young's (1990) *The Five Faces of Oppression* is among the most memorable readings I encountered in Fall 2020. It is without question I say, this chapter made a remarkable impression on my knowledge building and theory making – and will continue to do so into the future. The word “faces” already gives a slight personification to Young’s criterion, and with the numbers five and four, the connection was simple: I would personify the Five Faces of Oppression as the Four (or more) Horseman of the Apocalypse.

The Four Horsemen are described in the Book of Revelation when four beings symbolizing Conquest, War, Famine, and Death/Pestilence are summoned respectively upon white, red, black, and pale/green horses. These Horsemen are said to be the bringers of the apocalypse, signifying God's Last Judgement. The Horsemen are often depicted with specified characterizations like Conquest as Christ/the Holy Spirit wearing a crown with a bow and arrow, War as a soldier armed with a sword, Famine as a merchant holding weighing scales to portion wheat, and Death/Pestilence as a corpse followed by Hades and other beasts (Revelation 6:1-8).

My methodology echoes the sentiment of Bread and Puppet Theater's (2020) *The Why Cheap Art? Manifesto* for affordable and accessible art, hooks' (1991) recommendation in *Theory as Liberatory Practice* to utilize untraditional/non-academic mediums to create theory, and Solanas' (2020) *SCUM Manifesto* for a satirically serious take on a well cherished religious text, protesting against the "great art" curated by and for the patriarchy (pp. 216-217). My source material, Young (1990), defines the "five faces" to be exploitation, violence, powerlessness, marginalization, and cultural imperialism as a criterion when determining oppression: for an individual or group to be considered oppressed, they must experience one, multiple, or all of the five faces (p. 64).

For this piece, exploitation is depicted as a capitalism, violence as police brutality, powerlessness as border control, marginalization as beauty standards, and cultural imperialism as Manifest Destiny. Ultimately, my artwork is meant to look rough because it is. It is gritty, creepy, and real. The sketch marks from my pencils and uneven lines from my markers are intentionally apparent because there is more work to be done, like our world.

Exploitation

Young (1990) utilizes Marxism to explain capitalism's extortion of labor from workers to benefit the ruling class (p. 49). Similarly, gendered exploitation is done when men exploit women's labor through a "systematic and unreciprocated transfer of power" from one gender to another (Young, 1990, p. 50). Women of color face additional mistreatment; Black women have been exploited by the white man since chattel slavery further commodified, raped, and exploited Black bodies (Collins, 2000, pp. 146-147). Exploitation is depicted as the Horseman Famine; Famine carries scales because it measures how much wheat gets allocated to the starving poor, but it does not give out oil or wine because those are reserved for the upper class. **In my drawing, the capitalist, surrounded by money and power, symbolizes the intersections of political and economic exploitation.**

Violence

Young (1990) emphasizes the “context surrounding” acts of violence, which allows them to be a socially acceptable practice and is often used as a motivated tool to “maintain group privileged and domination” (pp. 61-62). Koyama (2020) recognizes violence against trans people taking form through economic, political, and medical outlets (pp. 94-95) and Betasamosake Simpson (2020) recognizes violence towards Indigenous Canadian women as the legacies of colonial rule destroy native sexualities and genders (p. 317). Violence is depicted as the Horseman War; War is armed with a sword held upwards to depict its call for blood and slaughter. **In my drawing, the police officer is armed with an assault rifle, standing in front of the names of Black victims murdered by police (written in red), to symbolize the physical domination of the state’s authority wielded by law enforcement.**

Powerlessness

Young (1990) questions industrial societies’ division of laborer as operating under an oppressive framework which further separates “professionals” from “nonprofessionals,” where nonprofessionals follow orders, are forced into menial positions, and have little to no opportunities, autonomy, creativity, or respect (pp. 56-56). Zaragoza (2020) writes about the colonial erasure of Indigenous people’s identities and the teaching of self-hatred

by the white man, removing their ability to exert what little power they had (pp. 322–323). Powerlessness is depicted as the Horseman Death; Death is followed by Hades, who is ready to capture the souls of the lives Death has taken. **In my drawing, the ICE agent is surrounded by barbed wire fences with the word “powerlessness” imprisoned behind the fence to symbolize powerless undocumented immigrants** (dozens of whom have died in holding facilities due to unsanitary conditions, infectious diseases, and inadequate medical care, [Committee on Oversight and Reform & Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, 2020]) attempting to live and work without any leverage, bargaining power, or rights.

Marginalization

Young (1990) warns about the dangers of marginalization due to the risks faced by not meaningfully participating in society, the potential to experience material deprivation, and the risk of extermination (p. 53). An uncommon example of marginals are fat people; Freespirit and Aldebaran (2020) assert how fat bodies are deemed undesirable unless commodification is readily available through extensive exercise and the dieting industry (p. 344). Because of how dangerous it is, I depicted Marginalization as a seemingly unassuming exercise ‘junky’ on Weight Watchers.

Without context, the viewer might assume it is just a horse doing yoga, but Marginalization is exhausted, deprived, and on the verge of collapse. **In my drawing, the exerciser symbolizes the undisclosed cultural standards forced onto people without regard to the individual's health and wellbeing, costing their life.**

Cultural Imperialism

Young (1990) goes beyond materialism to discuss when an oppressed group is contained, stereotyped, marketed as the Other, and labelled invisible by the dominant group to protect their universalism (pp. 58-59; 63). Echoing the sentiments of Betasamosake Simpson (2020), Zaragoza (2020), and Deerinwater (2017), Arvin et al. (2013) discusses the need to decolonize white feminism; instead, academia should embrace the diversity of Native, Black and Queer feminisms, among other things (pp. 10-11; 28-29). Cultural Imperialism is depicted as the Horseman Conquest; Conquest wears the victor's crown, armed with a bow and arrow. **In my drawing, Manifest Destiny is personified as the white women, with her golden hair as her crown and armed with the Bible in hand, symbolizing the unassumingly dangerous universal white experience.**

FEMALE CONUNDRUM

Salina Rai



women as the spontenity. women as the paradox. women as the earth.

KING SACRIFICE

Cassiopeia Mulholland

The waitress has barely left our coffees
when Father sets up the chessboard.

"Now, Son--"

--I fight to keep my face impassive, I
hate when he calls me that--

--I think pawns are a bit like babies,
wouldn't you say?"

He always does this, gives me a moral
lecture disguised as abstract philosophy.

I try deflecting. "Because if you don't
vaccinate them, most of them die?"

He glowers at me. "You can't vaccinate
chess pieces."

birthday present to myself was a trip to the doctor. In the decade since, we've learned how to avoid fighting about it.

His eyebrows twitch, his version of rolling his eyes. I move my pawn to d4, and he moves his pawn to d5. "Pawns are like babies," he says, "because they have infinite potential. They can turn into any other piece, even a queen."

I play pawn to c4--the queen's gambit--and stare at him. What is he trying to tell me?

"Pawns are the only pieces that can turn into things, you know?" He plays pawn to e6. Queen's gambit declined. "No other piece can become a queen."

I raise an eyebrow. "Especially not a king?"

"You're reading too much into it." He takes a long sip of his espresso.

We play several moves in silence, except for the click of the wooden pieces and the chatter of the other cafe patrons. A pair of knights comes off the board, then a pair of bishops. We both castle. I start an attack on the queenside, he starts an attack on my king.

"I don't understand why anyone would want the king to turn into anything," he finally says. "If the king stops being a king, you would lose the game."

"You wouldn't lose." If I double down on my attack and try to race, he'll beat me. But

he's being too reckless in his own attack. If I defend, I'll be ahead once the dust settles. But I have a few moves before I have to commit either way. "You'd just have to change the rules."

"The current rules are there for a reason." He makes the move I was expecting. "And they've been there for hundreds of years. Isn't it a bit disrespectful to expect everyone to change them just for you?"

"I'm not expecting everyone to change the rules they play by. But a lot of people like playing with different ones, and they're going to play with them no matter what. If you aren't willing to try their rules, they won't play with you." I frown down at the board. The next move is the point of no

return. It should be obvious--defend now, win the endgame.

"You liked playing by the common rules, you know."

I lift my gaze. "What?"

"You loved the game," he says. "All of those hours at clubs and camps. All of those trophies and medals."

"I loved winning." And winning those tournaments was the only way I could earn his affection. Not much has changed, I suppose.

His eyebrows twitch again. "Are you going to move?"

I glance down at the board, then shake my head. "No."

"What?"

I open my purse and set a fiver on the table. "Thanks for the conversation. I think I'm done with chess." Standing, I smooth my dress and walk toward the door.

"Jack? Jack!" he calls after me.
"Wait--Marina!"

I glance back for a moment, then turn forward again.

Maybe next time we can play backgammon.

###

A LOOK AT CIVIL RIGHTS AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Brenda Wilson

Human trafficking of all kinds is a blatant violation of civil rights. Civil rights are guarantees of equal social opportunities and protections under the law regardless of race, religion, or other personal characteristics like gender identity or sexual orientation.

This violation is most apparent in the distance between population statistics and trafficking rates. According to the 2019 census 13% of our nation's population was made up of Black individuals (1). What is shocking then is that Black people make up a staggering 40.4% of trafficking victims (2), and that when looking at trafficking arrests 55% of them involve the arrest of black children (3).

Traffickers choose their victims based on several factors that are characteristically seen in low income families. **Broken or single parent homes whether through death, divorce, or abandonment, ongoing physical/sexual/emotional abuse, and a lack of social/community support are just a few of the factors that victims report experiencing in life prior to being trafficked.**

Another characteristic that Traffickers look for is familial abuse. This can be physical/sexual or emotional abuse. While actual numbers are hard to pinpoint because of the lack of victims that come forward, most researchers agree that women of color are significantly more likely to experience domestic violence by an intimate partner than non women of color (7).

Women between the ages of 18-27 are the most likely to experience DV, followed by children aged 11-17. Women who have been previously abused are more easily manipulated to believe that they will be cared for by a new partner who offers promises of a better future.

While there have been some court cases that bring more attention to human trafficking as a whole, there have been few that shed light on the impact of trafficking and civil rights. Two cases that have made a difference were ruled on just this June. The first was a ruling by the supreme court that was decided in a 6-3 vote. This ruling stated that the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, bans employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. (8) Just a few days later in a 5-4 vote the court decided that the current presidential administration acted improperly in quickly terminating the DACA program which was established

by the Department of Homeland Security in 2012 (8). This program gave undocumented children who were brought into the United States as children the right to attend schools and college/universities without the risk of being deported. These rulings ensure that people who are in the LGBTQ+ community and those young people who are living in the US as undocumented immigrants the right to fair and equal employment. This helps to provide a lifestyle for them that would keep them out of poverty and hopefully lower their risks of falling victim to traffickers.

So what can be done to end this civil rights violation and bring equality to our nation? More educational and job opportunities for families and children of color. Better rates of pay to lower the income differential. More access to quality mental health treatment for those who deal with mental illness and fairer treatment by the correctional institutions and judicial system in our nation would be a good starting point.

"GRADING RAPE: THE FEMALE VOICE IN THE FIRST YEAR WRITING CLASSROOM"

Kimberly Baim

The first-year writing (FYW) classroom is definitely a unique one. Students are entering from all avenues and perspectives of the academic experience. Many would argue that the FYW classroom is where many students find their voice for the first time. However, for the female student, this takes on a particular meaning.

At the beginning of the semester, I require my students to develop a personal narrative essay. I do this for two reasons. One, students at the freshman level are typically well-versed in talking about themselves, due in part to the heightened emphasis on self-identity that is encouraged by the social media of this generation. It allows for an easy transition to allow students to open up and write, as well as it opens the airways for constructive feedback in a way that they can understand. Two, it can be quite easy for me to grade when pressed with acclimating to new class rosters and schedules. In other words, students don't have to second-guess my submission-to-grade rate.

However, my idea of a straight-forward assignment quickly transformed during my second year of teaching. My guidelines for the personal essay assignment were pretty flexible. Students were required to choose a life experience that had shaped their current perspective. After that, they would meet certain page requirements and format their work according to grammar and style rules that we'd gone over that semester. When I received the submissions, I was expecting much of the repeated narratives of high school break-ups, unique family dynamics, and homages to their extra-curricular activities. What I didn't expect was a detailed narrative of one female student's experience of sexual assault.

After reading the student's essay, I felt a sense of mutual empowerment. An empowerment that the student gained through expressing her experiences and healing process and a self-empowerment that I felt by being able to provide a space for her to discuss these issues in a cathartic way. Her voice was heard, and I was honored to have the opportunity to hear it. There are many opponents of the personal essay within the academic writing space. They often claim that having students write these types of essay distracts from the theory and form that they would need to learn in order to become competent writers.

What these opponents fail to realize is that students, particularly female students, need to understand that their individual voice, shaped by their experiences, is one that is welcome within the academic space. The female student can not succeed if they feel they need to suppress their voice or hide their experiences from the academic space. Doing so, gives them the understanding that they are not welcome.

It is essential to allow the female student an opportunity to find their voice within the academic space in order to flourish. If women feel marginalized by the academic space, it is up to faculty and administrators to provide the female student with a sense of identity and acknowledgement within the academic space. It shows her that her voice, shaped by her experiences, is just as important and worthy of recognition as any one else's.

It's simply not enough to designate the female voice to a special topics course or a niche student organization. The ability for female students to express themselves in the academic space allows them to fully understand their place in it. They can find strength in seeing themselves represented through the work they produce, which will empower them to excel.

SIMPLY AM

Jolani Phoenix



Within my wholeness I find myself
I can't be broken into a woman or a man
Beyond the designation of feminine and
masculine

I simply am by the virtue that I am

What you see when you see me is yours alone
I don't need to be made to understand
I am not because my am is accepted by you
I simply am by the virtue that I am

One drop of this may be how you define me
But I am made up of diverse genetic strands
When I say I am half of both or neither
I simply am by the virtue that I am

I have experienced the world through different
eyes
you'll never walk in my feet or feel through
my hands
Every personal moment has shaped this-- I am
certain is me
I simply am by the virtue that I am

IS DIVORCE A HUMAN RIGHT? THE CASE FOR THE PHILIPPINES

Arielle Erillo

The Philippines and the Vatican City are the only two countries in the world that still haven't legalized divorce. Celibate priests and nuns mostly make up the population of the Holy See; divorce is clearly not a high priority for the Vatican City. Nonetheless, why hasn't the Philippines, a country with a population of about 100 million people, legalized divorce? The short answer mirrors my current Facebook relationship status: It's complicated.

Is Divorce a Human Right?

Let's begin by defining divorce. For this essay's purposes, I will use Merriam-Webster's definition of divorce: the action or an instance of legally dissolving a marriage. The history of divorce in the Philippines can be condensed to a few essential facts. First, "before the colonial government of Spain imposed a new legal order, divorce was widely practiced among the indigenous peoples of the Philippines" (Gloria 2007, 19). Second, once Spain colonized the Philippines and converted millions of indigenous people to Catholicism, divorce was no longer socially acceptable. Third, in the early 1900s, Americans, particularly liberal Protestants, reintroduced absolute divorce and Reyes (1995)

along with many other politicians argued that absolute divorce threatened the Filipino home (42). After the United States finally recognized Philippines's independence in 1946, the enactment of the Civil Code of the Philippines removed absolute divorce from Philippine laws (Reyes 1953, 49). This move by the Filipino government pushed divorce advocates to "attack the Catholic Church and Spain, [and] appeal to progress and reason" (Reyes 2015, 53).

The Catholic Church maintains to this day that it is gravely immoral to end marriages because marital unions are sacred; recent sentiments state otherwise: Filipino divorce advocate contends "the law merely gives legal sanction to an already existing moral fact. In this sense, divorce, does not destroy the family or the home; what has already fallen asunder cannot be further broken" (Reyes 1953, 54).).

A survey conducted in 2017 by the pollster Social Weather Stations found that "53 percent of Filipinos support legalizing divorce". Philippines Senate has refused to pass a bill that legalizes divorce (Saludes 2019).

There are legal, economic, and social barriers to dissolving marriages in the Philippines. Legally, the Philippines "permit legal separation, annulment, and declaration of nullity of marriage" (Daytec 2015, 106). Legal separation allows for couples to live on their own, but it does not sever the marital tie between the two individuals. Annulments have high economic costs and declaring a nullity of marriage involves proving the marriage was never valid to begin with (Daytec 2015, 106). **These alternatives to divorce are all very difficult for the average Filipino woman to attain.**

One other barrier to dissolving a marriage is the social stigma that comes with separating from one's husband. Women are expected to keep their marriage together, so the option to even begin the process of legal separation or annulment comes with social humiliation (Abalos 2017, 1516).

The freedom of an individual to leave a marriage is unequivocally a human right. As a Founding Member of the United Nations, the Philippines has a moral obligation to uphold Article 16 Section 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Right, which maintains that two individuals in a marriage are entitled to equal rights before, during and after a marriage; insinuating that individuals deserve the right to freely walk away from a marriage. Daytec (2015) suggests that "divorce is now customary international law which the Philippines must honor, judging

from the fact all other UN member States permit it." 106) It is astounding that essentially every single country in the world, with populations over 1,000 people, have agreed upon the necessity of divorce, but the Senate of the Philippine government refuses to push the legislation forward. Since the Philippines is a signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the government should be held accountable for not fulfilling its treaty obligations to respect and protect its citizens' universal human rights.

The Suffocating Grip of the Catholic Church on the Philippines's Political Institutions

Legalizing divorce does not take away from the "sanctity" of marriage that the Church defends so greatly. Legalizing divorce will really just give women a sense of agency in their lives,

especially if they are victims of domestic abuse. The Catholic Church, which has had considerable influence on the Filipino government, has always taken the stance that "divorce weakens the institution of marriage and 'spawns a host of problems, especially for children.'" (Santos 2016). The Church refuses to acknowledge publicly that divorce can be just as freeing and hopeful as marriage. According to Bonifacio (2018), the Philippines is the only predominantly Catholic country in Asia, with over 92 million adherents in 2010 or over 86% of the population (41). Solutions will have to involve compromises on the part of the Church and divorce advocates; or else, legislation will never push through.

Positive Outcomes of Legalizing Divorce

President Rodrigo Duterte has responded to the global spread of COVID-19 by placing

"the entire Philippine island of Luzon under an "enhanced community quarantine" until April 12 to stop the spread of coronavirus infections (Santos 2020). The spokesman for President Duterte explained that "enhanced community quarantine" includes suspending transportation, regulating the provision of food and essential services, and increasing the presence of uniformed personnel to enforce quarantine procedures This harsh lockdown was aimed at the most populous island in the Philippines, Luzon(Santos 2020), and it has trapped Filipinos at home and has made the situation worse for thousands of Filipinos already struggling to provide for their family.

The time to act is now. The UN Women's "Gender Snapshot Covid-19 in the Philippines", published in April 2020, argues that

["against the backdrop of COVID-19, there has been a global](#)

surge in violence against women. Lockdown and quarantine measures have trapped women and girls with abusive partners and family members, as women's shelters and survivor services are scaled back. In the Philippines, women and girls face heightened vulnerability to gender-based violence, more so than the global average."

The real victims of not legalizing divorce in the Philippines are the women. In an interview by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Rorie Fajardo-Jarilla, maintains that "to many trapped in abusive marriages and to rights activists, divorce law will be instrumental in helping women free themselves from violent relationships." ("Philippines: Sweeping Domestic Violence Under the Carpet").

For most Filipino women, none of the current union dissolution methods are truly viable options for reasons stated above. **By pushing legislation to at least begin the process of legalizing divorce in the Philippines will provide hope for women in desperate situations now. Research conducted by Yodanis (2005) has even found that " in countries where divorce is accepted and practiced, the distribution of work between women and men in marriage is more equal" (644).**

GOODBYE

Rebecca Siede



This piece is dedicated to my deceased mother, Magalie. She was the epitome of what it means to be a woman. She went through so much adversity in her life, but it never broke her spirit. She was a homemaker: the most important position in the world. She dedicated all her time to caring for her 3 kids and helping her husband. Despite us living in poverty, she always found a way to provide for us and make us laugh and smile. She did not receive support from any family, but she held our family together. She taught us to pursue our dreams, love God, and love others. She was kind, she was funny, she was unique, and above all she was strong. She embodied beauty and faith. Like a true woman, she carried the world on her shoulders with flawless grace. My life is fulfilled if I become half the woman she was.