

*Women's movements and the Filipina, 1986–2008*

By MINA ROCES

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012. Pp. 277. Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463414000472

Mina Rocés's book *Women's movements and the Filipina, 1986–2008* could be seen as a culmination of her work in the fields of Women's, Gender and Philippine studies. One of the foremost scholars of women and feminism in Asia, and particularly the Philippines, Rocés's latest study of women's movements in the Philippines revisits the themes that have been central to her earlier work — Filipina women's history, Filipino and transnational feminisms, personal politics, fashion, and defining the 'Filipina' in theory and history — focusing on the 'history of the feminist project and its interrogation of the Filipino woman' (pp. 1–2). By exploring women's and feminist groups in the Philippines (mostly based in Manila), such as feminist nuns, indigenous women activists, women workers (including prostitutes and overseas contract workers), cultural workers in the media, actors, and teachers, Rocés produces an engaging, compelling and well-researched study of feminism in the Philippines. According to Rocés, most of these women's organisations are concerned with two major issues: challenging the dominant ideology of womanhood in the Philippines, and fashioning an alternative vision of Filipino women. To these ends, feminist leaders and activists deploy several discourses that centre on what Rocés calls a 'double narrative' of victimisation and oppression, while also forging an activist programme that produces role models and feminist practices designed to fashion an empowered Filipina.

Most of the chapters are devoted to in-depth studies of various women's and feminist movements in the Philippines. She argues that these organisations advanced a particular form of Filipino feminism, which distanced itself from Western feminism and was grounded in a deep understanding of women's situation in the Philippines. Starting from the 1980s, these women's movements laid the foundation for a Filipino feminist theory that challenged the traditional representations of femininity in the Philippines such as the Virgin Mary or Maria Clara (the female protagonist in Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*), and instead promoted powerful female icons and heroines such as the *babaylan* (pre-Hispanic female shamans), Gabriela Silang (a revolutionary heroine who fought against the Spanish), and Lorena Barrios (a leader of the New People's Army who was killed in combat in the 1970s) as representatives of the ideal Filipina. Rocés divides her work into three parts:

'Representing the Filipino woman'; 'Fashioning the Filipina through practices'; and 'Understanding the transnational context of the Filipina struggle'.

Roces recognises the feminist nun, the prostitute and the woman worker as representatives of the new 'Filipino woman'. Although they did not totally reject the Catholic Church, feminist nuns played a key role in the evolution of Filipino feminism by deconstructing the religious roots of women's oppression. As single, unattached and successful women, they became alternative and subversive role models who 'sought to empower women by demystifying suffering, and resocialising women into rejecting the Catholic ideals that endorsed subservience to men' (p. 37). While nuns were represented as powerful women in the discourse of Filipino feminism, feminists represented prostitutes not as sex workers but as victims 'pushed towards a life of prostitution' by poverty, failures in government policy, and 'by social norms that idealised the woman as martyr and dutiful daughter' (p. 57). According to Roces, this discursive strategy was adopted by feminists in order to decriminalise prostitution and to punish male pimps, traffickers and clients, rather than prostitutes themselves. Finally, feminists have added 'workers' to 'wives and mothers' in their constructions of the 'feminine', representing peasant women, domestic and migrant workers as both victims of a male dominated local and global workforce, and as the chief breadwinners.

In Part 2, Roces looks at ways the cultural practices of Filipino feminism, in the worlds of print culture and media, theatre, and fashion, introduced counter-hegemonic discourses about women during the 1980s. According to Roces, women's organisations produced radio and television programmes that 'were unabashedly feminist in orientation' and advocated women's issues like domestic violence, sexual assault and reproductive health. Although these programmes were not always successful in the ratings game, they educated the public about feminist issues, challenging the cultural taboos that surrounded the discussion of sexuality, adding a new feminist vocabulary to the public discourse about women. Women's movements also 'fashioned' a new image of the Filipina by asserting a new role for Filipinas in public life. As Roces writes, these public activities such as giving oral testimonies, performing in theatre and demonstrations and dressing in particular (activist) fashion, transformed women: 'shy, diffident, exploited workers delivered speeches at demonstrations', survivors of trafficking were transformed into 'amateur actors in theater advocacy', and victims of sexual violence became full-time activists (p. 145). In all these causes, feminists deployed the 'double narrative', using their position as objectified, trafficked and exploited women 'to reclaim their dignity', and to create new identities for themselves as a 'feminist, human rights activist or women's advocate' (p. 147).

In the final section of the book, Roces examines the transnational character of the women's movements in the Philippines through two critical feminist issues: trafficking and migration. According to Roces, activism on behalf of overseas migrant workers required organisational structures across national borders, and Filipina feminists essentially became transnational activists, speaking for the interests of women around the world. Roces cites the Filipino Catholic nun (again!) as activists 'who moved constantly from the local to the international', acting as 'conduits translating Western feminism for the Philippine context while injecting a Filipino perspective (in)to feminist debates overseas' (p. 175).

Roces also devotes one chapter to a discussion of one of the most controversial issues for women in the Philippines: abortion. Although Filipina feminists wanted to fashion 'a new hegemony where the future Filipina will enjoy reproductive and sexual rights', they were very well aware that abortion was illegal in the Philippines. They therefore operated in a 'liminal space', where their main task was to prepare the public for 'a discussion of abortion as a feminist issue' and to focus on 'the reality of abortion for many Filipinas' (p. 186). Interestingly, Roces reviews romance novels to explore the liminal space in which pro-abortion feminists operated, using fictional tools to educate the public about the reality of abortion and trying to shift 'the discourse on abortion from "morals" to "rights"' (p. 192). In doing so they became not only political, but literary subversives, undermining not just 'not just the sociocultural and legal mores of their time, but also the romance trope in which they were packaged' (p. 190).

Mina Roces's book is significant in many respects, offering the first comprehensive account of women's movements in the Philippines during the last two decades. Roces shows how these feminist struggles transformed the public discourse about women and shaped the role of women in Philippine civil society. But as Roces points out, this struggle is by no means complete. While feminists have successfully interrogated the 'Filipino woman', they have paid less attention to critiquing and transforming ideas about Filipino masculinity. And while Roces's book provides a thorough exploration of some feminist groups, it falls short of providing a definitive historical and theoretical study of feminism in the Philippines. One reason for this is that Roces tends to conflate women's and feminist movements, without much distinction between their differences, in her efforts to argue that women's organisations are almost always feminist at heart and committed to a feminist agenda. This explains why the organisations she focuses on are mostly radical and share similar discourses and positions. Differences between women and even women activists, particularly class origins and religious affiliations, are glossed over

to create a more or less unified feminist front. The author's desire to emphasise solidarity, rather than conflict, and her sense of veneration for feminist activists, doesn't leave much room for criticism or indeed for critical analysis. For example, Roces's deep admiration for the radicalism of feminist nuns leads her to play down their membership in a Catholic Church that is still rigidly patriarchal and instead focus on the way feminist nuns avoid confrontation with the male Church hierarchy on issues of sexuality and reproductive health.

Roces's emphasis on Filipino feminism also slights their links to international women's and feminist organisations and to a broader, more cosmopolitan discourse of women's emancipation. It's hard to tell how 'home-grown' Filipino feminism is in the absence of any systematic exploration of its intellectual links to Western, Asian, and other forms of feminism. While Roces traces the institutional connections between Filipino and international women's organisations, the flow of feminist ideas remains largely absent from her study. Tracing the historical, political and intellectual connections between Filipino feminist and women's movements outside the Philippines, as well as elucidating more clearly the origins of contemporary Filipino feminism in the Philippine past, would have greatly strengthened what is otherwise an interesting and timely work.

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*Making Moros: Imperial historicism and American military rule in the Philippines' Muslim south*

By MICHAEL C. HAWKINS

De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013. Pp. xi, 185. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463414000484

In *Making Moros*, historian Michael C. Hawkins relates the Moro experience in the first decade or so of the American colonial project in the Philippines. Hawkins presents his subject squarely within the context of imperial historicism which, he argues, 'provided Americans with the ultimate philosopher's stone capable of contextualising colonialism's unpleasant details into an almost millenarian vision of homogeneous modernity' (p. 24). Americans constructed 'a win-win historicist narrative ... affirming the possibilities of imperial tutelage' within Moro province.