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Feminism is an arena of much contestation in and beyond Filipina/x/o American (FA) studies. As a political movement, it is claimed by many for its articulation of a set of critical concerns around, and resistance against, the deployment of dominant sex–gender categories in the hierarchic, exploitative, and oppressive organization of social identities, subjectivities, economic value, political power, and both human and nonhuman life. It has also been repudiated for its participation in the very orders of domination that it critiques, as exemplified in imperial and colonial feminisms, which shore up the universalism and essentialism of modern sex–gender binaries and heteropatriarchal structures without attention to the continuing role of modern colonialism, racism, and capitalism in shaping both the material worlds within which prevailing sex–gender social norms and practices operate and the hegemonic epistemological frameworks for understanding them.

The contestations within feminism are, however, also what make for its continuing salience. Feminism remains a powerful, radical force and framework of social struggle precisely because of its socially honed critical capacity and imperative to denaturalize the categories of being (woman, human, and nature) that form the basis on which hegemonic political orders are legitimated and reproduced. The radical capacity and imperative to denaturalize given ontologies have historically been enabled by the embodied experiences and perspectives of those relegated to the devalued, secondary term of the modern sex–gender binary as well as those deemed outside of the binary altogether, and therefore outside human civilization, which that same binary defines in opposition to savage nature. Colonized, racialized, and indigenous women, lesbians, queer/third gender, and trans and feminized persons live the conditions of marginalization, devaluation, violence, and predation that dominant sex–gender ontologies entail. It is the denaturalizing feminist and queer critical practice born of their struggles and resistance to these political ontological orders that makes for feminism’s continuing political and intellectual relevance and potential in the contemporary moment.

Philippine and FA feminist scholars have importantly grappled with the sociohistorical conditions and sex–gender ideologies shaping the experiences and predicaments of Filipina women (and men) in the Philippines as well as in the diaspora. They have produced invaluable work on the gendered and racialized experiences and conditions of Filipina/x/o and FA nurses and health care workers, domestic workers, mail-order brides, sex workers, and call workers. Each of these groups is situated within different national contexts of the global reproductive labor and service industry, including tourism and the hospitality industry surrounding U.S. military bases, as well as workers in manufacturing and business process outsourcing industries, peasant farmers in agricultural industries, guerillas in revolutionary movements, Muslims in war zones of Mindanao, and indigenous peoples in minoritized communities. These works exemplify the feminist ways of understanding the lived social experiences, identities, intimacies, and subjectivities of Filipina women and men as a crucial part of a broader order of social relations of gender and race that are embedded in and constitutive of the systems of power that have shaped their lives, including Spanish and U.S. colonialism, Philippine postcolonial nationalism, U.S. imperialism, and global capitalism.

Even as they critique Filipino ideologies and cultures of sexism and patriarchy, feminists thus also shed important light on the imbrication of social practice and cultures in political and economic systems of colonialism and racial capitalism, within which dominant sex–gender categories of difference operate as organizing principles. Feminists have highlighted, for example, the role of dominant heteropatriarchal sex–gender ideals of Spanish Catholic cultures in constituting Filipina womanhood and subjectivity in postcolonial, immigrant, and migrant communities, and the disciplining use of such ideals in fostering submissiveness, sacrifice, obedience, social conformity, hospitableness, and other national cultural *values* that women, as culture-bearers and culture-keepers, are charged with embodying. They highlight the histories of culture that shape the social identities and kinds of labor that Filipinas learn to inhabit and perform as part of their gendered role in reproducing their communities. In this way, scholars bring a feminist concern about the role of sex–gender categories in organizing social reproduction, an arena of examination that enables a radical interrogation of larger political orders and economies, insofar as these are understood as modes of organizing and (re)producing social life.

Beyond social identities, feminist scholars have also highlighted the role of modern Western sex–gender categories and codes in structuring international relations and economic policies (most prominently over migration and sexual and domestic labor), legal and moral regulations over social propriety and belonging (property, territory, and nationhood), state and ideological institutions (the police, military, family, religion, education, and media), and environmental praxis or relations to nonhuman natures and existence. Feminist scholars as well as artists working in literature, film, art, and cultural performance have similarly examined the discursive, psychic, affective, and sensorial dimensions of these colonial, capitalist, racist, and sexist projects, including imperial and domestic wars, and the complex negotiations over power and reality that can be seen as playing out in representation, performance, and aesthetic form, as well as in actions of everyday life.

Feminism does not only critique logics of domination but also attends to resistance and struggle, focusing attention on actual and potential transformative logics and practices, and on contradictory, destabilizing and subaltern logics, which testify to other forms of power and modes of life but are buried or made invisible or illegible by dominant ways of perceiving, knowing, and living.

Although historical forms of feminism are situated critiques from particular social contexts or sectors with their own ideological blind spots, feminism is not exclusively defined by the historical categories of struggle with which it is identified, namely, women, sex, and gender. However, as a political, social, and intellectual movement, it continues to be enriched by its own plural and conflictual histories of emergence and engagement. Indeed, its own imperatives to call into question naturalized forms of being directs feminism to a denaturalization of its own epistemologies of critical understanding, to consider the ways that, in our own continuing locatedness within orders that we cannot transcend, our own cognitive tools and habits of perception and understanding (including the very category of gender) are also to be re-evaluated and transformed.

Aware of the continuing hegemony of colonial epistemologies over national and global life, Philippine and FA feminists have been impelled to look within our own selves and communities, languages, and modes of cultural life, as well as within those of indigenous communities that our own Christianized communities have participated in marginalizing and alienating from ourselves, for other tools, concepts, figures, and social practices (*babaylan*, *pakikipagkapwa*) that would help us decolonize and radically remake dominant modes of life in the direction of social belonging and thriving not based on the debasement of others. How can we draw on the strengths of our own survival and continuing traditions, for ways of living, thinking, and feeling—seemingly outmoded domestic forms of shared personhood and social being—that we already rely and even thrive on even as these might be diminished or proscribed by modern orders? How might we find in these older ways but also in newer experiments and improvisations, life-enabling revisions, and variations arising from the messy interfaces of subaltern and dominant norms of social life?

Like all radical transformative movements, feminism does not seek to institutionalize itself or perpetuate itself for its own sake but rather works toward its own obsolescence as oppositional critique. Unlike many nonfeminist revolutions, however, feminism understands the processes of its own movement as inseparable from the gains it hopes to achieve. It is a method of knowing, a way of working and living, a social praxis, and rehearsing the futures it aspires to be the means and model of realizing in the present.

See also [Critical Race Theory](#); [Filipina American Women](#); [Intersectionality Theory](#); [Pinayism](#); [Sexism](#); [Transgender and Nonbinary Filipinx Americans](#)

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