

GABRIELA activist: Class analysis and anti-imperialism necessary for the women's movement

written by Jo Quiambao
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As we celebrate Women's History Month and reflect on the contributions of women in society, it is critical to highlight our struggles as Filipino women with an anti-

imperialist perspective. As a community organizer with GABRIELA Washington, D.C., I've realized there is a need to go beyond U.S. identity politics in the political movement and study the experiences of women with a class analysis.

Coni Ledesma, from the Executive Committee of the International Women's Alliance (IWA), provided further context during her speech for GABRIELA USA's 2021 General Assembly:

"We believe that women's oppression started with the development of private property and the development of classes. And women will continue to be oppressed as long as there are classes and private ownership of the means of production. That today, imperialism exploits the majority of women because the majority of women belong to the oppressed classes.

"That is why building an anti-imperialist women's organization is imperative today. An organization that recognizes that women are oppressed as long as there is private property. That it is imperialism that keeps women oppressed and exploited."

The COVID-19 pandemic only exposed the worsening conditions of working-class people in our communities, both in the U.S. and abroad. Fears of contracting COVID-19 at the workplace were exacerbated by the longer working hours (if employees/staff were reduced in workplaces) or cut hours as people experienced reduction of hours, or complete layoffs.

Reporting in-person to work, without the understanding of guidance or particular protocols and restrictions, further worsened spaces that congregated workers (or people) and confined them in spaces — i.e. factories, prisons, detention centers, schools, healthcare facilities, service industry workplaces, etc.

Even prior to the pandemic, working people had already experienced being overworked, underpaid, lacked protection, and have been neglected by state

governments that lacked sufficient handling and planned responses to COVID-19 prior to reopening phases, which only proves that state governments only view workers as dispensable.

In being exposed to the experiences of migrant Filipino women, our kababaihan (women) also share a common struggle of economic hardship. Their work is a cheap source of labor and a commodity bought and sold in order to produce more profit. Lack of citizenship status creates an abusive economic environment where the employer utilizes the lack of immigration status to either threaten or further exploit women.

Abusive or controlling dynamics in the workplace against women only prevent women from reporting or exposing their conditions because of the fear of retaliation or losing their only source for economic survival.

With common struggles and coercive conditions, migrant women bear the brunt of worsening exploitation and oppression.

For Filipino women, their hardships are even more dangerous when encountered with harassment, sexual assault, physical or verbal abuse, and other controlling and power dynamics that become manipulative and harmful — whether in the workplace or at home. Being unable to afford basic needs on their own and feeling shamed, Filipino women for these reasons sometimes stay with an abusive boss or spouse/partner.

As one of the largest sectors of the population living outside of the Philippines, Filipino women face an urgent call to unite with a collective understanding of who our oppressor, our enemy, truly is — U.S. imperialism. While holding the culprits and perpetrators accountable in situations met with violence and abuse, it is not enough. It is not enough to bash the cis-presenting male, it is not enough to name patriarchy, misogyny and the looming arguments about a women's right to her body.

It's beyond these symptoms of oppression. The conditions of women demand further investigation and unity in fighting our common oppressor.

A woman's place in the struggle should always be linked to the conditions of people, of the most marginalized in our communities. These conditions necessitate a broader demand to organize women, particularly among the ranks of the working class. Our fight for human rights and protection as Filipino women is dependent upon the growth of a mass movement to defend and protect the livelihood and rights of the people. With a deeper understanding of our common enemy and building an organized movement, we can truly defend her, defend Filipino women, and fight for our liberation!

Jo Quiambao is a community organizer from GABRIELA Washington, D.C. GABRIELA D.C. was formed as an organization in the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia area of GABRIELA USA. The organization formed as a vehicle to empower Filipinas in our communities, whose human rights and welfare are being attacked and neglected. Founders of GABRIELA D.C. united to rise up, take action, and advance the national democratic movement as a path to genuine liberation, equality and justice for all marginalized Filipinos in the motherland and abroad.

