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She Sows Seeds of Hope: Intersectional Feminism and Urban Agriculture in the Philippines

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Abstract: This research employs intersectional feminist analysis on the emergence of urban agriculture during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines. Intersectional feminism asserts that oppression is a compounded reality; aspects of inequalities that transpire within the separate spheres of sex, gender, race, age, and class overlap creating an intricate web of oppression. For this reason, in unearthing the depths of marginalization, these intersecting realities must be assessed. With this, this research evaluates the experiences of women urban agriculturalists during the pandemic. Towards the end, this paper recommends that a compassionate and responsive post-pandemic food resiliency program must be inclusive, just, and dignifying most especially to the sector that feeds its nation.

Key Words: intersectional feminism, pandemic studies, agriculture, urban farming, urban gardening

1. INTRODUCTION

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the Philippines, access to food and essential goods have become more limited. Those who are living in Metro Manila, which is considered as the epicenter of the pandemic, were subjected to strict quarantine procedures (Dizon and Medina 2020, 2). These include the nationwide implementation of the following: curfew hours that vary per city, one quarantine pass per household, barangay- or citywide lockdown, and the strict observance of the minimum health standards (i.e., wearing of face masks and face shields and at least 1-meter physical distancing). To avoid mass gathering, establishments such as markets and grocery stores were closed. Eventually, the entire Filipino workforce needed to either continue working from home or close permanently. These reasons plus the insurmountable risk of exposure to the dreaded virus, prompted lots of Filipinos to resort to urban agriculture. Generally,

this involves planting and eventually harvesting crops and/or raising animals that can be used for personal, household or even community usage or sustenance (American Planning 2011). Since cities are highly populated or dense, urban farmers prefer vertical gardening, balcony herb farming or backyard vegetable gardening.

According to various studies on the prevalence of urban farming during the pandemic, most home or community gardeners are women (Advincula and Sunga 2021). Such phenomenon gave birth to the term *plantita*, which means “plant lover and nurturer” (Advincula and Sunga 2021). The term itself highlights the gendered aspect of urban farming; in times of crisis, women are the key to food resiliency, environmental sustainability, and economic recovery. On the other hand, the term also overshadows the different inequalities that women urban farmers face: they are overworked yet underpaid, overburdened yet underrepresented.



As the country prepares itself for post-pandemic recovery, this research claims that an effective plan on agriculture and food resiliency necessitates a consideration of intersectional feminism. Since “All inequality is not created equal,” *intersectional feminist analysis*, as coined by the Kimberly Crenshaw (UN Women, 2020), “shows the way that people’s social identities can overlap, creating compounding experiences of discrimination.” The determinants of oppression – race, gender, age, and economic status – are varied and affect differently. For this reason, to address this discrimination these overlapping realities must be unearthed and assessed. With this, the discussion of this paper is divided into three: (1) intersectional feminism and other related studies, (2) structural and representational intersectionality and women urban agriculturalists, and (3) conclusion. Towards the end, through this framework, this paper recommends that a compassionate and responsive post-pandemic food resiliency program must be inclusive, just, and dignifying most especially to the sector that feeds its nation.

2. Weeding it Out: Intersectional Feminism and/on the Environment and Agriculture

Intersectional feminism as an analytic approach attempts to disentangle different patterns or causes of oppression is traceable to Black feminism. Kimberly Crenshaw (1989, 149), an American philosopher, lawyer, and professor of law, initially coins “intersectionality” as “the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these social interactions in terms of power.” Since discrimination is deeply rooted, an intersectional feminist approach necessitates an evaluation of its different sources, which are oftentimes overlooked. The appropriate response then recognizes these marginal aspects, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and even economic status. In championing civil rights and antiracist policies, Crenshaw (Colfer, Basnet, and Ilhalainen, 2018, 4) asserts that white women’s experiences of racism cannot account for black women’s and vice versa: “the experience of racism is surely different for black men and black women, for white men and white women, just as white women and black women may experience sexism differently.” It is through this recognition of the various lived experiences of an

individual’s narratives on oppression, each unlike and has its own merits, makes intersectional feminism different: it therefore “conceptualizes social categories as interacting with and constituting one another to create unique social locations that vary according to time and place” (Havinsky 2014, 9).

Even if the seed of intersectional feminism germinates from Black feminism, its relevance in addressing oppression is recognized in other fields. Other related realms are (1) intersectional environmentalism, (2) ecofeminism, and (3) agricultural studies. Although both intersectional environmentalism and ecofeminism recognize that destruction of the environment causes social and environmental injustice, the former is broader than the latter. For Leah Thomas (Capshaw-Mack, 2021), who coins the concept of “intersectional environmentalism” referring to the “inclusive version of environmentalism that advocates for both the protection of people and the planet.” It is mainly anchored on the idea that degradation of the environment disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). On the other hand, ecofeminism is environmentalism and feminism. Ecofeminists argue that women and nature are interrelated. Even if it exists way before intersectionality, some scholars of ecofeminism points out the field benefits from intersectional feminism because it provides a paradigm shift or a “nodal point” for disparate approaches” (Lykke 2005; Kings 2017).

The last related field is agricultural studies. According to Bobby J. Smith II (2019), a sociologist and professor, to work towards food justice, there is a need to consider “how systems of inequality, such as racism and classicism, influences the social, cultural, political, and economic and environmental dimensions of food.” In his research, he presents case studies of black farmers and queer farmers “to show how these two groups create and (re)create emancipatory spaces for farming, food, and community” (Smith 2019). Essentially, this argues against the traditional narrative of American’s “food justice system” that farming solely belongs to white heterosexual men. Likewise, in a study conducted by International Food Policy Research Institute (Malapit, Quisumbing, and Hodour 2020), entitled “Intersectionality and Addressing Equity in Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health [ANH],” asserts that to properly address the issues of inequity, there is a need to recognize the multiple, overlapping ways on how people are marginalized. These includes



“gender, age, geographic location, but a combination of these unique to their particular set of circumstances” (Malapit, Quisumbin, Hodour 2020, 1).

3. Plants vs the Pandemic: Intersectionality and Urban Farming in Pandemic Philippines

To evaluate inequalities that urban agriculturalists experience during the pandemic, this study borrows two approaches from Crenshaw. Initially, she presents three main conceptual methods: (1) *structural intersectionality*, which refers to the oppression in the “intersection of race and gender”; (2) *political intersectionality* pertains to political or policies that generate violence against women, and (3) *representational intersectionality* focuses “cultural construction (stereotypes and narratives)” that exacerbates oppression (Colfer, Basnett, and Ilhalainen, 2018). For this study, the discussion on urban agriculture during the pandemic focuses on structural and representational approaches only.

“Urban agriculture,” according to Purdue University simply refers to growing or producing food in urban places or cities. In the Philippines, such is understood as community farms, growing food in one’s backyard or balcony, and even rearing poultry animals. An example is the Quezon City’s “Sharon Farm” under the GrowQC Food Security Program. Established by Mayor Joy Belmonte, it is a 5,000 square meter farm that produces vegetables from seedlings. According to the study conducted by Barrameda (2017), urban farming has long been considered by Filipinos even during the pre-pandemic times. Based on her respondents who participated in the “Joy of Urban Farming Project,” because of limited space that city dwellers commonly experience, they learned to adapt by employing the following methods: recycling materials such as styrofoam for container gardening, vertical gardening, and raised bed planting. The respondents report numerous benefits as well: “lowered household food expenses, developed recycling and solid and water waste management, access to fresh and safer foods” (Barrameda 2017, 51-2). Most importantly, Barrameda asserts that urban farming has a gendered aspect. Since majority of home gardeners are women, she (Barrameda 2017, 55) claims:

The women, being primarily responsible for food preparation and consumption in the household are the ones pressured to look for food when it is not readily available. With women’s home gardens, households are able to smoothen out fluctuations in consumption and incomes. Yet, such contribution is not distinctly recognized and valued because it is indirectly masked as part of the women’s domestic responsibilities.

Prior to the pandemic, data proves that 23% of the agricultural workforce are women (PSA 2018). In fact, the agriculture sector is one of the largest sectors of women’s employment, but they are unrecognized and underrepresented (ADB 2013). Even if such is the case, the existing wage gap between male and female is staggering. The tasks delegated to women include “planting, manual weeding, and crop establishment are accorded lower salaries” as opposed to duties designated to men - “plowing, land preparation, and care of irrigation canals” (Ani, Casasola 2020; Pandey et al., 2010). Women farmers earn US\$0.30 less compared to male farmers, perform household chores, manage the household budget (Ani, Casasola 2020; Akter et al 2017). When it comes to land ownership or property rights, women are less likely to inherit much less their own land (Ani, Casasola 2020; Quisumbing et al 2014). Overburdened by farm work and household responsibilities, women agriculturalists generally do not have proper access to health services.

During the pandemic, these inequalities are reinforced. Ofelia Bagotlo (2021), founding member of the Homeless People’s Federation of the Philippines shares that in a community farm she organizes in Payatas, Quezon City, the essential component of their effort are grassroots women. Initially working with three women volunteers only, their group expanded to 38 with still more women working than men. They earn a little while providing food and good nutrition as well during the pandemic. Moreover, since the Philippines records the longest lockdown in the world, the quarantine measures prevented women from selling their produce. Aside from this, the virus also generated a “shadow pandemic” or gender-based violence, which transpires globally. Incidence of femicide and domestic abuse increased since women are locked inside their houses with their perpetrators. In Metro Manila alone, there are 5,040 cases of violence against women and children reported at the start of the quarantine (ADB, 2013).

This is understood to be underreported since all government efforts are mostly centered on the virus.

Aside from the “shadow pandemic” women urban agriculturalists also experience what the economists term as the “SHE-cession” “because of its disproportionate and lingering impact on women’s finances and economic prospects” (Leyesa and Flores-Obanil 2021). Among those women are indigenous farmers; lockdown and border restrictions prevent them from marketing their harvest. Due to the virus, indigenous women farmers also worry about their access to health services and education.

On the other hand, another phenomenon rooted because of the pandemic is the “plantita” or “someone who loves likes, appreciates, and is fond of different kinds of plants” (Sunga and Advincula 2021, 93). In a study conducted by Sunga and Advincula, among their 104 respondents, 70% are women urban agriculturalists aged 18 and above. Aside from reasons such as mental health benefits and aesthetics, participants claim that gardening gives them sense of purpose and alternative source of food while nurturing the environment. This “plantita phenomenon” also addresses the concerns raised by intersectional environmentalists: as urban agriculture gives women sense of purpose and food security, it also promotes environmental protection.

Table 7.2b
Daily real wage rate of female agricultural workers, by region, Philippines, 2012-2016 (in pesos)

REGION	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Philippines	160.10	169.27	171.05	177.47	181.10
CAR	174.30	188.19	192.60	194.36	190.88
Ilocos Region	220.39	222.79	190.87	198.20	233.37
Cagayan Valley	196.49	195.34	194.94	198.92	222.11
Central Luzon	197.96	232.70	192.52	214.48	242.78
CALABARZON	189.28	222.17	166.67	172.59	231.60
MIMAROPA	163.95	171.24	170.98	181.20	169.76
Bicol Region	159.04	147.76	116.07	119.74	156.40
Western Visayas	148.39	151.69	154.74	156.18	159.69
Central Visayas	132.61	180.05	140.77	150.08	147.50
Eastern Visayas	128.95	141.67	112.75	112.02	157.05
Zamboanga Peninsula	135.92	142.28	146.16	152.39	146.33
Northern Mindanao	136.91	135.11	137.91	131.03	146.12
Davao Region	135.08	149.50	153.09	158.30	155.32
SOCCSKSARGEN	145.86	147.86	149.03	158.57	154.94
Caraga	151.65	170.58	175.57	187.60	179.39
ARMM	142.94	158.66	88.64	102.97	154.58

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA)

Table 7.2a
Daily real wage rate of male agricultural workers, by region, Philippines, 2012-2016 (in pesos)

REGION	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Philippines	171.81	176.44	181.01	192.01	193.22
CAR	183.83	197.73	204.33	209.68	204.80
Ilocos Region	233.79	238.68	233.66	238.18	242.33
Cagayan Valley	196.49	217.21	222.24	231.40	225.07
Central Luzon	237.02	256.96	260.28	254.27	262.51
CALABARZON	213.33	228.64	230.07	231.59	231.98
MIMAROPA	180.91	190.56	192.64	195.12	189.97
Bicol Region	153.55	153.83	168.14	170.26	183.33
Western Visayas	158.18	160.87	164.42	166.93	161.03
Central Visayas	141.10	151.02	152.34	160.02	157.88
Eastern Visayas	145.30	147.90	159.43	158.97	158.94
Zamboanga Peninsula	142.31	155.48	154.36	158.14	152.12
Northern Mindanao	145.90	150.87	153.87	159.69	150.86
Davao Region	144.69	165.71	163.96	169.19	165.42
SOCCSKSARGEN	152.58	155.06	156.23	166.16	159.24
Caraga	164.20	176.19	182.50	195.26	190.56
ARMM	150.63	151.61	153.70	162.33	160.52

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA)

Tables 1 and 2. These tables show the real wage rates of agricultural workers based on sex and geographical location. Notice the disparity of wages

between the sexes and the ever-decreasing provincial rates.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Urban agriculture during the pandemic thrives because of numerous beneficial reasons. Aside from providing healthy food for the household, if the urban farmers experience overproduction, the produce can be sold at a reasonable price. It thereby augments the income of the household since many were left unemployed during the pandemic. In addition, urban farming is also considered as therapeutic as it lessens the quarantine fatigue, anxiety, and even depression heightened or stemming from the pandemic. Since nature is being toiled and people’s consciousness are slowly directed to its preservation, the environment is gradually renewed.



Figure 1. The Maginhawa Community Pantry. This is the first community pantry established by Ana Patricia Non, a 26-year-old woman. Through this initiative, farmers can donate their crops and feed dozens of families. Since then, it has inspired other community pantries in other parts of the Philippines.

However, through structural intersectionality, as this approach focuses on the intersection of race and gender, it recognizes that the experiences of oppression are different from one race, class, gender, sexual orientation. Although the pandemic is a global phenomenon, Filipino women urban agriculturalists are mostly affected. Since almost all workforce has been halted, they needed to earn more *and* nurture more both at the same time.



Even if they are overburdened already, they are still underpaid and underrepresented since household chores and gardening are both unpaid jobs. In the Philippines, women perform more domestic tasks more than men both prior and during the pandemic (ADB 2013). On top of these, the pandemic forced women to be with their perpetrators of domestic abuse. Lastly, access to reproductive health services is disrupted during the lockdown adding more to their anxiety and burden.

Through representational intersectionality, it highlights the fact that one of the reasons why women are underappreciated in the field of agriculture is because of the stereotype that toiling the land or seas solely belongs to men. Even if 20% of farmers and fisherfolk are women who also work hard to contribute, their salary is not at par with their men counterpart. Another reason is the lack of participation of women in important agencies that perform important decision making. Yet during the pandemic, a study proves that women are at the forefront of Covid-19 response and healthcare.

Since the government is preparing for post-pandemic food resiliency plan, these intersecting realities must be recognized and addressed. The pre-existing marginalization of agricultural workers causes the Philippines, considered as an agricultural nation, to lag behind its neighboring Southeast Asian nations, such as Vietnam and Thailand. In short, it must provide equal and just compensation to all farmers, farmworkers, and fisherfolk regardless of sex, gender, and orientation. If 60% of our nation's agriculturalists are women who perform well and are compensated better, appreciated more, and well-represented then our nation can foresee a future that is healthy and wealthy. The system must also protect the dignity of laborers by providing access to healthcare and education, especially to girls and the elderly.

The pandemic exacerbates the pre-existing marginalization. Women, senior citizens, children, persons with disabilities, and solo parents have compounded burdens. An inclusive post-pandemic recovery plan should highly consider the roles that women play especially the urban agriculturalists who are feeding and nurturing the nation.

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