

**EXCERPT FROM GODDESS TONGUE:  
IN SEARCH OF THE LANGUAGE OF FEMINIST  
MOTHERHOOD**

**Maria Leovina Amante Nicolas**

**ABSTRACT**

What creativity really is, its truest metaphor, is the steady growth of life, like the life of a baby in a mother's womb. This work follows that development—in visible and invisible ways. Using the stages of motherhood as form to discuss motherhood as content, my work is my personal search to answer the question: what is feminist mothering? This excerpt focuses on the early stages: the richness of the womb and of the mind, the susceptibility for the conception of an idea, and the discovery of that idea's beginnings.

*For Isis who, at 3 years old, knows me better than anyone and for whom I will change the world as much as I can*

I do not delude myself, as Man does, that I create in proud isolation... Woman's creation, far from being like Man's must be exactly like her creation of children; that is, it must come out of her own blood, englobed by her womb, nourished with her own milk. It must be a human creation, of flesh, it must be different from Man's abstractions.

~ Anais Nin, from the *Diaries*  
(an epigraph from Judy Chicago's *Through the Flower*)

**Before the beginning...**

*Someday you will ask where you came from and people will tell you about Genesis, humankind's greatest landmark where the margin ended and the paragraph began. They will*

*tell you that you came from a lowly rib and that they came from earth and were formed by god himself. Someday they will tell you to worship a word, just one word because that word created the world.*

*It is one of the most beautiful stories you will ever hear. Empty space and right beside it a letter begins to break its whiteness, its chaos. It is a beautiful story but it is just one of the many.*

### **In the beginning ...**

*The world began when god spoke. And when god spoke he became real. And all who can hear and see him are saved. Men, some of them even holy, will teach you their language in order to see, in order to talk to their god.*

*Isis, my daughter, I write to you now across time and space to show you there are many ways of speaking. Women are joyfully and sadly margins; men, deceptively, paragraphs. But if you look closely, press your ear on the pages, you will hear how the tongue of the Goddess speaks in volumes, how she speaks of another word. If you learn it, you will never be voiceless.*

Is an idea an ejaculation? In the conceptual silence a voice spurts out an utterance bright with truth. Is art a sudden existence in the void, something from nothing? Or is it a climax that builds up in intensity and passion until it is brilliantly released to the world, impregnating barren minds?

To a woman, the creation of art or the beginning of an idea is an internal quake that rocks the softest, most secret places. Creation is imperceptible, except for convulsions that can only be perceived by touch. To a mother, creation is a long, arduous journey of nurture. The work of art or a new thought is grown alternately in love and in painful necessity. It evolves as it makes use of blood and flesh, mind and soul. It runs through veins and

explodes at nerve endings. It usurps through an umbilical cord, sucking in both love and rage. The process takes its time until involuntarily new art, new thought is born in a laborious series of moments to become an entity on its own, getting ready to learn how to walk.

This work is about the conception, gestation, birth and mothering of words and child.

I began with foraging in the wildlands of feminist ideology, in search of sustenance for my infant-daughter/thesis in my womb. An ARM of women, that is Association for Research on Mothering (ARM) based in Toronto, Canada identified a dearth in resources for feminist mothering. ARM president Andrea O'Reilly, in a call for papers wrote, "... numerous scholars have documented how and why patriarchal motherhood is oppressive to women. In contrast, little has been written on empowered, or more specifically, feminist, mothering."<sup>1</sup>

There is no self-help book on feminist motherhood and mothering. The rich and contrasting terrain of feminism just shows that there are still unexplored territories. Feminist mothers must learn how to forage through feral lands to find little nuts of enlightenment and berries of clues. But I believe some women have gone into those wildernesses. They are now prophets who proclaim their faith and in my search I have stumbled upon some of them in moments of grace.

## **PART ONE: CONCEPTION**

Pregnancy starts with conception.

This happens when an ovum, or egg is shed from a woman's ovary about midway between menstrual periods, and becomes fertilized by the male cell, or sperm, usually in the outer end of the Fallopian tube.

—*Stages of Pregnancy and Labour*,  
Department of Health, NSW

To seek visions, to dream dreams is essential, and it is also essential to try new ways of living, to make room for serious experimentation, to respect the effort even where it fails.

—Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*

November 5, 2002

*Adrienne's words find a place on my wall where they are to remind me not to be discouraged or embarrassed to have found the essence of living as a woman of intuition.*

In *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous implores that women write their bodies and my dilemma was I didn't know my body well enough. But I was determined to be an expert on my body through every possible way: lovers, sickness, food, health, vice.

*Medusa* was, for me, the start of writing, teaching, studying and even loving through a language that is of the feminine. I wanted to discover how eloquent my body could become by letting it speak to lovers, celebrate the senses, and manifest itself on paper.

I explored new ways of writing, and even reading, to understand Cixous' *écriture féminine*. Having gone waist deep into the waters of feminism, I began to dread returning to the disappointing shores of man and his tiring, boring language. Though there was a threat of drowning, I wanted to learn how to breathe underwater because women's writing is fluid and unexplored like oceans.

During that exploration, form and content fused. Thought and text became inextricable from one another. There was no difference between what I write, how I write, and who I am.

Judy Chicago's *Through the Flower* is an example of a woman speaking and creating art through her body. It tells the story of a feminist artist's struggle with form and content in a patriarchal world of the visual arts in the 1970s. Though focusing primarily on her sculptures, installations, paintings, personal life, and advocacy, I saw in Chicago's book a beacon so as not to lose my way in rendering my work in this intuitive way. In her introduction to Chicago's book, Anais Nin briefly describes this new rhetorics of women, "I consider this the particular contribution of woman, the ability to blend the personal with the objective beyond the personal... The work requires fortitude. And when heart, intuition, emotion have played their part, the intellect can make a synthesis."

I saw that the established and accepted forms of writing within and around the academe, formerly dominated by men, were limiting. To begin with a problem and to test a hypothesis for a solution using a prescribed process to come up with a conclusion was too ideal if not simplistic. Add to that the requirement of adding a body of readings to show erudition, scholarship.

In Robin Morgan's introduction to *Sisterhood is Powerful*, I found a couple of lines of a non-poem, non-letter—one of those pieces that defy genres—that puts in cadence one of my assumptions:<sup>2</sup>

except that Women's Liberation has taught me not  
to be afraid of being incorrect, and most of all of  
being personal

I found that process went against what I wanted to do; it was trying to dictate my experiences. When I read poets, novelists, and feminist theorists, my experience of them is unlike a student in a library but more of a woman amongst grandmothers, mothers, sisters, friends, and women strangers and enemies.

For what is the purpose of a prescribed academic form than to assure the high court of scholarship that a student knows how to follow instructions, that she uses the best known process there is and that she can't come up with a discovery on her own?

I can use the energies I would have put into writing a graduate thesis about some major literary phenomenon that needed posterity for finding an answer to a pressing personal question. How must a feminist, new mother like me raise a daughter?

To write about women is to write about an unpredictable subject matter of relative novelty. Not that to be novel is any compliment for us. The experiences of women, being a recent object of scholarly investigation, must already indicate that the existing methods of study and forms of composition need to be reconsidered.

All writers know that life and writing are so lovingly entwined and that in such kind of embrace one would not be able to determine where one ended and the other began.

And so, my work seeks to en flesh that embrace. This is being rendered with passion and rage, in celebration and in mourning, with ambiguous tenderness. This is replete with my stories and readings, researches, narratives, and interviews of other women who are mothers and who are not, who are feminists and who are not. My language is not put on or chosen like the rhetorics of "learned men". Its language is natural, harmonic and changing, honest and brooding. This is an infant, seed of possibilities—to be planted in the reader. I seek to encourage women students to write from their bodies, to discover how mothers can be feminist mothers and to illustrate that the body is the key to how women can speak more clearly and more forcefully.

In writing about feminist motherhood and mothering using the language of the feminist body, men are doubly removed by the experiences of being a woman and of being a mother. This

concerns me because feminist mothering is not limited to women. Fathers, too, must learn how. I follow Judy Chicago's lead on why I still choose this form, "It is not enough for us to learn to identify with men; we have done that all our lives. *Men have to learn to identify with us*, and it is this process that feminist performance and feminist art can promote."<sup>3</sup>

### **Fertility**

What could an ordinary, single woman of typical middle class origins bring to the forefront of feminist discourse when she had been spared of living on the "battlegrounds"? I am not saying that there is a war between men and women, I am saying there is a war between women and oppression. I dare use war because oppression kills or maims the spirit and body in both explosive and insidious ways.

In the Philippines in the past, feminism was linked to nationalism or political activism.<sup>4</sup> Today, that war is fought on the grounds of rape, marital or incestuous abuse, reproductive rights or non-rights, equality in legislation, poverty, equal access to opportunities, and child protection. Outside of these war zones, in more peaceful areas of life the battles are ambiguous. I neither earned medals nor battle scars. I was fighting on a purely theoretical plane in the relative safety of peacetime academe. I was a propagandist and not a revolutionary. And when I did find myself in the middle of feminist struggles I discovered that I was inadequate and alien. I began to ask, what is an authentic feminist?

First, the word *feminist*.

I have retyped and deleted that word in this paper over and over, debating with myself whether to use the word *feminist* or not. *Feminist* has acquired some negative definitions through the years. No woman would easily say "yes" to the question of whether she is a feminist.

In her book *Who Stole Feminism?: How Women Betrayed Women*, Christina Hoff Sommers distinguishes "equity

feminists” from “gender feminists”. The latter is identified with personal outrage and resentment. They are “articulate, prone to self-dramatization, and chronically offended”. In a way, they are the feminists even women dislike and don’t want to be associated with these days. However, gender feminists are warriors who have “a concern for women and a determination to see them fairly treated”.

On the other hand, Hoff Sommers describes equity feminists, women with First Wave or “mainstream” feminist influences: “Now that it has overthrown most of the legal impediments to women’s rights, equity feminism is no longer galvanizing; it does not produce fanatics. Moderates in general are not temperamentally suited to activism. They tend to be reflective and individualistic. They do not network. They do not rally. They do not recruit. They do not threaten their opponents with loss of jobs or loss of patronage. They are not especially litigious.” An equity feminist’s demands are simple, she “wants for women what she wants for everyone: fair treatment without discrimination”.

There are various kinds of feminists ranging in principles, purposes and methods. Their clashing definitions are complicated and impossible to classify and their interactions are much like mother-daughter and sister-sister relationships. After all, all feminisms are the daughters of one Mother Feminism and sibling rivalry is nothing new.

So I contemplated using the word womanist, the way Alice Walker defines it, simply because it is beautiful and I understand it. She writes in *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, “Womanist Prose”:

Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness



of entire people, male *and* female... Traditionally universalist [meaning sees all color of skin]... Traditionally capable... Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*... Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

Who would not want to be a womanist? Who isn't? Oh well, feminist will have to do. Feminist will always do. There must be nothing to be afraid of the word. It holds its original power.

I do not believe that to be an authentic feminist I must consciously expose myself to victimization or that I must nit-pick in order to identify my own "oppression".<sup>5</sup> Where I am and who I am is a ground for feminist discourse at closer scrutiny.

Let's look back at one of the basic concepts of Feminism as identified by Marilyn French in *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*:

Feminism is the only serious, coherent, and universal philosophy, that offers an alternative to patriarchal thinking and structures. Feminists believe in a few simple tenets. They believe that women are human beings, that the two sexes are (at least) equal in all significant ways, and that this equality must be publicly recognized. They believe that qualities traditionally associated with women—the feminine principle—are (at least) equal in value to those traditionally associated with men—the masculine principle—and that this equality must be publicly recognized. Finally, feminists believe the personal is the political—that is, that the value structure of a culture is identical in both public and private areas, that what happens in the bedroom has everything to do with what happens in the boardroom, and vice

versa, and that, mythology notwithstanding, at present the same sex is in control in both places.

Even if asked to accept a general definition of feminism as such, at present young women do not call themselves feminists. They do not believe that feminism is still relevant to their lives or they never even acknowledge that feminism *is* the reason why feminism *seems* to be irrelevant to their lives. They just assumed an aimless definition for feminism. (Young women think that feminism is all about going Dutch on a romantic date or that it is all about hating and blaming all men.)

For feminism, the personal is the political. There is a glass ceiling. There is a bell jar. There are unreasonable expectations. There are double standards. There exists aesthetic and physical stereotypes, and if not stereotypes, they are impossible ideals. There is the objectifying gaze, the lecherous glance. There is verbal or implied inattention or rebuke. There is merely condescension, not true respect. There is no safety. For other women, no ease.

The "encounters" I've had struck me as trivial. I neither had the experience nor the language to present an effective testimony before a convention of women or even just among a small circle of women friends. My brand of feminism seemed to me to be superficially all in my head, in my readings, and purely confined to the literary. Not all women bring their politics to the streets. Not all women have eloquent issues. I knew all the signs and can identify a threatening predicament and protect myself from victimization. But no area in my life then called upon me to question or abandon that comfort zone.

I never realized that I belonged to a class of women. I was unattached. Neither rich nor impoverished, I could practically do whatever I wanted. I was neither bogged down nor hoisted up gender-wise by any particular religious belief.

I was an admirer of feminist principles and discourse but I never participated in activism nor was I a member of any feminist collective. In the academe, the lectures I gave were infused with a more than satisfactory level of gender awareness making me literally an armchair feminist and no more. Looking back, I saw that my identity was unexceptional. A lot of single women out there would never really align themselves with feminism but nevertheless are assertive of their rights and very aware of the issues that involve them as women.

Simply teaching feminism was like teaching History, relevant as far as it has affected past lives or the direction of our collective narratives. Naturally, that effect is hardly self-evident in the present context and in the personal realm. Women in this country have been voting since 1937. The Filipino suffragists started lobbying in 1906. Today, we think voting is as natural as taxes. Most of the young women I was teaching didn't see anything wrong with participating in the pageant of the blackest, straightest hair or the whitest, smoothest underarms. They thought there was no need to analyze the differences between gestures of love and acts of submission. Most of the young men think that they are honorary women just because they couldn't imagine hitting their girlfriends. Feminism in my ordinary classroom is textbook material, all theory.

It seemed to me, I was over with feminism. It was like a religion in which without grace, without being "touched" there is no possibility of belief and baptism. For the young women I taught, feminism *is* history. How does one make something new out of an "incident" as "far out" as feminism? I believe many women out there speak out without acknowledging that the vocabulary and syntax they use are all gifts of the women's movement. I believe many women sneer at the word feminism without attributing that freedom to sneer, to express themselves and the phenomenon of

actually being listened to as feminism's influence. I believe they think that it is enough that they know their rights and can choose and act.

What I considered as the end of thought was the awakening of answers.

This work aims to find a way to make feminism relevant and understandable to a younger generation of women, our students and our daughters, who may be led to believe that there is no need for vigilance. We need a new language for mothering these young women who think equality has been achieved and as Marilyn French says is "publicly recognized":

If feminism is a culture, how do we pass it on? I need to know what to say to my daughter. I need to know how she can be freer than me.<sup>6</sup>

Yes, feminism may impress one as *passé* these days. But what we must look out for are the moments when we would need feminism to process certain past experiences and moments when, like an exhibitionist wearing a tattered coat in a public park, patriarchy would flash its ugly little head.<sup>7</sup> Most importantly, we need feminism when we consider the future—being mothers and fathers of that future. We must all be adept at feminist mothering to assure that one day the oppression will stop.

### **Ovulation**

A woman's body is most fecund during ovulation. Some women claim that they can tell when they are ovulating. It is said that the sexual drive of women is strongest during this time because the nature of life is it always wants to be born.

We've often heard that ideas evolve. I want to say my work is ovulated.

According to the Mayo clinic, if you are a woman who sometimes experience a pain on one side of your lower abdomen and you don't know what it is, keep track of its

timing. Chances are it occurs midway through your menstrual cycle, about 14 days before your next menstrual period.

During the time I prepared to write about feminist mothering, I felt what many women who can tell they are ovulating say they feel. It is called *mittelschmerz* which means “middle pain”—pain during ovulation.

After giving birth, I became an expert on my own *mittelschmerz* but before that it must have been easy for me to monthly dismiss it as some other gastro-intestinal manifestation.

Now I see that women’s writing—all women’s art—begins as an ovulation. In the last two years, since I joined the print media, writing has become half the time an obligation and half the time a challenge and mental exercise. But *Goddess Tongue* is different. There was pain during its initial stages, in some indistinct part where my body, mind and spirit converge. It was something like a drawn out ache from longing or like quiet tremors of excitement. Often ideas would come to me but they would turn out to be just minor gastro-intestinal disturbances of the playful mind. But in this one, I knew something was happening. I was metaphysically ovulating.

My work was not a spurt of enlightenment nor a bulb suddenly switched on. It was a tiny egg that moved, a tiny egg that is not yet, a tiny egg that did not know what it was going to become but instinctively knew where it was heading.

So it is no wonder that the form of my writing has followed the process of motherhood. There is a distinct correspondence between how *this*, my work, came about and how my daughter Isis came into my life. Both would take years before birthing. Both would be brought about by seemingly unrelated events and images. Both would be a work in progress and would grow side by side.

I know when my daughter was conceived. I have the date written on a journal. I know the exact time, the exact place. Not that the date or the moment bordered on the

mystical, not that I knew then my life has reached a turning point where it inevitably surged on uncontrolled by me. I was simply following what Anne Wilson-Schaef fervently advised, "You need to claim the events of your life to make yourself yours." I didn't know that on the days when I claimed the events of my life through zealous journal writing—to points of maniacal logbook notations—my life was growing another life of its own. That was 2000, towards the turn of the real millennium.

But the more significant thing is my daughter was ovulated years ahead, on a day unmarked in my journals. She came to me in the summer of 1999, one afternoon on a concrete bench on Dumaguete's boulevard.

I sat there with a friend talking about what young people who want to be poets talk about when the image appeared as if pages of a book of poetry were riffled through by a sudden breeze and it stopped on a page with a poem about a mother and her young boy walking on the breakwaters, playing hide-and-seek with crabs. I started to conceive of my daughter then that one moment when I truly, honestly desired to have a child. Even if the rest of my life was a testimony of disinterest in children and my not so recent years were spent running away from family.

T.S. Elliot said poetry communicates before it is understood. I dare say, so do the metaphors of life and love.

One thing about imagery is it is absorbed through the senses. My body wanted to protect that image; it kept my mind ignorant of the signs. My body said it was time as in the words of Adrienne Rich, time for a new way of living. It was an anguished leap of faith into motherhood; pregnancy was a poem that insisted to be written.

The way I look at it, I could have gotten pregnant at any other time. But it happened then, at that point when I was going at 140 kilometers per hour on a highway leading nowhere. Oh, I had ideas, projects lined up, a research on the planning

stages, hundreds more of students to teach and love affairs that would be a pity to give up. But it was all in my head, all up there—even the enthusiasm.

I was single and living in my head. My world was the books, the bed sheets and the beers. Every day seemed like any other day. I tried to know my body but it was in suspended animation and never really moved while everything else orbited around it.

No, it wasn't a manifestation of Backlash as in the chronicles of Susan Faludi. My arrival at motherhood was more accurately caused by a steering of the force that moves the pen.

On the night of the pregnancy test, I took a shower and as soon as I looked into that small window on the test strip, rain came in torrents and thunder and lightning struck. It is my favorite pregnancy anecdote, my proof that the Goddess has a sense of humor.

All of a sudden, without foreboding. I realized then it was the signal of a new life—or should I say two new lives.

On the highway, I came upon many exits. There were endless choices. I surveyed the map for abortion. I surveyed the map for marriage. I surveyed the map for single parenthood. And all the many combinations, all in my head. Ultimately, my decision was, whatever it took, I was going to live the moments of this detour fully.

But that was a decision, execution was a different thing. I was no better prepared than Anne Lamott. In *Operating Instructions* she writes about herself—and me: “It occurs to me over and over that I am much too self-centered, cynical, eccentric, and edgy to raise a baby”. Better her talking than me.

There is only one moment when I truly, honestly felt I could be a mother, all the time I believed I was not built to mother. I never lived with my biological mother. All my other “mothers” are their own loving inventions and devoted improvisations. I had no grand illusions about motherhood, no ideals at all. That was the real deal, let the Freudian critics analyze that to bits.

Before I got pregnant I was planning to get one foot in the door of ethnographic research. Now, here I am and I tell you, motherhood is the ultimate research challenge. Biology, anatomy, anthropology, economics, psychology, children’s literature, early childhood education, medicine... you name it, this research assignment is the ultimate in multi-disciplinary investigation. And the really challenging part is, I’ve got one chance of getting it right.

On another note, I got to know my own body, learned to listen to it. I became watchful and alert of its slightest throb and shiver. I found out it was not hard to speak for it because it has a language all its own. Not since menstruation has a woman ever intensely listened to her body than during pregnancy.

It took a while for me to realize that in the end, I got everything I wanted including that one thing that would make me an active feminist. This goal of learning about feminist mothering.

Here’s the tricky part. The end of this excerpt and still there are no answers. Well, this one is a work in progress, still about to go through gestation and is a long way from birth. But who says answers always come in the form of answers?

I end with a quote from *Of Woman Born* by Adrienne Rich:

I know no woman—virgin, mother, lesbian, married, celibate—whether she earns her keep as a housewife, a cocktail waitress, or a scanner of brain waves—for whom her body is not a fundamental problem: its clouded meaning, its fertility, its desire, its so-called frigidity, its bloody speech, its silences, its changes and mutilations, its rapes and ripenings... There is for the first time today a possibility of



converting our physicality into both knowledge and power.

The repossession by women of our bodies will bring far more essential change to human society than the seizing of the means of production by workers. The female body has been both territory and machine, virgin wilderness to be exploited and assembly-line turning out life. We need to imagine a world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body. In such a world women will truly create new life, bringing forth not only children (if and as we choose) but the visions, the thinking, necessary to sustain, console, and alter human existence—a new relationship to the universe. Sexuality, politics, intelligence, power, motherhood, work, community, intimacy will develop new meanings; thinking itself will be transformed.

This is where we have to begin.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Andrea O'Reilly, Associate Professor at York University, aims to come out with a full-length publication which examines, from different racial perspectives, theories and practices of feminist mothering. She identifies the following topics as springboards: analysis of feminist mothering in literature and popular culture; sociological/anthropological/psychological studies of feminist mothering; and theory/theorizing on feminist mothering. <<http://cfp.english.upenn.edu/archive/2003-06/0142.html>> My work aims to examine such topics as I have encountered them in my own experience as a struggling feminist mother. In a way, this is my response to ARM's call for papers.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpts from *Letter to a Sister Underground*. I am attracted to the current trends, or I'd like to say tendencies, of breaking the barriers of genres. Women writers are most active in pushing for that ultimate breakthrough.

<sup>3</sup> To expose a private world like motherhood into the public sphere can make men feel uncomfortable as they are used to wallowing, sometimes hiding, in the public and ignoring the private. This is how Judy Chicago

puts it: "Because women have always taken responsibility of the private in life, men have been totally relieved of that responsibility. Not only do women have to move into the public life, but men have to share the burdens of private life before any real change can take place. This means that men have to be educated emotionally, and the first step in that education is to be made to "see" women, to feel us, experience our point of view."

<sup>4</sup> Fe Corazon Tengco-Labayen in her book *In Every Woman* traced feminism in the Philippines from colonization to the suffragist movement in the early 1900s, through the Marcos dictatorship to the Filipino women's own brand of feminine mystique.

<sup>5</sup> Something about what Hoff Sommers wrote regarding New Feminism struck a reverberating note in my mind. "Indeed, one of the main hallmarks of the New Feminism is its degree of self-preoccupation. Feminists like Elizabeth Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were keenly aware of themselves as privileged, middle-class, protected women. They understood how inappropriate it would be to equate their struggles with those of the less fortunate women, and it never occurred to them to air their personal grievances before the public."

Though I am not that privileged and I could not decipher what Hoff Sommers meant by "protected", I see my struggles are nothing compared to what other women go through each day. Hence, my "self-preoccupation" is this search for feminist mothering.

On the other side of the privilege spectrum though, I consider it a true gesture of sisterhood to respect all feminist endeavors. It bothers me up to now to have come across an article written by an elitist columnist in a local broadsheet calling feminists Gloria Steinem wannabes and stating "Feminists are chauvinists". Her audacity almost jolted me out of my "self-preoccupation" and made me want to hit her with, not my copy of Steinem's *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (how fitting) which was soft bound, but with my hard cover of *The Word of a Woman* by Robin Morgan.

<sup>6</sup> There are many ways in which women are not free. We are still shackled by ideals of beauty, myths of motherhood, illusions of romance, etc. These are the constant battering of outside forces that make us susceptible to self-doubt. I think women still believe that showing emotion is a universal weakness and so forth. There are still things women envy about men. Envy is not a bad thing; it can be a sign that men are still

privileged because of their gender as indicated by their rights over certain things and absence of responsibility over other aspects of everyday life.

<sup>7</sup> On my way home at 5:45 am from The Philippine STAR office where I spent the night to work on this paper, I experienced another incident when life imitates art. On the jeepney ride home a man sat across from me fumbling with what I thought was his leather coin purse. Turns out it was his penis and pubic hair peeking out of the open fly of his white trousers. What I thought was his fishing for some change was actually his carefully studied maneuver of exposing himself to me, as we were the only passengers. All I could do was move away, pay my fare, and pretend that the day's paper was more engrossing than usual. After all, he was my metaphor for patriarchy. I couldn't walk out on him. I could have lashed at him and stirred up a storm; I was angry enough. He was oppressing me, mocking me. Men are disgusting. What would he do if I flash him my uterus? Could I do that, threaten him, intimidate him with my uterus? And then I thought he's really just one sick man. He may be my metaphor for patriarchy but at that moment he was just one sick man who would be incapable of comprehending that my rage was personal and political. He kept on staring at my face, maybe expecting me to shriek, cry or faint. With a rolled up newspaper in one hand and an umbrella in the other, I looked at his face as I got off the jeepney, his legs apart and crotch slightly thrust forward. I thought, "You will not get a rise out of seeing me shocked or afraid because I am not. I am angry. I understand you are sick but if you try to assault me I'll whack your dick with the day's news."

## References

(This is a list of resources that fertilized, shaped, challenged, mapped out, accompanied, bewildered or enlightened my writing, within this excerpt and beyond. I think it is impossible to identify which specific parts any resource imprinted itself upon as I intend that the form of my work is seamless and persistent.)

Angier, Natalie. *Woman: An Intimate Geography*. New York: Virago Press, 1999.

Brownmiller, Susan. *Femininity*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1984.

Chicago, Judy. *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist*. New York: Anchor Press/ Doubleday, 1982.

Chira, Susan. *A Mother's Place Choosing Work and Family Without Guilt or Blame*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1998.

- Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- Faludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1991.
- Findlen, Barbara. *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation*. Seattle: Seal Press, 1995.
- French, Marilyn. *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1985.
- Greer, Germaine. *The Whole Woman*. London: Anchor, 1999.
- . *The Female Eunuch*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981.
- Hoff Sommers, Christina. *Who Stole Feminism?: How Women Betrayed Women*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.
- Janeway, Elizabeth. *Man's World, Woman's Place: A Study in Social Mythology*. New York: Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1971.
- Lamott, Anne. *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993.
- Lazarre, Jane. *The Mother Knot*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.
- Martin, M. Kay and Barbara Voothies. *Female of the Species*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1975.
- Morgan, Robin. *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.
- . *The Word of a Woman Feminist: Dispatches 1968 - 1992*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992.
- . ed. *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*. New York: Vintage Books, 1970.
- Pearsall, Marilyn, ed. *Women and Values: Readings in Recent Feminist Philosophy*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999.
- Steinem, Gloria. *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*. New York: New American Library, 1983.
- Tengco-Labayen, Fe Corazon. *In Every Woman: Asian Women's Journey to Feminist Awakening*. Manila: St. Scholastica's College, 1998.
- Wells, Diana, ed. *Getting There: The Movement Toward Gender Equality*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers/ Richard Gallen, 1994.
- Stages of Pregnancy and Labor*. Health Information and Translation Services. Department of Health, NSW.
- Mayo Clinic <[www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)>
- Association of Research on Mothering and York University <[www.yorku.ca](http://www.yorku.ca)>
- The Mothers Movement <[www.mothersmovement.org](http://www.mothersmovement.org)>