

**REVIEW**

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*Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage:  
The First Quarter Storm and Related Events*  
by Jose F. Lacaba

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*Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage: The First Quarter Storm and Related Events* by Jose F. Lacaba narrates a brief but tumultuous period in the country not with the dispassionate butnitpicking scholarship of a traditional historian but with the eyewitness color, emotional involvement, and self-reflexivity of a chronicler whose rebellion supports the overthrow of an authoritarian regime and the sham objectivity of traditional journalism.

First published in 1982, the book compiles the essays written by Lacaba and published in the *Philippines Free Press* and the *Asia-Philippines Leader*. The coverage and publication of the essays spanned the close of the decade of the 1960s and the first quarter of the year 1970. One of the events foreshadowing the declaration by President Ferdinand Marcos of martial law in 1972 was the violent clashes in Manila, pitting the police and the military against students, workers, and other members of militant organizations. This period in Philippine history is known as the First Quarter Storm.

The history of the street protests denouncing the Marcos administration and the interventions of the US government in the affairs of the country and other Asian countries such as Vietnam are viewed through the lens of a young journalist and activist, Jose Maria Flores Lacaba Jr.

**Oppositional retelling**

“Social history does not only reflect public interest, it also prefigures and perhaps helps to create it,” wrote Raphael Samuel. Unlike the Annales

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school in France, which Samuel said emphasized “structure and process” in the study of the “grand permanencies,” regulating the protracted changes of geography and climate, for instance, social history “derives its vitality from its oppositional character,” which focuses on actual events and ordinary people rather than abstractions and dominant elites.

In *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage*, the reader is privileged audience to the experiences, emotions, and insights of an activist who hurls himself into the whirlpool of upheavals. Lacaba survives again and again to report not just from the frontlines but from deep within the funnel of rage and insurrection mortally engaged in street combat with the unleashed iron fist of the state that bombards the attacking and scurrying street parliamentarians with all weapons at hand: denial of permits to hold rallies, truncheons, guns, water cannons, arrests, detentions, torture, and “disappearances.”

“New social history” is an attempt to write an alternative to the dominant and dominating discourse of “statecraft”; by doing so, the social historian “echoes” or “constitutes” what Samuel regards as a “much more widespread collapse of social deference, and a questioning of authority figures of all kinds”.

Lacaba does more than echo the rage; his impassioned voice amplifies to the reader picking up the book in 2018—as much a time of “disquiet” and “rage” as the Marcos years—that, long before the singing, yellow-waving, and rosary-praying EDSA Revolution and the anonymous disinformation blitz waged by keyboard warriors and troll armies were the street parliamentarians of the 1970s for whom advocacy and articulation were literally a matter of life and death.

In the reports published “before” the Third Quarter Storm, Lacaba’s voice is that of a street-smart journalist with an eye for the telling detail, the poet’s gift for word play, and a chip on his shoulder against the primary occupants of Malacañang Palace.

By page 53, the detachment of the earlier pages is superimposed by Lacaba’s self-realization: “It was impossible to remain detached and uninvolved now, to be a spectator forever.” Choosing to run for his life with the pursued youths and lash back in self-defense and hatred at the cops who bear ironically no nameplates, he declares himself finally as “one of them,” no longer just “one with them.”

Lacaba uses his press card (“presumably [making me] immune to arrest”) to emerge from a hiding place, check if the riot troops are gone, and then sound the all-clear signal so the fugitives can go home or be brought home or to the hospital (Lacaba 88).

His transformation is completed ironically, not when he bleeds from shrapnel but when he witnesses an unarmed demonstrator trapped in a dark alley without witnesses and methodically mauled by a group of plainclothesmen who then claimed the bleeding, maimed youth “stumbled” to explain his injuries.

Lacaba’s accounts are harrowing not just for their graphic depiction of violence. What is left out surfaces questions that remain unsparing in the age of extrajudicial killings and the War on Drugs: Why would a man hurt a fellow human without defense? What kind of state turns men into monsters?

### **Embedded journalist**

The rawness of Lacaba’s narration never falters, even when it comes to himself. During the People’s March held on March 3, 1970, and the violent dispersal of the marchers that followed, Lacaba, while witnessing the mauling of a youth by three plainclothesmen, writes: “I stood there paralyzed by a mess of emotions—rage, outrage, frustration, fear, and hate—and through my mind went murderous thoughts” (118).

Lacaba initially walked away from the torture, “temples throbbing, hands shaking” (118). He is approached by a fellow journalist carrying a TV camera, who asks if Lacaba got the name of the victim, still moaning at the feet of his torturers. Lacaba’s rage—“I wanted to strangle him”—is directed at himself as much as at the TV journalist (118).

When he and another man carry the victim, named Augusto Quezon, to the street, they ask the driver of a daily, the *Herald*, if they can be brought to the hospital. The news team refuses; on the trail of the news, they must follow the police jeeps and detouring to the hospital would delay the news-gathering.

Lacaba’s resulting rant embraces the Philippine media in macrocosm, then and now: “I cursed the *Herald* under my breath, and if it makes any difference I also cursed this magazine I work for, for not providing is reporters with transportation. I was cursing the whole world under my breath, including and especially myself, for lacking the guts to curse out loud” (119)

During the Iraq War (2003-2011), the US Department of Defense permitted journalists and photojournalists to move around with troops and enter combat zones to give a more “accurate” but also favorable portrayal of the US’s involvement in the war in Iraq. The practice of “embedded journalists” drew flak for encroaching on the impartiality of the press and insidiously promoting biased coverage and state-sponsored journalistic deception.

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Critics express similar objections to the genre of New Journalism, Literary Journalism, or Creative Nonfiction. Quoting Gutkind in *The Art of Creative Nonfiction* (1997), Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo writes that “Creative nonfiction differs from fiction because it is necessarily and scrupulously accurate in the presentation of information, a teaching element to the readers, is paramount. Creative nonfiction differs from traditional reportage, however, because balance is unnecessary and subjectivity is not only permitted but encouraged” (Hidalgo10).

The reader decides how he or she will take *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage*: as a biased and deluded account, or a biased and courageous one. There are many truths, more than one reality, all dependent on verification. Choosing to believe Lacaba in these times of historical revisionism is expressing preference to hear the voices of those that have been silenced, the voices of those attempting at great personal cost to speak for the silenced.

*Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage* is also a history of Philippine media. Lacaba gives glimpses of the role of the campus press, embattled but committed. Long before social media, activists used group media and alternative media to raise political consciousness without being bogged down by the academic and activist jargon that was incomprehensible to those with less formal education. Drama, pantomime, verse, chants, and songs were the media educating and mobilizing the people in the classrooms of the streets.

Lacaba reserves his sarcasm for the mainstream media, which could be relied on to spread rumors and speculations favoring the establishment: “On February 25 [1970] ... the newspapers carried two items that would later give the demonstrators something to worry about. One was the weather report... Was the weather report, too, the demonstrators wondered, subject to news management and manipulation?” (95).

By stirring in his readers a fire to know more about our past, Lacaba performs what the storytellers of yore considered as their role in the tribe: to connect the present and the past. Despite Lacaba’s “sharp eye for telling detail,” recall of “colloquial phrases,” and faithful evocation of “period atmosphere,” he has not “domesticated” history (Samuel). *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage* “rescues the past from the ‘enormous condescension’ of posterity” (Samuel).

Thirty-six-year-old, the writing still makes the “night sweat with terror,” especially now, in these “dragon-ridden” days and nights. Books like *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage* must be read by Filipinos.

For we must never forget, learning from the examples of our heroes and martyrs, “what it means to make history” (Maria Serena I. Diokno quoted in Malay ix).

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