# HOW TO MAKE WOMEN VISIBLE IN HISTORY

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In philosophy and history, as well as in almost all the sciences, women are excluded, neglected, and thereby subordinated. This situation is unacceptable, in fact patently unjust, especially now when we are celebrating the centennial of the birthing of the Filipino nation. It is time, in the words of Joan Kelly Gadol, to restore women to history and history to women. On a broader plane, women should be restored to the world of thought, and the world of thought to women.

Others have explained why — because the lives and experiences of women comprise a very important subject of investigation. They should not be lost or left in the margins but should be moved to the center of analysis. Women, especially those considered 'ordinary' and, therefore, not included in mainstream narratives and discourses, should be given due recognition. It is time to name the unnamed, to surface the submerged, to give voice to the silenced, and empower the disempowered.

The questions that need to be answered with more breadth and depth have to do with finding, surfacing, examining, and writing about women as part of Philippine history. What are the methods that have been and could still be used in this endeavor, and how do we assess if the usage is correct?

On the question of discovery, perhaps it is more important to pay attention to the women who still have to be discovered. For in truth, many Filipinas have already managed to surface in Philippine history. Among them are those who are closely related to known heroes as wives,

mothers, or daughters; those who came from prominent families; those who blazed the trails to the professions; those based in urban centers like Manila; and those who had the ability as well as the inclination to write about their experiences. Some examples of such Filipinas were lucky enough to be included in the book entitled *Women in the Philippine Revolution* (Soriano 1995). In the titles of the articles about them, it is obvious that they were considered adjuncts of the men in their lives: Gregoria de Jesus, wife of Andres Bonifacio and then of Julio Nakpil; Hilaria del Rosario, wife of President Emilio Aguinaldo; Matea Rodriguez y Tuason, wife of Don Jose Sioco and then of Don Juan Arnedo Cruz; Teodora Alonso y de Quinto, wife of Francisco Rizal and mother of Dr. Jose Rizal; Trinidad Tecson y Perez, wife of Julian Alcantara, and then of Doroteo Santiago, and lastly, of Francisco Empainado; and others.

The women who have not really emerged are those who occupy the bottom of the social ladder, those who reside on mountaintops, those who barely went to school, those outside the mainstream, those at the margins of discourses — unseen and ignored even if crushed underfoot. This is why works like *Working Women of Manila in the 19th Century* (Camagay 1995) are truly praiseworthy because through data unearthed from archives, the *cigarreras, vendadoras,* and *tenderas, bordadoras* and *costureras, criadas, maestras, matronas titulares,* and *mujeres publicas* of the past have come to life. From such works it has become obvious that working women during the Spanish period were not passive victims. According to Camagay, they had their own minds, their own strengths and capabilities. They knew how to fight exploitation and oppression, and the women's movements of today can learn a lot from their experiences.

But if the basis of recognition for women of the past is their having a specific name, face, and life history, there is no doubt that it was easier for privileged Filipinas to emerge than others. One reason is the tendency of historians to focus on a few women who could be compared to and be considered equal to men. By their example, they proved that women could engage in war, lead battles, and face any danger for love of country. During times of peace, they showed that women had brains, they could think rationally, and they could be considered professionals, intellectuals, and business leaders like men. In other words, what men do is still the standard, and women are valued if they prove that they meet this standard.

But there are a lot more Filipino women who are heroines in their everyday lives because without them, their families will not survive and the economy will grind to a halt. There are the ordinary 'housewives' who, in truth, give and sustain life, and find ways to survive during critical times. There are the women workers, farmers, migrants, vendors, and others who comprise the majority of the population yet could be truly considered a minority if the attention and importance that society accords them were the measure. There are the Aetas who are short, dark, curly-haired, and flat-nosed but who carry a burden as huge and as heavy as a mountain to remain alive after the Mt. Pinatubo eruption. There are the Muslims and the Cordillerans who also fought the foreign invaders, but who are not given the recognition they deserve in our history books. There are the young girls and the older women who also have their issues, but are seldom asked to discuss them. There are the lesbians who despite the discrimination they suffer already constitute a significant component of the women's movement. But wherever they come from, they are all women who may have common experiences as to how men treat them.

How do we then look for the abovementioned women, they who are frequently lost and forgotten?

All we need to do, according to Du Bois, is to learn "to see what is there, not what we've been taught is there, not even what we may wish to find, but what is" (Du Bois in Bowles and Klein 1983).

After seeing, there is need to name, because

> naming defines the quality and value of that which is named—and it also denies reality and value to that which is never named, never uttered. That which has no name, that for which we have no words or concepts, is rendered mute and invisible; powerless to inform or transform our consciousness of our experience, our understanding, our vision; powerless to claim its own existence.

From this perspective, the search for women is more inclusive than exclusive, is based on diverse viewpoints rather than one universalistic framework, and is open to employ a variety of methods from a variety of disciplines. It seeks to capture the differences in the experiences of women due to cultural, class, and racial origins, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation. At the same time, it also looks for commonalities which bind most if not all women.

This is the trend even in other countries. From an assumption that women belong to a single category, historians have come to recognize the diversity in women's identities based on their concrete historical context, their particular place in society, and their specific links to the forces which empower or disempower (Wallach Scott 1996:1–13).

**What methods can we use to surface women in history?**

First, we should clarify what we mean when we say that history is a continuum. Before, history used to be seen as purely a thing of the past. But the past continues to the present which in turn is connected to the future. Our situation today

is a product of the events and struggles of the past. And whatever we are doing today will be the basis of the future. Given this perspective, we are involved even today in the making of a history/herstory which will be inherited and continued by succeeding generations. It is important to see, analyze, and record what we are doing through methods which give it meaning as part of a history/herstory which is alive. And this task should not be the burden just of a few historians but of all who wish to recapture the history/herstory of the past and create a history/herstory of the present.

There are very many methods to choose from, and from this broad range, all of those who want to try can surely find what is appropriate for them. I remember what I read from a practical handbook on how to retrieve women's history. According to the author, the past belongs to all of us, and all of us have a right to find it (Beddoe 1983:1). Some of the best historians were nine-year-old students who were asked by their teacher to interview their grandmothers! If they proved capable enough, anyone who has interest in and sympathy for women can surely prove equal to the task.

All the possible methods cannot be possibly discussed in one paper, so permit me to mention those that are already in use, and to highlight some of those that I have experienced using in my own journey toward discovering historical women.

## Personal Narratives: Focus on the Life Story

We can start with **narratives about the personal life of a woman.** These narratives have many forms and names. They can be **autobiographies** which are appropriate for those who love to write about their experiences. They can be **biographies** of women, who may be alive or dead. If alive, they can be interviewed or involved in getting more information from documents, pictures, diaries, letters, articles from newspaper

and magazines, etc. The narratives can also be **life stories** which are for women in the margins. I want to discuss the latter more lengthily because it is what I used in my dissertation.

This is a narrative text that aims "to account for the whole of the informant's life experience until the moment of the interview." It covers "not only the temporal and causal organization of facts and events considered significant, but also the value judgments that make sense of this particular experience" (Chanfrault-Duchet 1991:77).

What are the uniqueness and advantage of the life story as compared to other means of gaining knowledge about women?

> It highlights the complexity, the ambiguities, and even the contractions of the relations between the subject and the world, the past, and the social and ideological image of woman — i.e., how women live, internalize, and more or less consciously interpret their status. Thus, the life story approach has to be considered as a methodological tool providing access to a body of information that is more detailed, more discerning, but also far more complex to analyze than that collected through other approaches (Chanfrault-Duchet 1991:89).

The life story is important for women because it is only through this method that the social construction of gender can be clarified. As a woman passes through the different stages of her life — infancy, childhood, pre-adolescence, adolescence, married life, motherhood, widowhood, etc. — she has different people to interact with, different tasks to do and roles to play, different experiences and powers. In the life story, "the social nature of the self is dramatized in the narrative."

> . . .the social self does not merely occupy a place within the social order; rather, its place is overdetermined by the status of woman. This means that women's life stories, unlike men's, deal not only with the relation between the self and the social

> sphere, but also, and above all, with woman's condition and with the collective representations of woman as they have been shaped by the society with which the woman being interviewed must deal (Chanfrault-Duchet 1991:78).

On the other hand, if it is men who are telling their stories, their masculinity does not appear as a social obstacle but as an active and facilitating factor in their attainment of individual identity and success. Male representations constructed by society give power and privilege to men.

But it is not only gender which is decisive in the construction of the self which appears in the text, but many other possible sources of domination and subordination, such as imperialism, racism, even the elitism of the ruling class and the dominant majority. This can be seen not only in the life story, which frequently is not written by the narrator herself. There are women who belong to minorities and who have written the history of other lives in a manner which is woven into the history of their communities.

This is why, according to Salazar, "In the 'Third World', women's autobiographical texts have become an integral part of the intellectual, ideological, political, and even armed struggle waged by oppressed and silenced people against the powers of repressive states and hegemonic groups" (Salazar 1991:93).

She adds: "**Third World Women's Autobiographies or oral histories of resistance** tend to allocate the private and domestic experiences of the narrator to the historical and public context of their social-political struggles" (Salazar 1991:94). There are ways of "opening a discursive space for 'subjected knowledge' to (re)write the historical record" (Salazar 1991:104).

The life story, like similar texts, is complex because in it may be mixed questions of nationality, class, race, and gen-

der, which lead to the overall question of power relations. As explained by Kaplan, gender cannot be separated from other ways of shaping society. It is usual for discourses on class, race, and gender to merge or to occur simultaneously, the relations among these categories structure both personal and social meanings (Kaplan 1985:149).

The narrator can speak as a Filipina, as a worker, as a woman, as a citizen, as a representative of the group she belongs to. She can agree with or object to the dominant discourses. She can be quiet, reluctant, or self-restrained, and this silence may have more meaning than the words she utters. In the language of deconstruction, it is important to 'read' what is not in the transcription in order to find the oppositional meanings.

**Genealogy: From Mother to Daughter**

In order to understand a woman better, whence she came and who will come after her, it is good to trace her genealogy from her grandmother and mother to her children and grandchildren. This method has been fruitful in discovering and analyzing materials which are ordinarily stored and kept by families and clans, as well as in comparing the experiences and levels of consciousness of different generations of women.

One example of this is *Women in the Philippine Revolution,* a project of the Samahan ng Kaanak ng mga Bayani ng Himagsikang Filipino ng 1896(Descendants of the 1896 Philippine Revolution Heroes), who are now known as Kaanak '96. In order to get more information about 30 heroines whom they wanted to foreground through biographies, the first thing they did was to go to the latter's relatives who could share materials and photographs. What became problematic for them were the heroines who were lesser known even by their own descendants. Aside from retrieving all

available information from the National Library, National Archives, and the National Historical Institute, they also had to organize themselves into a telephone brigade to call each of those listed in the telephone book with the same surnames as the heroines mentioned.

A unique example is *Towards Feminist Consciousness: Filipino Mothers & Daughters Tell Their Story* (Guerrero 1997). Here, stories of mothers and daughters were done in pairs, in order to surface from the narratives the various processes of creation, transformation, and transfer of values which have to do with being both feminist and nationalist. The stories were supplemented with data from written materials and testimonies of friends and colleagues of the narrators. With these methods, the commonalities and differences in the perspectives, experiences, and values of women belonging to different generations were surfaced and at the same time linked through the mother-daughter relationship. By comparing the stories of each part of a pair, each part becomes more complete.

**Testimony and Interview: Bearing Witness to Historical Moments**

Receiving the testimonies of women with common and dramatic experiences in a specific historical moment is also an effective method. I remember what Sofia Alino Logarta did for the conference on the role of women in history conducted by the University Center for Women's Studies in 1989. Then, hardly anything was written or heard about the experiences of women who were part of the Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon or HUKBALAHAP. Through interviews with a few of them and the writing of their experiences, these women acquired names, voices, and meanings (Logarta 1989). During the 1989 conference itself, they came to give their personal narratives and these were recorded on video. I will

never forget the image of Remedios Gomez Paraiso, alias Commander Liwayway, organizer of Squadron V. Resplendent in her *terno,* she narrated how she witnessed the cruelty of the Japanese. She also revealed that in the fighting, she was always in the midst of her squadron. She engaged in combat with her hair combed carefully in place, and with lipstick on her lips. According to her, this helped strengthen her morale. After all, she said, "Part of what I am fighting for is the freedom to be myself."

Of a different mold is the experience of participants of the Women and Development Program of the U.P. College of Social Work and Community Development in an exposure trip to the community of comfort women belonging to the Malaya Lolas in Barangay Mapaniqui, Floridablanca, Pampanga. Their orientation commenced in a big red house where many of the *lolas* (grandmothers) were imprisoned and raped. Afterwards, they proceeded to the barangay where each of the *lolas* was interviewed by the students, so that their experiences under the Japanese soldiers could be taped and systematically recorded. The *lolas* were very open in revealing their hair-raising experiences. Although a few were crying and shaking while narrating, many showed extraordinary strength and courage. Some even became very creative in their sharing — they recited poems, sang their own composition, and danced with the students. In the end, through another group of students from Miriam College, the experiences of the Malaya Lolas became the subject of a video production now available to others who wish to learn about them.

## Exchanging Stories and Other Indigenous Methods

If we want to look at the history and experience of a current group of women, visiting, observing, asking questions, exchanging stories, and listening to them in their own

nesting place are some of the most effective methods. These are based on indigenous research being promoted by Filipino psychology, which includes *pagmamasid* (observation), *pagdalaw-dalaw* (visitation), *pakikipagkuwentuhan* (story-telling), and others. According to this perspective, it is very important to establish rapport in order to get authentic data. If this is not achieved, it is hard for the research participants to open up because they will tend to treat the researchers as outsiders (Sevilla 1982).

As an example, I would like to share what transpired during the field visit conducted by my class in the Alay Kapwa site in Leveriza. This group of urban poor women was founded some 18 years ago through the intervention of the Good Shepherd Sisters. At first, we sat together with two of the group leaders who shared stories with us. Afterwards, we observed some of their income-generating projects—soap-, candle-, and candy-making — and we asked questions to the women managing and working in these projects. We ate lunch with some ten members of the Alay Kapwa in their office and afterwards, we continued exchanging stories. We were surprised by their openness to us. Aside from their livelihood, their obligations to and experiences with their organization, their struggles against demolition, US bases and Martial Law, they also shared their family and married life. We were impressed by the changes they achieved, such as the sharing of housework with their husbands and sons and the freedom they obtained from the latter, enabling them to participate fully in their community work and national campaigns. One was even bold enough to talk about sexual relations, and how she became an active and satisfied partner of her husband. Within one day, we were able to learn a lot. We fully experienced the strength of the women we shared stories with, and this strength, according to them, is much more than what their men have. From this we derived unique inspiration.

In case we want to deepen and broaden our knowledge about the history and experience of Alay Kapwa in the context of their own community in Leveriza, we can try another method. This is called **ethnography,** which was first used by anthropologists, and it is similar to the living-in method (*pakikipanuluyan*) described in Filipino psychology (Nicdao-Henson 1982). It is based on observing and describing people in their 'nesting place' in an unhurried fashion. The researcher is right there, she gets the data herself through her own eyes, ears, nose, and other senses. She carefully collects, records, and contextualizes the data which she then feeds back to her research participants and partners for them to analyze and validate. This method can be adopted to empower the women within their own community (Del Rosario in Guerrero 1997).

**Creative Focused Group Discussion**

There are groups of women who wish to record their own history/herstory in a systematic and participatory way. In this context, the focused group discussion supplemented by other creative methods can be effective. Victoria Narciso Apuan and myself experienced these when we served as facilitators for a project of the Katipunan ng Bagong Pilipina (KaBaPa), an organization of rural women founded in 1975. After more than 20 years of existence and struggle for equality, development, peace, freedom, and the happiness of children, its leaders thought of putting their 'brilliant experiences' (*maniningning na karanasan*) in book form. They gathered about 20 women from various provinces in order to collectively share their memories of the highlights of their work in various fields: organizing, education, and project management. The themes of struggle were gleaned from the testimonies, poems, songs, and stories of the various stages in KaBaPa's

development, which became the guide for the focused group discussion. The role of the facilitators was limited to surfacing some general questions about every three-year stage, and categorizing the answers on manila paper. After a short summing-up, each of the participants left a message and a photograph for the next generations. The key leaders wrote synthesizing essays about their experiences in their line of work. They read through old copies of their newspaper called *Ang Bagong Pilipina,* looked for old greeting cards with beautiful and meaningful designs, and chose pictures from old albums which can be included in their dream book.

**Quantitative Methods**

Can quantitative methods also help in surfacing women in history? The answer is yes.

As explained in the earlier part of this paper, women are diverse, and so are the people who are researching on them. It is not possible to have just one methodology which can be considered appropriate for all. It is more correct to say that researchers use a variety of methods based on what they know, what they think works, and what can convince those who will be reached by the research.

In the work, for example, of Carolyn Israel Sobritchea entitled "American Colonial Education and Its Impact on the Status of Women" (1989), she used data from the Bureau of Census and Statistics on the level of education of women and men, on registered professionals, on the participation of women and men in different occupations, and the average annual income of professionals based on gender. She analyzed the statistics and came out with the conclusion that colonial education did not result in gender equality because it merely reinforced the traditional gender division of labor between women and men. It only served to facilitate the

participation of women in the public sphere, and their entry into jobs which linked them to the global market as producers of export products.

In my paper entitled "Globalization: From History to Herstory," which I presented during the Roundtable Discussion sponsored by the National Centennial Commission-Women's Sector, I also used quantitative data from the National Statistics Office, the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, the Department of Labor and Employment, and other agencies. With these data, I was able to explain the trends in women's situation under globalization: many are getting employed in the economic zones, particularly in the electronics industry; many are getting displaced in agriculture as well as in industries like garments which are finding it difficult to compete; many are entering the informal sector; many become migrants and fall victim to prostitution and trafficking; etc.

**How do we get the data in the research process? What are the possible relations between the researchers and their research subjects?**

Data may be extracted from their sources without necessity of informing or asking the permission of the woman or women who are subjects of the research. An example of this is retrieval from the archives, from published materials, and other documents accessible to the public.

Data may also be obtained according to the method decided upon in accordance with the interest and objective of the researcher. Examples of these are the interview, focused group discussion, etc. wherein there are specific questions the interviewer wishes to ask and there are answers to these questions expected from the respondents.

Data could also be acquired based on what the woman, who is the subject of the research, wishes to reveal. This way,

it is her voice which is heard and she is in control of the research process.

The last is the most difficult to do because the researcher has to carefully weigh her relationship to her research subject who is also a woman. In a sense, she surrenders her power and allows her subject to move to the center. This is what ordinarily happens in the life history as a method.

I experienced this myself when I was doing my dissertation on homeworkers. In this reflexive process of deep reflection as to the role of the researcher herself, I had to ask and answer the question: Who am I? And this is what I came up with:

> I am a teacher teaching women and development at the graduate level at the University of the Philippines. I am currently taking my doctorate. I spent more than twenty years in the movement of grassroots women. My political orientation is strongly nationalist and pro-people. I am part of the middle class, married, with three children. I have written two books within two decades of research using a variety of methods, from the survey and structured interviews to focused group discussions and case studies. I have been immersed in homeworkers' issues for more than ten years.

I knew from the very start that there was a wide power gap between me and my research subjects. This gap is itself a product of my Western and elite-oriented socialization as an intellectual belonging to the middle class, highly educated, and feminist. I realized the need to bridge this gap, to remove myself from the center, take my subjects from the margins, and place them in a controlling position in the research process. The reflexive nature of this process would also become a statement for the democratization of research and other forms of constructing knowledge and creating text. Through this process, it is possible to surface the world of the forgotten, and thereby challenge the view which seeks to homogenize all cultures and flatten out all forms of differences.

In Philippine society, homeworkers can be truly considered a minority: they cannot speak English and, therefore, cannot take part in the Westernized culture internalized and propagated by the elite. As part of the labor force, they are marginalized because they are not seen, heard, and counted. They are virtual colonies not only of imperialist business but also of local capitalists and of the men who exploit their labor and their sexuality.

In the prevailing society, homeworkers are exploited and oppressed. Their oppression as a class reinforces and merges with their oppression as women and as citizens of a colonized country. In this situation, very few of them reached high school. It is difficult for them to read and write, and needless to say, they are not in the habit of writing books. They are not seen, heard, or valued by society even if their labor is an important element in the country's economy. They are scattered and often isolated, so even the trade unions do not pay them much attention.

But homeworkers have a history, a meaning, and a significance that lie buried, and which should be unearthed and named. They can engage in the discourse of the minorities in society, if they are given the space and the opportunity.

The first one I asked for a life story is Antonina Tina, or Ka Nini, the present National Coordinator of the Pambansang Tagapag-ugnay ng mga Manggagawa sa Bahay (PATAMABA).

Who was Ka Nini to me before I thought of making her the subject of a life story? The following was my answer to this question:

> She comes from the poorest section of the peasantry. Her experience as a sewer has lasted for decades. She reached only the third grade; nevertheless, she has a strong personality and leadership. She served long as head of the provincial chapter of the Katipunan ng Bagong Pilipina (KABAPA), an organization

of rural women, and when the latter founded the PATAMABA, she was elected its leader in its first congress. She is older than me by a few years, married to a farmer who is also organizationally involved, has two small children, a boy and a girl. Their family life is simple if not frugal. Husband and wife share in the housework. Her courage and determination have been tested many times, even in the face of armed military men in the hinterlands of Bulacan where she was organizing. She has a strong class and nationalist consciousness, having taken roots in the progressive movement. This consciousness merged with feminist consciousness as she also became part of the women's movement. She loves to tell stories, and she is quick to open up about her personal life, even about sensitive topics like sex.

I had known Ka Nini for more than ten years because she was the first homeworker I interviewed for my earlier researches. Our relationship is one of comradeship and deep friendship. We were together in an ILO meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, where she spoke for homeworkers and I served as her translator. If we were to measure the level of interaction that a researcher and her research subject needed to reach in order to obtain authentic data based on the framework of Filipino psychology, perhaps Ka Nini and I would perhaps inhabit the upper limit. We were not only comfortable with each other, we were bound by the same feelings and beliefs.

The first thing we tried was the autobiography. I gave a list of what I thought it should contain and Ka Nini agreed to follow it. She submitted what she wrote, I checked what she did not cover from the list, and she wrote additional text. What could be seen in her output was the skeleton of her life, which needed to be filled with flesh and blood. Reflecting on the process, I came to the conclusion that the autobiographical method used in sketching the life of a homeworker like Ka Nini was inappropriate. In the first place, she was able to reach only third grade so she really found it difficult to write. And because I gave her a very long list, she tried to cover every item through very short outputs. The result looked like

disjointed 'answers' to the 'questions' on my list. It did not contain the Ka Nini whom I knew as a very effective speaker and animated storyteller.

We changed the method and tried a taped interview. We used up an hour as she answered my questions which tried to clarify certain aspects of her autobiography. In this exchange, the initiative belonged to the one asking the questions, and Ka Nini merely served as a respondent who was cut short and stirred to other topics more important to me when she strayed. When I read the transcriptions, it looked like a structured interview and not really a live story.

It was good that at this point, I was able to read about the experiences and reflections of some feminists about the life story as a unique method. According to them, "Realizing the possibilities of the oral history interview demands a shift in methodology from information gathering, where the focus is on the right questions, to interaction, where the focus is on process, on the dynamic unfolding of the subject's viewpoint" (Anderson and Jack 1991:23).

With this in mind, how then should the interview be conducted? There were many suggestions.

The narrators should be given all the opportunity to explain, clarify, and reflect upon the meanings they themselves wish to give to the words they themselves have uttered. Thereby, they become "freer to tell their own stories as fully, completely, and honestly as they desire" (Anderson and Jack 1991:18).

The interviewer should learn how to evoke a "web of feelings, attitudes, and values that give meaning to activities and events." S/he should ask open-ended questions, so that it becomes clear to the narrator that her "interpretation of her experience guides the interview." If there is a need to get more information, the request about this may be made in a respectful

and indirect manner such as, "Perhaps, we can now share stories about your experiences as a child worker." The interviewer should also pay attention to the 'moral language' consisting of statements which assess or judge the self and analyzes how the conception of the self is related to cultural and social expectations (Anderson and Jack 1991:19–20).

There is a need to listen to different channels: to the strong ones which agree with the dominant discourses, and the weak ones which go against the standards of these discourses. Part of this is paying attention to the stoppages, to the silences, to what remains unsaid.

The interviewer should also utilize women's ways of communicating to the full, such as active expressions of encouragement and understanding, respect and empathy, laughter and humor, and mutual disclosure (Minister 1991:27–39).

When I went back to Ka Nini to interview her again a few more times, I tried to be a better listener. We were seated on a mat as if we were merely conversing while the tape went to work. I allowed her to tell as many stories as she wanted and I never cut her short unless she herself stopped on her own accord. We also focused her sharing on the meanings she gave to her experience, her sense of what was right or wrong, and her drawing of lessons and insights from her own life. If her stories were so painful that she cried while telling them, I also felt the tears well in my eyes. But more often than not, we burst out in peals of laughter, especially if the topic was sex. I also took note of statements which she kept repeating and emphasizing, as well as instances when she became silent, found difficulty in responding, or was reluctant to speak.

Compared with earlier transcriptions, the result of my latter interviews was richer and more alive.

It was only after these that I gained the confidence to analyze the entire text of Ka Nini's life.

**How do we analyze and interpret the data? How do we write the report? In what language or form? Whose voice will prevail?**

This can be done by the researcher alone, in the language and form s/he is most comfortable with, and she will be considered the author.

S/he can do this in partnership with her research subjects, and the outcome can take the form of negotiated interpretations.

It is also possible to highlight the voices of the women research subjects and they themselves can give meaning to their lives and experiences.

There are some books containing life stories of Filipino women which can serve as examples of these.

*Fishers, Traders, Farmers, Wives — Life Stories of Ten Women in a Fishing Village,* written by Jeanne Frances I. Illo and Jaime B. Polo (1990), had used up two years in field work, 138 tapes which had to be transcribed, and six years of wrestling with the data before the final version was published. The aim of doing the life stories was to show the influences which shaped the lives of the narrators, with emphasis on their natal and conjugal families, on the property and resources they had access to, on the forms and requirements of production and consumption, on the types of work that women and men did, and the gender-based relations within the household.

The ten women narrators were chosen from a list done according to a census that the researchers undertook in a community of fisherfolk in Bantigue, Pagbilao, Quezon. The basis for selection were their age, their position in the household, the economic situation of the household, i.e., if they had access to land or not. Professional researchers, women and men, interviewed the narrators and summed up their lives

according to the categories laid down by the research. The final version was written in English (with quotations from the original language used by the narrator) and in the third person. The analysis and synthesis of the life stories were done by the researchers according to the patterns they were able to draw.

*Filipino Housewives Speak* by Delia D. Aguilar (1991) had also experienced a long birthing process before it saw the light of day. This book, written with a Marxist feminist framework, aimed at analyzing "through the prism of women's eyes the power structure within families as this is revealed in the way home life is organized" (Aguilar 1991:1). It was based on ten interviews conducted by the author in the summer of 1984. Most of those she interviewed were part of the progressive movement which was then in the heat of struggle against the Marcos dictatorship. They came from the lower, lower-middle, middle, and upper-middle classes. The stories were published in English (it is not clear how they were crafted and translated), and the analysis which revolved around the notion that the family was the site of both women's oppression and resistance came solely from the author.

*Hugot sa Sinapupunan — Stories from the Womb* (1992) by Marie Christine B. Bantug, Karina Constantino-David, Rebecca Demetillo-Abraham, Alexandra B. Pura, and Maricris R. Valte also had taken a long time (about two years) before it was launched. The stories contained in it revolved around various forms of oppression experienced by Filipino women. The narrators were women, rich and poor, whom the authors knew or whom their friends referred to them. These women were interviewed in a manner which was both structured and open-ended.

According to Constantino-David in her prologue, "The interviews became the means for them to reflect on their own experiences, to clarify what was disturbing to them, to pour out what they used to keep to themselves, in order to close a

chapter in life, for those interviewed as well as for us." (*Naging daan ang interbyu upang makapagnilay sa sariling karanasan, upang mailinaw ang bumabagabag sa kalooban, upang maibulalas ang matagal nang kinikimkim, upang masarhan ang isang kabanata ng buhay, para sa mga iniinterbyu at sa amin na rin.*)

The stories were written by members of the DOG (Documentation of the Oppressed Gender) team in a popular way for publication. Some of the final versions were given form by writer friends. Even then, according to Constantino-David, "the true authors are the women who readily shared their stories so that others can draw lessons as well as strength from them." (*Ang tunay na may-akda ay ang mga babaing hindi nag-atubiling ibahagi ang kanilang karanasan upang mapaghanguan ng aral at lakas ng iba.*) The authors did not do a synthesis although in the prologue, they clarified the concept of oppression they had agreed upon before undertaking the documentation.

The works mentioned above served both as an inspiration and challenge to me. Although they are models, I knew that what I wanted to do was different from what they did—different in that it would not use English and as much as possible would be faithful to the language of the narrators. Different also because the analysis would not come only from me but more from the narrators as individuals and as a collective. This analysis would be in accordance with a feminist and participatory framework, focusing on representations of class and gender, and aiming at contributing to the empowerment of homeworkers. Even then, I also knew there were qualities worth emulating from the earlier works cited — the seriousness in systematically gathering and processing data, the attention to detail and form, the rigor of the whole process of research and the creation of text.

It is really difficult in real life to deal with the issue of who has the right and authority to read or interpret a text: the narrator or the listener? It is possible that the question is based on her exposure and experience. This is why I have great hopes that those who have been writing in a gender-blind fashion can still become gender-sensitive in the future.

What is perhaps more difficult to do is to analyze texts which are really on women and weigh them to find out where their gaps and flaws lie. Allow me to lift the following article from a collection of biographies on women in the Philippine revolution:

### *LORENZA AGONCILLO Y MARINO*

*By Benito J. Legarda Jr.*

The tides of history swept Lorenza Agoncillo at an early age into the stream of heroic events. Her father was Felipe Agoncillo (1859–1941) who, after studying law in Manila, set up practice in his hometown of Taal and married a lady, Marcela Marino (1859–1946) from another distinguished family. His opposition to abuses led the Spanish authorities to suspect him of being a filibustero or separatist, and he was ordered deported. But he eluded his captors, sailed to Japan, and then settled in Hong Kong.

There his family joined him in 1897. At that time there were three daughters, and two more would be born in Hong Kong where they received an English education before they returned to the Philippines in 1907. The eldest was Lorenza (born September 5, 1890). At their modest house in Morrison Hill Road (number 535), important meetings were held by Filipino revolutionists, including General Emilio Aguinaldo, in March and April of 1898.

It was General Aguinaldo who asked Mrs. Agoncillo to make the first Philippine flag, following a design provided by the Philippine committee in Hong Kong. She in turn was helped by Jose Rizal's niece, Mrs. Delfina Herbosa Natividad, and by the seven-year old Lorenza. The task was completed in five days, and Aguinaldo took it back to the Philippines when he

sailed on the U.S. transport McCulloch. It was this flag which the General waved when he declared Philippine independence on June 12, 1898.

The Agoncillos stayed in Hong Kong while Don Felipe campaigned eloquently but vainly for the recognition of the Philippine Republic. Eventually, with conditions stabilized and elections announced under American rule, he returned and was elected to represent the first district of Batangas in the first Philippine Assembly. Thereafter, he would follow a life of service both in the private and public sectors.

Lorenza, like her sisters, opted for a life devoted to education and culture. First, she answered a call to the religious life and joined the St. Paul de Chartres congregation, but was taken ill with a seemingly incurable kidney condition and had to leave. However, she recovered two days after coming home, and thereafter, she enrolled in the Philippine Normal School. She devoted the rest of her life to teaching at the Malate Catholic School, which gave her a plaque of merit in 1967 in recognition of fifty years of service to that institution.

She was characterized by family and friends as unassuming, trusting and kind-hearted. In the cultured surroundings of the Agoncillo household, full of music and letters, she could recite beautifully Rizal's "*Mi Ultimo Adios*" at family gatherings. She lived through the deprivation and horror of the Japanese occupation and the battle for Manila, during which the family house was burned, then was asked to help reopen the Malate Catholic School in 1946.

She died on September 2, 1972 and, like her other four sisters who attained maturity, never married. Friends wondered at this, for like their parents they were devoutly Catholic, proudly patriotic and culturally accomplished, and moreover were nice looking. Possibly their distinguished father had set such a high standard of conduct and accomplishment that younger men could not measure up to it in their minds.

The article ends by citing two sources. Within it, there is a whole-paged photograph of the Agoncillos in the company of President and Mrs. Emilio Aguinaldo.

In what ways can we analyze this text? One of the more effective methods is **discourse analysis,** which analyzes not

only the meanings which are on the surface or which lie buried in the text, but also the situations and activities important in its creation, which comprise its context.

The following questions, for example, may be asked, according to Estrada-Claudio (1998):

1. *What are the concepts and ideas the text wants to convey? What are the overt meanings? What are the hidden ones?*
2. *What are the claims to expertise or knowledge that this text is making?*
3. *What discursive strategies can I see in the text that reinforce its claims to knowledge expertise?*
4. *What form of consciousness or subjectivity is the text imposing?*

Based on these questions which are involved in the process called **deconstruction,** it is easy to surface meanings which are obvious: 1) Lorenza Agoncillo comes from a prominent family; 2) Her father was a revolutionary who was deported and who later joined Aguinaldo's group; 3) Aguinaldo ordered Lorenza's mother to make the Philippine flag and in this endeavor, Lorenza, who was then seven years old, was able to help; 4) Lorenza was an educated woman—she knew English, she went to the Philippine Normal School, she knew how to recite "*Mi Ultimo Adios*"; 5) She almost became a nun but due to illness, she became a teacher in a Catholic school where she taught for a long time; 6) Like her sisters, she never got married.

From my own reading, the meanings that are indirectly expressed in the article are the following:

1) Lorenza came from a Catholic and educated family prominent during the Spanish as well as the American period, which is why it is fitting to highlight her role as the daughter of a famous father and an obedient mother, and as part of a family with high moral standards; 2) Her heroism

was accidental — it was by chance that her mother asked her to help in making the Philippine flag when she was just seven years old; 3) The Agoncillos should be justly proud of their close association with the Aguinaldos; 4) It is a pity that a woman as beautiful, as good, and as religious as Lorenza was not able to get married, perhaps due to the influence of her father.

To make the text even more credible, it was mentioned that the source of the article is a book written by Lorenza's sister herself and the author's interview with the latter. In another part of the collection, the author was introduced as a prominent economist with a Ph.D. from Harvard and who served various institutions, including the International Monetary Fund. The picture of the Agoncillos in the company of the Aguinaldos also provided proof that the two families were really close.

What kind of subjectivity is being imposed by the text on the reader?

First, the reader must be conversant in English, otherwise s/he would not be able to understand the text. Second, s/he has to give recognition to those who belong to prominent and educated families because they are the leaders in society. Third, to be considered a heroine, it is not necessary for a woman to be consciously and actively involved in the struggle of the Filipino people for freedom — it is enough that she heeds the behest of others. Fourth, it is praiseworthy to be associated with the forces of Aguinaldo and this should not be questioned, especially by the pro-Bonifacio and the anti-Americans who are now engaged in many debates. Fifth, a woman who fails to get married is truly a waste. And last, it is fitting to trust in the credibility of an author writing about a woman in the Philippine revolution if he is male, educated, and recognized by institutions like the International Monetary Fund.

From my vantage point, this kind of subjectivity is not pro-woman; neither is it patriotic. What do you think?

**What guidelines can serve researchers in assessing their research that is centered on women and is empowering to women?**

First, they should have included gender as an important key in the comprehensive analysis and understanding of society. There are differences between women and men that culture has created. In general, these differences favor men who benefit from the labor and sexuality of women. In patriarchal society, it is the men who have power over the women. They are the ones who exploit, extract, control, and dominate many spheres, including the sphere of knowledge.

Second, they should acknowledge the incompleteness and injustice of androcentric or male-centered knowledge, and of a male standard which claims that only those methods which men invented and which worked in their favor are the only valid ones.

For there are many ways of knowing, and for women, this is one which unites subject and object, places researcher and research subject in one dialectical process, captures the fluidity and complexity of life, sees the present as part of the continuous unfolding of time linking past and future, evokes empathy and understanding, and gives form and voice to the meanings and realities of the invisible, the unheard, and the disempowered in society (Jacklin and Farnham 1997).

This, according to Barbara Du Bois, is 'passionate scholarship' and 'necessary heresy' because it directly confronts patriarchy.

Research, according to Harding, should not only 'add' women to the existing body of knowledge, or merely highlight the contributions of women. It should put women at the center, use the bottom-up approach, take the vantage point of those at the bottom, and critically analyze those who exercise social power at the top (Harding 1987:1–4).

Third, research should not only be about women but for women. It has a strong element of advocacy and is frequently linked to women's movements where the researchers belong.

Fourth, the research process is also very important. This was described by Aino Saarinen as one of deconstruction and reconstruction: deconstructing the masculinity of traditional research, and constructing a new framework where new questions are asked about the experiences of women from the point of view of their own personal lives. This model opens up new perpectives whereby women would be "regarded not only in terms of subordination and victimization, but also seen as active subjects who play an independent and creative role in the development of culture" (Saarinen 1988:35–51).

Saarinen traced the development of research on women and described the crossroads reached in the last years of the sixties, when the lens shifted from exceptional women to ordinary women. These are the majority of women, whose everyday lives revolve around not only the productive and public sphere but also the reproductive and domestic sphere, have been described, named, and valued.

For women like us in colonized countries, there are additional steps to take in order to find our own place and voice. Because there are so many theories and methodologies created in the developed countries, and there is danger of being overwhelmed if we will take all these seriously and apply them blindly even if they do not fit. It is important to learn from other women but it is more important perhaps to start with our own situation and experience. We need to draw our knowledge and experience from within our society and based on this, we can choose from what others wish to teach us so that we can use them to better understand ourselves.

Aside from this, it is also important to seek our own place in the current flow of our history towards freedom and more

freedom for the Filipino people. We need to be critical of the view that we have already attained complete independence and this occurred on June 12, 1898. If this were so, how do we reckon with the Philippine-American War, by which the new colonizers stole the freedom won and upheld by the First Philippine Republic? More than half a million Filipinos, women and men, lost their lives in this war and its aftermath. Those who fought the Americans, including women, have not yet been given their due recognition. It is also not made clear that foreign domination has not ended till now. It only changed form under globalization which is tormenting the already tormented, especially our women.

In other words, we first need to clarify the context of our efforts to make women visible in our history. Lastly, let me leave you a poem I wrote ten years ago:

**BIGAS AT SAMPAGITA**

*Dugtung-dugtong*
*Tuhug-tuhog*
*Bigas at kamao*
*Sampagita't puso*
*Sa landasing pataas at paikot*
*Ng magkakabaro*
*Sa pag-inog ng panahon*
*Pilapil ay nagiging semento*
*Maybahay ay nagtatrabaho*
*Birhen ay nagiging puta*
*Ang mayroo'y nawawalan*
*Ang walang-wala'y ninanakawan*
*Ang marunong, ginagawang mangmang*
*Ang mangmang ay pinipiringan*

*Paano lalanghapin*
*ang bagong sinaing*
*sa dahop na palayok?*
*Paano aalpas ang halimuyak*
*ng bagong pitas na bulaklak*

*kung nakakulong*
*sa nakasusing baul?*

*Dugtung-dugtong*
*Tuhug-tuhog*
*Bigas at kamao*
*Sampagita't puso*
*Sa landasing pataas at paikot*
*Ng magkakabaro.*

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