

**GENDERED HISTORY IN DANGER:  
WHEN THE SUBJECT BECOMES THE WRITER**

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In 1996, I was awarded a professorial chair in women's studies by my university. Within the duration of that grant I was to give a lecture about something which I thought at the time was vaguely unspecific—I was to work on anything about women. Unlike the other chair holders who had disciplines and specific fields, and who, I understood later, were given the chairs because they were experts in their fields, I came to realize, wrongly or rightly, that I might have been given the chair on women's studies simply because I am a woman. Also, unlike the other prestigious names attached to the endowments funding the chairs, my chair, which was called the Concepcion G. Zaide Professorial Chair on Women's Studies, was funded by the husband of my chair's honoree, and my chair's honoree did not belong to any discipline being studied in my university or anywhere else. She was a restaurateur, and was one of the canteen concessionnaires in my university. She was honored by a chair not because of her expertise in a particular field—she was honored by a chair because of her gender. Her gender alone justified the existence of that professorial chair, and in a way my gender justified, too, my selection for that chair. I was unable to comprehend two years ago the awesome power, the magnitude of strength, though rendered covert, of that statement. Somehow, within the traditional structure of seeing and evolving paradigms, gender becomes the option, the enabling paradigm by which certain standards can be reevaluated and perceived. For once

the woman defines a particular aspect of discipline by herself, solely by virtue of her gender. What I am about to tell you is not just about me, and not just about Concepcion G. Zaide, but also about a host of other women who in time began to fill my notebooks with names and stories from another time, and who, as I found out later, would form the bedrock of my insights about how we should write, view, and read our history. I wish I could assure you that the path leading to these insights was straightforward and predictable, but it was not. Somehow, interfacing the woman as a research topic with what we know and consider as traditional research has revealed to me certain ruptures in the paradigms we still use to build on that chunk of significance we call 'knowledge'. I will try to weave my narrative into the confines of the variables of methodology and framework, and, hopefully, we can identify at certain points the changes we need to make us women more accessible to researchers in the future, and, more importantly, to enable us to retrieve from our past whatever traces are left of stories of other women, to make our history truly a history of one people, and not of just one gender.

Given the conditions stipulated in my chair, the first obvious step I had to make was to look for my women, I called my topic, in the place we usually go to for our surveys and reviews of literature—the library. 1996 was the centennial of the Philippine Revolution, and fusing my topic with the consciousness being raised by the remembrance of significant history seemed the ideal scope from which I could explore my thesis, whatever it would be. I suppose library shelves are arranged pretty much the same anywhere else, and so the particular section I was directed to yielded to the label 'Philippine Wars'. It included not just books about the Philippine Revolution of 1896 but also books on all Philippine wars, including a wide selection about the Philippine involvement

in the Second World War from the years 1941 to 1945. As my eyes ran through the titles revolving around 1896, I found myself straying toward books about the more recent war of 1941. There were two or three books about the women of 1896—all biographies—at the one end, but the other end yielded titles and topics more familiar to me, especially one: *Who Is Who: Philippine Guerrilla Movement* by Laverne Peralta. I had to scan the Peralta book for two reasons: one, I never knew that the ROTC as a unit played a major role in the last war, or to put it in terms understandable to women, I never knew that our collegiate students, presumably almost all males, were organized formally in resisting the Japanese occupation during the war years. I said I had to scan the book for two reasons, but the second reason slowly crept in as it were from another channel of memory only after the first one had been formally recognized and reconciled into memory. I suddenly realized that I was familiar with the ROTC as a unit because I was once a cadet officer myself in the UPCBCMT Corps of Cadet Officers many, many years ago. Even before I opened the book I knew it would have a list—a role call as the military would call it—of names. Names lead to specific people with particular stories, and so I scanned the list. And from the list, with growing frequency, my eyes began to extract the unfamiliar configurations glaring out of context:

Abanilla, Julieta (killed in action)  
 Abel, Nena  
 Ampon, Petronila  
 Domondon, Faustina (killed in action)  
 Medalla, Juanita  
 Nacu, Natividad  
 Real, Anaclea

These were names of women. And there were seventy-eight in all. There were seventy-eight women incorporated into the ROTC Hunter Division who have fought alongside the men during the war years of 1941 to 1945. My eyes went back to the shelves; there were books of men soldiers who told the details of their sacrifice and bravery but none about the women who fought alongside them. All I had was the book, and the brief description after each woman's name: her rank, her expertise and, in many cases, her wounding or death in combat. I copied the names and hang onto those names the way we usually do in research. Their names, I thought, would lead me to the surviving ones. I was wrong, of course. Names of males do lead us somewhere. In my research, however, the names of these women led me nowhere near them. But then, as I found out, their names led me straight away to realize why women were often effaced even at the very first level of data gathering, consequently leading to her eventual banishment from history.

Let me tell you why I gave up on my first attempt to locate a woman's name. When we look for a male name, we are looking at a very constant configuration or symbol. A male name will remain unchanged, from birth, within a marriage and even with succeeding marriages, until death. Its fixedness corresponds to the actual constancy occupied by a male in our society. A male, even with the multiplicity of his social identity—being a son, a brother, father, grandfather, or uncle, or even a friend—retains the continuity, the tradition of who he is. His name transcends years and tenses and can therefore be retrieved at any point of his life, or at any point of the life of the one who wants to retrieve it. If I were to locate one Alfredo Dela Cruz, I had the choice of looking for either just his birth certificate, marriage certificate, or death certificate and would end up knowing who he was. A male classmate we

knew as Alfredo Dela Cruz would still be known and listed as Alfredo Dela Cruz even after twenty or two hundred years. By the unchanging nature of his name, a male can survive years and generations, and in effect be guaranteed a place in history.

But what happened when I looked for one Julieta Jamelin, one of the names I retrieved from Peralta's list? I could safely assume that she was Julieta Jamelin somewhere between 1941 to 1945, when her name was written by herself or by someone from her unit who knew her to be part of the Hunter Division, but her name in itself declared the ambiguity of her identity and guaranteed the uncertainty of my quest. Unlike a man's name which remains unchanged regardless of change in his civil status, a woman's name is appended depending on her civil and sometimes on her political and social role. By a first name and a family name alone, how do I know Julieta Jamelin is not single or married? In fact, even with a middle name, say Julieta Cruz Jamelin, how do I know whether that is her maiden name, or her married name? Unlike a man's name which can be retrieved in a single track of search, the birth records are often the common choice, and searching for a woman's name requires at the minimum a double-track searching. Among the birth records, Jamelin could stand for Julieta's father's family name or among the marriage certificates, Jamelin for Julieta's husband's family name.

Given the society we live in, it seems that a woman's name reflects the malleability of her status and its dependence on the males who occupy significant phases in her life: her father and her husband. The very purpose of giving names, of giving labels—that is, to signify symbolically a particular entity, to affix to it a constant space in our symbolical world—becomes void, when the entity being named is female. In our human world where tradition and societal identity depend on

memories transmitted through words, through language, it is easy to see how a male's name alone can weave the necessary connection and constancy as his stories move through time, from his own generation to ours, to the next; and how a woman's name, by virtue of its unfixed nature, ironically becomes the reason for her effacement from history. Given this context, we can see how a male's accessibility to be committed to memory and the past facilitates his dominance in history. His story, once told, becomes a fixture in our narrative. His other stories become additions to the narrative, and are therefore built on the earlier ones, eventually closing to a chapter. A woman, on the other hand, faces changes on two levels. Her other stories also become additions to the narrative we already have committed to history, and no erasures are needed. But it becomes another matter as a woman goes through a change in her name. Previously written or orally transmitted stories about her will have to reflect the change in her status, making sure that two or three changes in her name still signify the same person. Her story, in effect, becomes a living substance, the antithesis of history. I was lucky enough to get seventy-eight names of women who at that particular point in their lives were known by those names. Other people certainly did get to know these women I was looking for, but most likely with different surnames now, and most likely these people did not know that these women fought in the last war, that these women were heroes—at least, heroes as we traditionally call them.

During the months I tried locating my women—vainly, even though I ran a complete list of their names in major tabloids and a reputable women's magazine—I happened to visit my dentist who noticed my books and inquired about my interest in the military. I told him I was working on a particular aspect of the guerrilla activities during the recent

war and was looking for women guerrillas. He told me then that he was a guerrilla himself (my dentist happened to be part of the USAFFE-Northern Luzon Forces), and that he knew a woman guerrilla fighter who was living just three blocks away from him. He told me that her name was Rosa Santos, and that she was eighty-six years old. With my mouth in cotton balls and my face half-numb because of an extraction, I went to see Lola Rosa. She gave me the whole afternoon to tell me her story.

First of all, she was not a guerrilla fighter, but her husband was. I should have left, but Lola Rosa began telling me how she and the rest of the womenfolk would wake up at twelve in the evening to pound cassava and shred them, and cook them, and wrap them in banana leaves so that the guerrilla unit stationed near their town could pick up the food before four in the morning; or how she would walk for three days before she could reach Pampanga or Tarlac so she could buy two gantas of rice for her three little boys while her husband fought the enemy; or how she would hide her ailing father in the carabao cart and pull the cart herself, so she could take her father to a doctor; or how she would be covered with fear as she and her little boys, and her mother listened to the Japanese running and firing their rifles but that she had to be strong so she could hug her little boys and show them that everything would pass, and peace would come again. When I stood to leave, Lola Rosa apologized and told me that her story might not be the one I was looking for; it was not about bravery, she told me. It was just her story. For that brief moment as I looked at this old woman, I knew that her words had captured so clearly the essence of what history should be, and how it became to be shaped and defined by the perspective of just one gender. The values we use for defining what should and should not be included in our

collective memory invariably reflect the consciousness of only the dominant one, and, therefore, favor the gender who can execute them. Bravery becomes defined by the taking or sacrificing of life which, in both cases, lead to the loss of life, either the hero's or the enemy's. So what trait had sustained Lola Rosa as she walked through enemy camps in search of rice and cassava, or as she chose to stay in her house in a town used as a camp by the enemy? Her actions sustained life: her life, her family's life, even the lives of the guerrillas whom she and the other women fed but who killed or were eventually killed because they defined bravery by instinct and aggression. 'Country' becomes the undefined boundaries of hills and terrain where fighting determines the owners of territories, making males leave their communities and their families unprotected, while they fight for the custody of mountains and fortresses. They come home jubilant because a fort has been conquered, only to find their homes burned, their children killed, and their womenfolk raped and murdered. Lola Rosa stayed home while her husband left to protect what we call a country. Where lies this we call country, this we call motherland?

As we go through the list of values which defines the merits of narratives fit for inclusion in our history, we find that stories about women seldom fit the traditional yardstick, and, therefore, are less likely to be recaptured in the written word. We find that our history as we know it today seems punctuated by highlights and the drama, or the highpoint of each particular epoch, with less emphasis on the interweaving events leading one segment of the past into the other, or the details weaving into one coherent story the totality of one experience for one whole community. For sure, the bravery of Lola Rosa's guerrilla husband has to be told, for it is part of the story. What we need is to tell Lola Rosa's story, too, for it is



also part of the story. Unless both are told, neither will suffice. Back in our prehistory, the drama and exploits of Lamang and the others we call heroes were embedded in the rich tapestry of rituals and customs which were retold over and over throughout the myth. This is the essence of shared consciousness. We tell and retell events not solely to focus on details, but to transmit to the young the routine of living, the ceremony accompanying each activity, and aspect of our lives as members of one community. History is not just about the brave people; it is about us all. When we look back therefore to see what other biases rendered us invisible in the pages of our history apart from the ambiguity of our names, we can see clearly that the underlying framework justifying these reflects a consciousness or world-view commonly attributed only to males. Because writing history has become almost an exclusive and controlling domain of the male, the essential network of knowledge, and the pursuit of knowledge, comprising history as a discipline reflects a value system, or a way of cognition, that is essentially male. We have pointed out specific areas in this system: the partiality to males in the selection of a historical subject, the inherent partiality of methodology to the maintenance of male subjects, and, of course, the value system also inherently partial to values the community specifically assign only to males. If we were to complete the framework, and highlight at the same time the imposition of a male-dominated value system in the writing of our history, we might find ourselves being confronted by a perspective rigidly defined by an insistence to force history and history writing into an inflexible and fractured paradigm. The fixedness of this world-view may be manifested in what I call the three myths of historiography: one is the insistence that the history of one class can account and suffice for the histories of others, and the other is the appropriation of the

role of the historian or narrator by the dominant class or gender or both, and the third is the whimsical belief that history writing should be objective, and can be objective. These three can be amply illustrated by the present state of our history, the Philippine history.

Last April, I was able to put together a rather ambitious and extended essay about particular issues that Philippine historians should confront, if we all share the conviction that Philippine history should forever remain a significant source of understanding for us Filipinos. Like in my previous adventurous encounter with my professorial chair lecture, the path which had led me to the writing of this essay was wrought with beginner's insight and confusion. What began as a search for a particular information eventually led to my discovery of a variety of versions, depending on the historian writing, of that particular information I was looking for. You have to read the bound essay to get the whole picture, but I will cite to you now certain portions which will help us understand the three myths I was referring to.

Given the many versions I have read, I cannot help but be conscious of the other persona, the narrator or historian, speaking to me from the pages. Almost without exception, the different narrators all share the same profile: male and educated. Ethnicity is Tagalog. We can see an interference of race there, if we consider two variables: we either have a white, which is always American, educated male as the actual writer and narrator of our history; or a white, which is still American, educated male being cited as main and reputable source of our male, Tagalog, and educated narrator. All the same, we can easily identify the variables comprising the paradigm which has shaped the way we perceive, digest, and assimilate that chunk of knowledge we call history: only one gender, one class, and one ethnicity radiate the reality we all share, which

is multicultural, multilingual, multiclass, and, definitely at least, composed of two identifiable genders. And, therefore, running through the experience of being suffused with so many versions of one historical fact, I keep encountering provocative questions and complaints: What we know is the history of the Tagalog people only, only the Tagalogs rose in revolt, only the Tagalogs opposed the Americans; the other regions did not know the concept of independence; why impose the history of the Tagalogs upon the other cultures?; and so on. Depending on the writer's perspective, we see the Tagalogs being blamed for the defeat of the Filipinos, or the Ilokanos being branded as troublemakers. And, of course, we have a wealth of conflicting views, too, about the involvement of the *ilustrados* and the *indios*; the revolution was sustained by the common *tao*; the *ilustrados* provided the leadership; Bonifacio failed because he was a common *tao*; Aguinaldo succeeded because he was educated; only the *ilustrados* were agitating for a revolution; the *ilustrados* as turncoats, betraying the revolution; or the common *tao*, simple, too ignorant to fight for something so abstract. To make things more complicated, there is the tendency to write whatever narratives we have in the languages of the narrator only, in Tagalog or English, with the utmost reluctance to develop a multilingual schema among the readers, and, therefore, encourage the production of translated historical texts.

Another big quarrel among our historians involves the insistence that history conforms to 'truth'—with 'truth' being defined as that something that can be verified or authenticated, collaborated by eyewitnesses, or properly documented and cited as something actually happening, in a worthwhile way and fashion, of course, as we have defined earlier. In this we see the overlap of another entirely different domain, that which is empirical, into a discipline almost

defined by remembrances, by memories. In our perverted obsession with accuracy, we forget that narratives like history deal with much more than dates and names. I know this is a highly inflammable arena, but my insights come from another field, another perspective, which I think may bring us round to one of the main functions of the narrative threads binding a community together. Long before we learned to write—or more accurately, long before the elite few in us had learned to write and impose writing as a norm for knowledge—all we needed to keep our collective memories together were a sharp memory and a colorful tongue. We may see the myth as a residue of that something told a long time ago, already devoid of dates and specific time frames, of particulars effaced as the myth was retold a million times through generations. A myth tells us what layers of information have been systematically deleted, leaving the bare essentials, those information eventually leading to wisdom and understanding. Within the context of my lecture, we are familiar with old men, old veterans of the recent war, who will keep telling the same story, oftentimes forgetting dates and names, oftentimes exaggerating, and somehow we notice the lapses, the reductions or additions, and yet no matter how often we hear the story, oftentimes we feel moved, and oftentimes we stop a moment to reflect about the past which has touched us now, through the narrative of another. For me, that is as historical, if not significantly more, as any good male, Tagalog, and educated historian can get. For to trap our memories into the written form and pages not all of us can buy and read, and for us to be consistently blinded or constrained by the need to conform to the valuation of a discipline not quite sufficient to accommodate a complexity like collected memories, may invariably lead to one provocative question: If the historical accounts written in our history pages were shared

by all of us, and considered significant by all of us, why should we be obsessed with the anxiety that these accounts might be forgotten?

It seems proper that we raise this question, because that is partly why I find my unexpected detour into the world of women's studies as something akin to an illumination. In the last four or five years we have gotten familiar with narratives, also from women involved in the last war, but involved in a way we and our society are more accustomed to: narratives of women as victims. I was working on the text of my professorial chair lecture while listening to the accounts of another Lola Rosa, this time Lola Rosa, the comfort woman. I remember scribbling on my notebook. It is so easy for women to tell tales about her weakness, her subjugation, because we teach ourselves and the others teach us that pain and abuse are integral parts of our being and definition. And so, by way of an anticlimax, I suddenly figured out why I could not find the woman of my research: I could not find her because she had been brave and strong. Like the names I have read to you, my brave and fearless women have probably been killed during the war, or more sadly, have been silenced by our collective attempt not to remember something glorious and something heroic, because the paradigm is only for the other.

#### Complete List of the Women Soldiers:

Abanilla, Julieta (S/Sgt; Hunter Home Guard and sympathizer;  
killed in action) Abel, Nena  
Abrenica, Asuncion (killed in action)  
Acantilado, Cristina  
Adevoso, Pilar  
Alcantara, Adriana  
Ambat, Leonarda  
Ampon, Petronila  
Aquino, Angelita

Austria, Damiana  
Austria, Felicidad  
Bacosa, Fausta  
Baet, Crispina  
Baldemor, Eustaquia  
Baldemor, Thelma  
Basco, Encarnacion  
De Ramos, Belen  
Domondon, Faustina (killed in action)  
Dono, Flora  
Elias, Trinidad  
Ellsworth, Eugenia (her senior officer is Senator Raul Manglapus?)  
Eluria, Alicia  
Esconda, Trinidad  
Espena (? , not legible), Makita  
Evangelista, Virginia  
Fernandez, Victoria  
Ferrales, Julieta  
Figueroa, Maria  
Figueroa, Nora  
Flores, Luz (now a teacher?)  
Fulgar, Petra  
Galipot, Purita  
Garcia, Gregoria  
Garrido, Laudamia  
Gatangco, Anastacia  
Geronimo, Alicia  
Gotangco, Aurelia  
Hardison, Rosario  
Ibadlit, Consuelo (1534 Int. 3 Canonigo, Paco, Manila)  
Ilagan, Aurora  
Ilog, Visitacion Alunos (SFDM, QC?)  
Iluria, Minda  
Jamelin, Julieta  
Jarin, Virginia  
Javier, Belia  
Jurado, Angelina  
Landicho, Natividad  
Lara, Estrella

Macalinao, Cirila  
Medalla, Josefina Oliva  
Medalla, Juanita  
Nacu, Natividad  
Namayan, Lucila Alcantara  
Navarro, Carmen  
Ortiz, Ana  
Pablico, Sinforosa  
Quesas, Primitiva  
Real, Anacleto  
Real, Victoria  
Reyes, Maura  
Rivera, Flor Almonte  
Salamatan, Crispina  
Sanchez, Agrifina  
Siscar, Isabela  
Tiamson, Virginia  
Torres, Lolita  
Umali, Isabel  
Umangan, Dorinda  
Umengan, Luz  
Victoriano, Abulencia  
Villa, Martina Agorilla  
Villadolid, Tagumpay  
Villanueva, Marian  
Zagal, Lolita  
Zaldivia, Trinidad  
Zeta, Angelina  
Zeta, Felicitas  
Zoleta, Josefina

### Reference

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