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**Vina A. Lanzona**

**Amazons of the Huk Rebellion:**

**Gender, Sex, and Revolution in the Philippines**

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Philippine independence (322–23). In other words, contrary to the public statements of the American expansionists, there was freedom of conscience and the press only if one accepted being under a second colonial master. Public criticism was stifled by a new law on libel and sabotage.

Florentino Rodao, professor of history at the Universidad Complutense (Madrid) and one of the pioneers in the study of Spanish presence in Asia, briefly discusses the fortunes of the small Spanish enclave in the Philippines under the Spanish, American, and Japanese governments, three administrative systems that, with slight adaptations, based themselves on the long Hispanic sociopolitical context of Philippine society.

A single theme unifies this collection of essays: that there was more continuity than break when the US government took over Spain's farthest colony, perhaps unavoidably, because the Washington government was a novice colonizer. The change of jurisdiction over the Philippines at the end of the nineteenth century has not been adequately studied, and what has been written—and accepted by many writers and teachers of Philippine history—has been a chain of prejudices, half-truths, and partial perspectives. The only solution is to study the sources preserved in the archives, of which not even one half has been utilized. Unfortunately this is a utopian ideal, since Castilian, the language in which our historical documents are written, has disappeared from our country.

This collection of essays is a welcome addition to our constant search for the true story of our country. It corrects a number of errors that have passed as essential factors in the formation of a free democratic Philippines. Written in Castilian, one hopes a translation will prevent it from remaining a closed book for our people.

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VINA A. LANZONA

## **Amazons of the Huk Rebellion: Gender, Sex, and Revolution in the Philippines**

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2010. 370 pages.  
Originally published in 2009 by the University of Wisconsin Press.

The amazing feat of a woman guerrilla leading a group of guerrillas and defeating a stronger Japanese military troop in Candaba, Pampanga, on 8 March 1942 explodes into written historical accounts on the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines. It dramatically presages the organizing and launching of the Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon (People's Army Against the Japanese Invaders or HUKBALAHAP) on 29 March 1942. The woman guerrilla, Felipe Culala, known as Commander Dayang-Dayang, would later find herself the only woman to be elected as one of the four top leaders of the military command of the HUKBALAHAP. Then silence. Hardly anything is to be written anymore of women's participation in what has been acknowledged as the most successful guerrilla movement to challenge the Japanese invaders. Women Huk guerrillas appear only in the interstices of written histories as couriers, medical aid givers of wounded soldiers, and the like. That is, until this book, *Amazons of the Huk Rebellion: Gender, Sex, and Revolution in the Philippines* (2009), by Vina A. Lanzona.

In decentering history from male Huk leadership to women guerrilla participation, from an accounting of events to focusing on everyday concerns and problems as well as gender relationships among members inside the Huk organization, Lanzona faced the formidable task of reconstituting the lines of the history of women's participation in the Huk struggle with barely any written historical documents to rely on. And so she turned to oral history, to interviewing countless and hitherto unnamed women for their memories of their participation in the Huk struggle during and after the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines. She discovered, as I did when I researched on the songs of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), Partido Sosyalista ng Pilipinas (PSP), HUKBALAHAP, and the Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan (People's Liberation Army or HMB), that networks of former members continued to exist long after the Huk movement was deemed decimated by the government. She sought out the women Huk guerrillas in communities and villages that must have been strongholds of Huk support, and when

she found them they not only unraveled to her their still vivid memories about the Huk struggle, but also provided her links to other women in their network.

How reliable are memories in reconstructing a history forty to fifty years gone by? Lanzona says she began her interviews with Filipina women in 1993 to “recover an otherwise unrecoverable dimension of the Huk movement” (16). That the women chose not to forget, that they could recount details of their participation and share their war and postwar experiences, that they were willing to be named as the author’s primary sources can only indicate the value they put in their being part of the Huk movement. Each woman’s memory can be checked with other memories. This the author Lanzona did and more.

Weaving the strands of individual memories to form the collective story of the Huk “amazons,” Lanzona is able to show the contradictions within a radical movement that, even after the Second World War, continued to struggle for an alternative, more equitable society. Members who came from peasant backgrounds became literate because of the Huk movement’s education program. Women took on dangerous courier missions, participated in military operations, and even served as the node of a vital information network that proved their mettle and transformed their political being. But it was not as easy to eradicate traditional views and cultural practices. Men were privileged with positions of leadership, and many women in the movement accepted subordinate roles as the norm. Rarely did a woman like Celia Mariano penetrate the inner circle of leadership. When it came to the gender question, Lanzona opines that, while “the Huk movement subverted the existing social and gender inequities in Philippine society” (266), and seriously tried to address the “sex problem” by upholding the practice of monogamy among comrades who marry within the movement while allowing married men to take on “forest wives,” it was difficult to implement a new kind of morality. She points as a weakness the treatment by the movement of sex and family-related problems as political issues and therefore subordinating these to what it considered were more noble revolutionary goals. This, she argues, is the movement’s missed opportunity of making revolutionary rhetoric a reality.

The author devotes a larger portion of her study to the continuing Huk struggle after the war and up to the early 1950s. And rightly so. The war years put to the fore an anti-Japanese Huk guerrilla movement that drew

strength from civilian support. Toward the end of the war, many barrios in Central Luzon had already been liberated by the Huks from the Japanese. But recognition for the successful guerrilla warfare they waged was denied the Huks by the US government. Even their triumph in engaging in electoral politics was soon for naught when six of the elected Huk leaders were ousted from their seats in Congress. The Huk movement was revived and transformed into a people’s liberation army (Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan or HMB). While many of its old members returned to continue the struggle, there were those who were war-weary and had chosen to go back to their former lives. The conditions had also changed. As noted by Lanzona, it was easier to recruit when the fight was against a foreign enemy. This time around civilian support was getting more difficult to solicit.

At first the HMB posed a formidable threat to the newly constituted Philippine government. But with US military assistance and marshaling of government troops against the Huks, the movement became more and more isolated. These were the most trying times especially for the Huk amazons. Although Lanzona does not categorically say so, the sex and family-related problems probably became more pronounced and intense during the HMB years when the movement was driven to the mountains and the forests. There are many details in Lanzona’s book that portray the very human needs of Huk members, both men and women, whose “violations” of revolutionary discipline were meted harsh punishment, including execution. Women’s desire for intimate relations, the “biological necessity” of men that must be satisfied, feelings of loneliness for family and friends, the yearning for some kind of normalcy, the difficulty of giving birth in a forest or a mountain, then the anguish of having to decide whether to leave the babies with their mothers and relatives while they continue the struggle or to raise them in the forest and have to suffer to see them go hungry—all these were very real conditions in the Huk movement that must find space in historical accounts. And that Lanzona deftly does in her book.

There is another story that Lanzona stitches in her account of the Huk amazons. Through a series of archival photos published in newspapers that she retrieved and placed strategically in the pages of her book, Lanzona tells how the government propaganda machine churned out its own version of the Huk amazons. There is the photo of a woman wearing an expression of peaceful sleep, yet a corpse among the Huks killed by government troops in Candaba. The photo serves to warn the public that the battle against the

Huks does not distinguish between men and women. In the preceding page is a photo of the captured wounded Commander Betty on a wheelchair surrounded by the press and not at all fearsome looking. Under the photo, Lanzona's caption partly reads, "Not much was written about Commander Betty except that she was 'beautiful and fragile,' and she was constantly hounded by 'the press and radio representatives from Manila' who were captivated by her sexual aura and military presence" (136). Huk leader Celia Mariano is a portrait of calm defiance in a photo taken, Lanzona says, a day after her capture. There are also the obvious propaganda photos of babies and children branded by the government as "huklings," to sound like ducklings and therefore more like nonpersons. One shows the thin figures of "huklings" already "safe" inside a big playpen in Camp Murphy's "hukling nursery" and being visited by President Magsaysay's daughter "as part of her birthday activities" (140). Another is of two soldiers carrying two "huklings" and showing them to a third soldier. Lanzona cites the original caption that reads, "Two Huklings, abandoned children of Huk parents, are in the hands of the 20th BCT men who came across the babies . . . in Bulacan" (141).

While interesting, the many photos that the author includes in the pages of her book are but contrapuntal to the Huk amazons' own narratives and do not diminish the power of their memories as history. Their history has been silenced for many decades. Lanzona has retrieved it for them. In doing so, she has succeeded in putting a more humane face to the Huk movement.

It is only right that Lanzona's book, *Amazons of the Huk Rebellion: Gender, Sex, and Revolution in the Philippines*, hitherto available only in the US has come home to be read by us Filipinos as an important part of our history.

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MINA ROCES

**Women's Movements and the Filipina: 1986–2008**

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012. 277 pages.

Although women's movements in the Philippines have been praised for their gains and contributions both nationally and internationally, not too many scholarly works have been written about them—how they came to be and what their contributions were as woven into the narrative of personal and institutional politics. In particular, there has been no systematic reflection on what is probably the greatest achievement of the women's movement in the discursive realm, that is, the (re)construction of the Filipina. Mina Roces's work sets out to fill this gap. In this light, she aims to address the main area of inquiry on how women activists theorize the notion of Filipino woman and how this conception underpins their work and advocacy. Congruently, Roces navigates through various (and oftentimes clashing) discourses on the "Filipina" embedded in societal mindset and practices as well as in the activists' political project template. As Roces argues, the women's movement, in challenging the grand narrative of the "Filipina," presented a counterhegemonic discourse replete with a double narrative or "the deployment of two contrasting discourses—a narrative of victimization and a narrative of activism" (3). How the women's movements "managed" this double narrative in the context of their political agenda is the central theme of the book.

The book begins with a brief discussion of the history of the women's movement in the Philippines in both formal and informal political spaces and in domestic and international spheres. A very informative explanation on the "constructed" image of the "Filipina" as tied with different historical milieu lays the groundwork for locating the hegemonic discourse on the Filipino woman. By and large, the ideal "Filipina" conjured by our colonial past was that of a chaste, ever obedient and suffering woman, and proverbial martyr—a virgin bride, a subservient wife, and a "complete" woman by virtue of motherhood. Women who went against such image were considered as societal aberrations; women in history who supported and fought in revolutionary or other social movements were silenced, invisibilized, and relegated as mere addendum to men. Challenging this