

COLUMNISTS - COMMENTARY

Philippines - Karina Constantino David: In memoriam

Thursday 23 June 2022, by [HONCULADA Jurgette](#) (Date first published: 29 June 2019).

It is a testament to Karina Constantino David's organizing savvy and political heft that a cross-section of "ka-women-an" (and brave soul Jose Deles) packed a seminar room at the University of the Philippines College of Social Work and Community Development on June 22 to mark the 40th day of her passing.

Numbering 60-plus altogether, we were a merry mix with varied backgrounds (academe, urban poor, workers, NGOs including an election watchdog, homegrown feminists, et al.), reflecting Karina's wondrous reach but also affirming the Paulo Freire imperative of wedding theory to action.

Praxis, in fact, was the leitmotif of Karina's life. No idle thought, no idle word, no idle action, but one rooted in the other, always. The songs she wrote (or translated, such as Victor Jara's "Cuando Voy Al Trabajo") were not sheer whimsy but an odd melding of romance and grit, and yes, a call to arms for women long deadened and defeated by poverty and patriarchy.

In the opening video, Karina acknowledged her belated feminist awakening. Her first "Aha" moment was sparked by the visit of two Ateneo college students seeking an interview with spouse sociologist Randy David on newly formed Bisig (Bukluran sa Ikauunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa), particularly its "socialist vision." Karina offered to answer their questions because Randy would be away for an hour and, besides, she wrote the final draft of the "vision" after lengthy group discussions and debate. But the two schoolboys issued a curt "No, thanks." The look in their eyes said, "It's only you." Uncannily, this was a reprise of her mother's experience. Letizia Roxas did half of eminent historian (and Karina's father) Renato Constantino's writings but did not get full or equal credit, and was mostly consigned to the "background," Karina wryly noted.

Karina's contributions to feminist pedagogy are pivotal, including the adaptation of feminist poker from Latin America for Philippine gender sensitivity training ("Feministang Pusoy") and the diagrammatic expression of "Manifestations of Gender Bias": a circle with five equal parts denoting double burden, violence against women, sex-role stereotyping, subordination, marginalization and, in the center, personhood (low self-esteem). The circle sits atop a cross, seemingly saying that gender and its oppressions are a cross many women bear daily.

Karina's organization Hasik (Harnessing Self-Reliant Initiatives and Knowledge) is credited with producing the first gender sensitivity training manual in the '80s, and also in pioneering gender sensitivity training for men. Karina called herself an "organic feminist."

Karina was a class act, manifest in the accounts and vignettes that poured out of the handful of speakers who often exceeded their 10-minute limit.

Kara, the Davids' eldest daughter, spoke of Karina's intelligent heart and boundless generosity. When Kara sought her advice on how to spend TV reality show winnings amounting to a million

pesos, Karina counseled: “If you want something to last, share it with, give it to, others.” Kara started a school in Bicol, a feeding program and an education foundation for poor children. That was over 10 years ago, and the scholarships are ongoing. Among the many children beneficiaries is a girl who once dove for sea urchins at 5 years of age to earn money. She is now a teacher.

Three former Hasik staff members, Consuelo “Tata” Lacson (now Añonuevo), Alexandra “Jing” Pura and Mina Tenorio, shared that Karina exacted high standards in everything she did, expressed in the word “rigor.” Jing toted a bag loaded with paperbacks—proof, she said, of the preparatory readings she had to do (mostly Karina’s articles) for the talk in a nod to Karina’s standards. Mina said that by rigor Karina meant thinking an activity through from A to Z (if possible), “finding answers to problem areas, preparing for contingencies” and “always looking at the larger picture—what would best benefit the common tao?” The Hasik joke was, “Karina is in the details.”

Teresita “Ging” Deles of INCITEGov and Pilipina had worked closely with Karina in the past three decades in many joint projects and campaigns, including the birthing and building up of EveryWoman. Ging dwelt on two sets of three Ks to sum up Karina’s character traits and methods of work. In the first instance: sharp analysis (kilatis), thinking out of the box (kalikutan ng isip), and sense of humor (kiliti) to describe her persona. In the second instance: knowing people (kilala), song (kanta), and reclaiming the power of story and narrative (kwento) to describe Karina’s methods.

Becky Demetillo Abraham helped open the celebration by leading a stirring rendition of “Babae Ka,” assisted by daughter Astarte. Later, a diffident Becky said she would only sing “snippets” on account of failing memory and aging vocals. But, lo and behold, Becky amazed the multitude of women by singing entire stanzas and full scores. Maybe she thought that Karina was keenly listening from on high gave Becky a growing force and power that was palpable.

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P.S.

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