Women in Southeast Asian Nationalist Movements

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CHAPTER 5

Salud Algabre: A Forgotten Member of the Philippine Sakdal

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Born in 1894, Salud Algabre was a member of the Sakdal, a Philippine peasant organisation founded in 1930 by Benigno Ramos. The organisation protested against the mainstream nationalist movement led by Manuel Quezon, because the Sakdalistas considered that it was not seeking genuine independence from the American colonialists and that it was dominated by landlord interests. Salud figured prominently in an uprising on 2 May 1935 in the town of Cabuyao, Laguna, when she led a group of Sakdalistas who blocked the railroad, cut telegraph lines and patrolled the national highway.

For this act, Salud was arrested by the authorities and stood trial on the charge of being a member of an illegal association. The case lasted for four years. The court found her guilty, and she was fined and sentenced to imprisonment for six to ten years — the only woman Sakdalista to be so punished. However, she served less than two years of her sentence as she was pardoned by Quezon, president of the Commonwealth of the Philippines. After World War II Salud continued her fight against big landholders until she died at the age of 85 in 1979.

In books containing short biographies of Filipinos in history, there are few women, and Salud does not figure in the list. There is more documentation of Filipino women who struggled to be given the right to vote. The fact that this was a cause spearheaded by educated and professional women who were able to document their struggle made them by default visible in the historical narrative. Absent or rare,
However, is the documentation of women who were active in the nationalist movement but came from the lower class. Legitimate though the causes of both these types of women, struggles by peasant women remain absent or marginalised in the pages of the nation's history.

It is also notable that those few women who are generally recognised as having participated in the nationalist movement in the 20th century identified with the mainstream and were part of the elite that led it. The Sakdal movement has been relegated to the sidelines, even though it was part of a long history of peasant movements that combined nationalism with a struggle for land in the Philippines. Except for the discussion of Sakdalism in David Sturtevant's book
(1976), the history of the movement has not been extensively documented, so the role of Salud Algabre in the Philippines nationalist movement has received very little attention. In effect, not until very recently have women in such peasant movements been the subjects of historical study.²

This chapter relies on a few lesser-known interviews of our protagonist. Salud was interviewed in 1935 by the Sunday Tribune Magazine and in 1966 by the historian David Sturtevant.³ These transcribed interviews provide invaluable insights into her personality and her convictions. Eleven years later, Salud was interviewed by the Filipino historian Isagani Medina. Salud was by then 83 years old. The result of this interview was an article written in 1996 by Thelma B. Kintanar and Carina C. David.⁴ So far, these three interviews remain the major sources of information about Salud.

As a female member of a section of the Philippine nationalist movement that combined the demands for independence and rights for peasants, Salud Algabre has been lost from view in the history of Philippine nationalism. This chapter will attempt to return her to the ranks of notable nationalists.
Filipino Women in the Nationalist Movement

The Philippines is home to the first nationalist movement in Southeast Asia to have declared independence from Spanish colonial rule and established a modern nation-state. In the 19th century modern-style nationalist organisations were formed, and in 1896 the Philippine Revolution led to the end of Spanish colonial rule and the declaration of a short-lived independent Philippine Republic in 1898. US colonialism almost immediately displaced the Spanish. Admittedly, it was of a much more benign type than the Spanish colonialism, and the Americans claimed to be preparing the Philippines for independence, but the actual transfer of sovereignty did not occur until after World War II, in 1946.

In the 20th century the mainstream Philippine nationalist movement, which had resorted to armed rebellion against the Spanish, was led by a landed elite who cooperated with the Americans, taking positions in the Philippine Commonwealth structures created by the colonial power in preparation for eventual independence. The Jones Law of 1916 was the first articulation by the United States of its decision to grant the Philippines independence on the condition that a stable government was established. It also created an all-Filipino legislature composed of a House of Representatives headed by Sergio Osmena and a Senate headed by Manuel Quezon. Members of both chambers came from the landowning class. This elite used their political clout to protect their economic interests. Members of the Philippine missions sent to the United States to work for independence laws also originated from the landed class. There was no room in this mainstream nationalist movement for peasants, who constituted the majority of the population and included many tenants of the large landlords. Nor was there much room for women, even of the elite class.

The Philippine nationalist movement contained a few notable women, but colonialism had made it difficult for many women to become involved in such public political activities. Efforts were made by the Spanish colonial power, and particularly the Catholic Church, to reduce Filipino women to a position of subordination in relation to men. This kind of socialisation, impressed through education and the publication of moral codes about how women should behave, may have had an impact on the elite but affected ordinary Filipino women far less. After all, the creation story of the Filipinos, wherein man and woman emerged from a single node of a bamboo, underscored the
Map 6. The Philippines
egalitarian status of man and woman in rural society. Women's political activity began in the 19th century. Filipino women established a Masonic Lodge dedicated to women and formed a women's chapter in the Katipunan, a secret organisation that aimed to overthrow Spanish rule in the Philippines.\textsuperscript{5}

In the early 20th century, under US rule, some Filipino women entered male-dominated professions (such as medicine and law) and demanded the right to vote in the electoral assemblies established by the Americans. They finally acquired the right to vote through a provision in the 1935 Constitution.\textsuperscript{6}

In this context Filipino women were emboldened to get involved in the affairs of the nation. The women included Salud Algabre, who took up the fight to improve the situation of peasants, for which she saw the independence of the country as indispensable.

The Sakdal Movement

The Philippines has a long history of agrarian unrest, caused by land tenure problems. By the 19th century, land became an important economic asset not only for food production but also for commercial crops. Early in that century, the Spanish finally opened up the Philippines to world trade, which created a demand for certain crops such as sugar, tobacco, abaca hemp and rice. At that time, landowners were of two types: religious corporations and private individuals. The former owned vast tracts of lands devoted to cash crops. The majority of Filipino landowners, who owned two to three hectares of land, were compelled to borrow capital for the cultivation of cash crops. Loans were extended by rich landowners who imposed usurious rates and readily acquired the land once the farmer defaulted in paying his debt. With an economy based on agriculture and the landholding class confined to a few, tenancy became the norm rather than the exception.

Protests against vast estates owned by Catholic orders such as the Dominicans contributed to the Philippine Revolution. These estates were found in most provinces of southern Luzon, the main island of the Philippines. (For places mentioned in this chapter, see maps 6 and 7.) One of the revered leaders of the 19th-century nationalist movement, Jose Rizal, came from the province of Laguna, which was practically a Dominican estate, where tenants were ruthlessly exploited. Laguna was also the native province of Salud Algabre. Land tenure
problems persisted there, even though land was purchased by private owners under US colonialism.

The pattern of farmers losing their land to big landowners, as described above, persisted during the US period. It did not help that many Filipinos did not have legal title to their land since the process of getting a title required money, education and time, all of which the ordinary Filipino farmer lacked. Hence Filipino society during the early decades of the 20th century continued to be dominated by large landowners.

The Depression of the 1930s worsened the lot of farmers in the Philippines, which fuelled peasant uprisings, including the Sakdal movement. Unlike the more common spontaneous peasant Millenarian uprisings, however, Sakdal was also a nationalist organisation.

Ramos, the founder of the Sakdal movement, was an employee of the Philippine Senate who fell out with the nationalist leader, Manuel Quezon, who was the Senate president and had been responsible for getting Ramos his job. Ramos vowed henceforth to be a critic of Quezon as well as the government. In 1930 he founded an organisation and a newspaper, both bearing the name “Sakdal”, a Tagalog word meaning “to accuse” or “to strike”. The objective of the organisation was “to accuse governmental officials before the public of acts which Ramos declared detrimental to the country and especially to the common people”. Ramos urged his followers not to participate in government, not to vote, and not to pay the *cedula* or poll tax. The field notes gathered by Sturtevant, a historian of this period of Philippine history, yielded testimonies of arrested Sakdal members who refused to pay their poll tax. Salud Algabre’s husband was one of them.

One issue of the newspaper *Sakdal*, dated 16 August 1930, set out the nationalist ideas of the organisation. It argued that independence was not something to be granted by the United States; it was a right declared by the Filipinos. It was wrong, therefore, for leaders such as Quezon to send missions to Washington to seek independence: the nationalist movement should seize independence.

In 1933, the Sakdal movement became a political party. A convention was held on 29 October, and Sakdal produced a constitution and by-laws.

The Tydings-McDuffie Law, which provided for a transition government to last for ten years, was approved by the Philippine Legislature on 1 May 1934. Ramos explained Sakdal’s rejection of the Tydings-McDuffie Law in this manner:
We do not believe the Tydings-McDuffie Act ... Since 1898, the United States has again and again repeated the statement: We will recognize the independence of the Philippines and has designed legislation to permit independence. But they never carried it out. By saying that they will recognize independence in ten years, the Americans are doing nothing more than suppressing independence agitation for ten years. The Americans, who have over and over promised to recognize our independence and have always broken their promise, have now enunciated a new promise called Tydings-McDuffie Act. So why should they be believed this time? We have affirmed that at whatever cost we must secure independence by our own strength.9

In July of 1934, a constitutional convention took place to draft a constitution that was to be ratified through a plebiscite on 14 May 1935. On 2–3 May the Sakdal Uprising took place, registering the Sakdal’s rejection of the constitution. By this time the movement had adherents in the provinces of Laguna, Rizal, Nueva Ecija, Bulacan, Tarlac, Batangas, Tayabas, Cavite, Capiz, Cebu, Negros, Cagayan, Antique and Misamis. These provinces had large estates and landless tenants. At the time of the uprising, the Sakdal movement advocated land reform, the dismantling of large estates or haciendas, and immediate, complete and absolute independence from the United States.

Clearly, the agrarian discontent in the Philippines attracted peasants to the movement. This was the situation of the Sakdal movement when Salud Algabre became a member.

**Personal Antecedents of Salud**

Salud Algabre was born two years before the beginning of the Philippine Revolution of 1896. She was the daughter of Maximo Algabre, a landowner from Cabuyao, and Justina Tirones, a seamstress. She had nine siblings, but only six survived.

The Algabre family had a history of resistance against colonisers starting from the Spanish period. According to Salud, her grandfather and father fought the Spaniards during the Philippine Revolution. Her grandfather, who was a gobernadorcillo (head of a town), slashed his own throat as a protest against the threat of the Spanish civil authorities to banish him to a far-off place for refusing to kiss the hand of a priest. An uncle was a member of the Katipunan, the secret
organisation that spearheaded the Philippine Revolution. Some relatives were exiled to Dapitan and Jolo in Mindanao for their revolutionary activities. Salud mentioned that during the war against Spain her grandfather and father were soldiers who faced the Spaniards in Calamba and Santa Cruz, two towns in Laguna. Both fought under General Juan Cailles, who would later become governor of Laguna during the US period.

In her interview in 1966, Salud recalled that her paternal grandfather had extensive landholdings and five granaries. The fact that he owned land qualified him to get elected as gobernadorcillo during the Spanish period. She did not mention how her grandfather lost his lands. It is likely that he became indebted in some way and due to his inability to pay back the loan his land was acquired by the lender.

Both Salud’s parents had formal schooling, having spent about six years in Manila. When it was Salud’s turn to study, she too was sent to Manila during the years 1903–9. Living with an uncle in Tondo, she was able to finish grade four. Her mother, however, made her stop schooling out of fear that her American music teacher, Mrs Brown, would take her to the United States. Salud had fond memories of this teacher and also remembered her English teacher, Mrs Domondon, and her sewing teacher, Mrs Emilia Flores. With her schooling halted, Salud was entrusted by her mother to a private tutor until the first year of high school.

According to Salud, her patriotism was sparked by her appreciation for a subject in elementary school that must have been civics, a subject introduced by the Americans to the curriculum and focused on training for citizenship. Salud recalled that it was through this subject that she internalised her identity as a Filipino and her love for her country. In her later interview with Isagani Medina, Salud sang from memory the patriotic song *Philippines, My Philippines* composed by Francisco Santiago. When she was 19 years old Salud featured as one of the town belles of Cabuyao, in Laguna, in the annual parade on 30 December 1913 to commemorate the death anniversary of the national hero Jose Rizal.

In her 1966 interview, Salud admitted to having several suitors but said it was Severo Generalla who won her heart. She mentions that by this time both her parents were gone and that the match was initiated by the father of Severo, who was the master baker in a bakery in Pandacan, a suburb of Manila. Salud mentions that Severo studied nine years in Manila and attended night school at the Liceo de Manila, where he obtained an Associate in Arts degree. Salud was
21 years old and was working as a seamstress when she married Severo in 1915.\(^\text{15}\)

Severo left his job as a baker and became a cigar maker at Tabacalera, a private tobacco factory, where he became president in Pandacan of the Union Obreros de Tabaco de Filipinas (Tobacco Workers Union of the Philippines). Salud described her husband as a “strong union man” and mentioned that Severo’s affiliation to the union “would lead to some trouble” (using her own words) that necessitated their leaving Manila and returning to the province of Laguna. Severo owned a stall in the Calamba public market and also went into farming.\(^\text{16}\)

Although Salud and Severo may have started life as members of the Filipino educated elite, they experienced growing impoverishment. The loss of their lands in the provinces may have resulted in their relocation to Manila in search of job opportunities in the city. Severo’s involvement in the labour movement in Manila then forced him and Salud to return to their place of origin, now as landless peasants. This marked a turning point in Salud’s life. It was back in Laguna that Salud would become a member of the Sakdal movement.

**Salud as a Member of the Sakdal Movement**

A reversal of the family’s fortunes, added to the fact that she had some education, made Salud Algabre analyse the situation not only of herself but of the peasant class to which she now belonged. Salud eloquently articulated the plight of the dispossessed, which is evident in an interview given in 1935 after she was arrested.\(^\text{17}\)

For Salud, no number of petitions sent to the US government or consultations with Filipino leaders — who in her mind had become stooges of the Americans — would ameliorate the condition of the peasants. In her 1966 interview she expressed the injustice that had befallen tenant farmers in these words:

> When we worked the land, we were cheated. The terms on the estate were 50-50. If the tenants harvested 1,000 tons, 500 were to go to the *proprietario* [landowner] and 500 to the farmers. But we never got the agreed 50 per cent. We would get a mere 25 per cent, sometimes even less.\(^\text{18}\)

Salud was convinced that there was no one to turn to but her fellow peasants, who had to organise themselves. This realisation moved her to join the Sakdal movement.
Salud became a member of Sakdal in 1930, when she was 36 years old. Her interest in the movement was awakened when her grandfather Lino handed her a copy of the newspaper *Sakdal*. For Salud, the contents of the newspaper expressed succinctly the plight of peasants like her who were attracted to the objectives of the Sakdal movement, which worked for the distribution of land and the independence of the Philippines from the United States.\(^{19}\)

In her 1966 interview, Salud stated that independence was indispensable and was an important precondition for improving the plight of peasants:

> Nothing could solve our problem except independence, as the United States had promised. Freedom was the solution … With independence, the leaders would cease to be powerful. Instead, it would be the people who were powerful. The people would have their freedom. We would have our own lands; they would no longer be the monopoly of the *proprietarios* and of government officials. As it was, we had nothing.\(^{20}\)

Salud’s words, recorded in an interview after she was captured in 1935, describe vividly the plight of peasants during the 1930s:

> We cannot send the children to school without money. Times are bad. What mother wouldn’t send her children to school if she could. Two years ago we made a sugar crop for Julia Lumpaco in Calamba. We were to take what they gave us after the sugar was sold. We harvested 122 tons of cane. We have received no pay as yet. We owe Julia P137.00 The account is mixed up. Some times [sic] when we got a peso she would put down P1.15 or P1.20. When we got P5.00 she would put down P5.75. We were dissatisfied. Couldn’t stand the charges so we left. She said for every ton we harvested she would collect fifty centavos on the land. We were supposed to get a fourth of the harvest. They wouldn’t let us raise chickens. We needed chickens to get spending money for the children; where we are now we are getting P1.20 a week for the chickens, have fruit trees and get odd jobs cutting cane. We had two carabaos [buffaloes], but both have been sold. We borrowed P400.00 on a mortgage when my child got sick. A surveyor agreed to survey our solar [farm] and get title for P50.00. He did it in our absence and made mistakes in the boundary. Then he sued us for P130.00. We spent the P50.00 we had to pay for the title in the lawsuit. We haven’t been able to pay the land tax for four or five
years. My husband was put in jail because he had no cedula. We are against the Constitution. We are against the leaders because they promise us independence and never get it. We think there is no hope for us in our hardships without independence.\textsuperscript{21}

When they met Benigno Ramos, the founder of the Sakdal movement, in 1930, Salud and her husband agreed to help organise the movement in the town of Cabuyao. In her 1966 interview Salud described Ramos as “a good man” and said that she and her husband agreed completely with his purpose. Organising the movement in Cabuyao meant distributing free copies of the newspaper \textit{Sakdal} and explaining its contents to other peasants.\textsuperscript{22}

Eventually Salud’s home became a regular meeting place every Sunday. Salud recalled later that Mass was celebrated in the morning, officiated by the head of the newly established Iglesia Filipina Independiente (Philippine Independent Church), Gregorio Aglipay.\textsuperscript{23}

This church played an important part in the Philippine nationalist movement. In 1898, during the Philippine Revolution, Aglipay, a Filipino secular priest, was appointed by Emilio Aguinaldo as the chief chaplain of the Filipino armed forces. He was summoned by the Manila Ecclesiastical Tribunal, a church body controlled by the Spaniards, for having accepted such an appointment and for other breaches to the canonical discipline. Aglipay never appeared before the tribunal and as a result was excommunicated. In 1902, the Philippine Independence Church was formally established with Father Aglipay as its first bishop, independent of the Pope in Rome. It drew many adherents among the Filipinos because its liturgy was similar to the Catholic faith. The only difference was that it had severed its ties with Rome. This was why the Philippine Revolution considered it to be a national church; its clergy was entirely Filipino, and it was headed by a Filipino.

Sakdal delegations from nearby provinces such as Tayabas, Batangas, Cavite, Rizal and Bulacan congregated in Salud’s house. At one point there were about 500 Sakdalistas present. Salud commented in the 1966 interview: “It was exciting. Religion in the morning and politics all day.” These meetings assumed a festive air, with everyone bringing their own food and Ramos and Aglipay in regular attendance: “Cooking fires burned all day and well into the night.”\textsuperscript{24} Starting in late 1931, meetings were held regularly until the Sakdal Uprising on 2–3 May 1935.
Map 7. Provinces of southern Luzon, Philippines
The town authorities were suspicious. The police would barge in and inquire why people were gathering. They would disperse the group and deny them freedom of assembly and freedom of speech. Arrests of Sakdal members took place as well. The non-payment of *cedula* became a convenient excuse for arresting Sakdalistas. Salud’s husband was one of those jailed for not paying *cedula* and was made to wear a uniform with stripes like those of the tiger. In her 1966 interview Salud recounted:

> I took a picture of Severo in that tiger shirt and mailed it to the United States. I wanted the Americans to know what their compatriots here in the Philippines were doing to the people. What kind of government did we have if men who refused to pay the *cedula* were forced to wear tiger suits. Nothing happened. I don’t know whether they received it or whether it was intercepted.

In a meeting of local leaders held in Salud’s house on 7 April 1935, it was agreed that an uprising would be held on 2 May 1935. Salud’s role was to inform the Sakdal leaders in the nearby towns of Cabuyao such as San Pedro, Calamba, Los Banos and Caluan of the impending uprising. She instructed them that the uprising would consist of their occupying the municipal hall of the town, raising the Sakdal flag and proclaiming independence.

**The Sakdal Uprising in Cabuyao**

In her 1966 interview, Salud Algabre gave an extensive account of her part in the Sakdal revolt of 1935. On 30 April 1935 she went to San Pedro, Calamba, Los Banos and Caluan to inform Sakdal leaders of the forthcoming uprising. She was back in Cabuyao the following day, 1 May. According to her, the Sakdalistas were armed with *bolos* (knives), clubs, sickles, some shotguns and revolvers.

On the afternoon of the appointed day, 2 May, Salud led a group of Sakdalistas assembled near the railroad station and blocked the railroad and cut the telegraph lines. Salud was garbed in a white long-sleeved shirt, a red skirt with a blue tapis (a piece of cloth wrapped around the skirt) and a white headband. The colours red, white and blue echoed the colours of the Philippine flag.

Other Sakdalistas converged in the municipal hall of Cabuyao. At that time, the municipal mayor tried to dissuade them from occupying the town hall. Seeing that he had failed to stop them, the mayor
admonished them not to touch anything found inside the building. Even the guns in the armoury of the municipal hall were not touched by Sakdalistas. They raised the red Sakdal flag and sang the Sakdal hymn.30

Salud and her group proceeded to the highway and felled trees to block the road. Traffic was stopped at the highway at six in the evening. At seven o’clock, Salud and her group stopped a car carrying Marines from Los Banos. A sergeant asked Salud why they were being stopped. Salud introduced herself and her companions as Sakdalistas and said that they were demanding “immediate, complete and absolute independence”. She asked for the Marines’ firearms and the key of their vehicle, and issued a receipt for the confiscated items. Salud gave food to the Marines and stayed with them until the morning. Because the Marines seemed frightened by the Sakdalistas with their bolos, Salud then released them.31

Following is an account recorded in 1935 by one of those stopped by Salud:

Salud Algabre, the generala was a thin, slight woman and she must have been around forty. But her frailty ended then and there. In her attire, her brisk manner and her speed, she affected a martial disposition. She had on a white long sleeved camiseta [a shirt], a red skirt and a white piece of cloth for a tapiz. These together with a white headband made her a perfect picture of a war general. We noticed too that she was restlessly walking hither and yon, inspecting detained cars, issuing receipts for confiscated revolvers. Later on, she made it emphatic that only those revolvers belonging to Filipinos would be returned to their owners. Americans, Chinese and other foreigners would have to give up their weapons for lost.32

The confiscation of weapons belong to Americans, Chinese and other foreigners by Salud, with the parting shot that they should be considered as lost, implies that these people were considered as oppressors of Filipino peasants and therefore deemed as enemies. The same account mentioned that in issuing receipts for confiscated items, Salud borrowed a fountain pen from the author of the account. She cut off a piece of her skirt and said: “Now take this piece of cloth as a receipt of your fountain pen and as soon as the war is over, just show me this receipt and you can have your pen back.” We do not know whether the promise was fulfilled, but what was significant was the expression of Salud’s word of honour.
Salud’s married name, Generalla, was easily transformed into Generala, which was the Spanish term for “woman general”. In fact, despite being expected to assume the surname of her husband, Salud retained her maiden name, Algabre. In a sign of her independence, she explained, “It’s my custom not to use my husband’s name. I don’t want my maiden name to die.”

Around eight in the morning, Salud returned to her house to get some rice. It was at this time that the governor of the province, Juan Cailles, and his soldiers stormed the Cabuyao municipal hall. When news reached Salud that the constables were after her, she went to the house of a friend to check on her children and hid in an irrigation canal. At the time of the uprising, the eldest of Salud’s five children was 16 years old and the youngest 14 months. She remained there until 1.30 in the afternoon. Salud recounted:

Hardly had I reached home when I was informed that a number of Constabulary soldiers led by Governor Cailles were on the way to arrest me. Leaving my children crying, I went to the river about five meters from the house, and submerged myself in the water. I kept my head under the water as long as I could stand it without breathing, then I would rise for a breath of fresh air.

I heard Governor Cailles giving orders to shoot me down on sight. I was fearful the soldiers, angered at not finding me, might shoot my children. I expected to hear their shots anytime. Governor Cailles and his men waited at the house for almost an hour. I thought I would go crazy if they did not go away soon. At last they left, and I sneaked into the house and told my children to be good for I was going away. Then I went to Pulong Kahoy in Cavite where I hid until the Constabulary came last Sunday.

In her escape towards Silang, Cavite, Salud later recalled meeting a soldier along a dike. He ordered her to come close to him. She said:

I drew myself straight and tall and walked up to him. He had on a Constabulary hat, but was wearing only an undershirt and trousers. He had also a rifle with a fixed bayonet in his hands. We just stared at each other over the bayonet. After a long time, he lowered the rifle, turned and left. I continued on across the paddies.

I believe he knew who I was. Perhaps he had heard that I had a powerful anting-anting [amulet]. People said I did. But my only anting-anting was help from God.
Salud continued to elude the soldiers as she crossed rivers and hiked through rice paddies. She even mentioned that there was an airplane searching for her. After she reached Silang, she was walking along the bank of the river when she encountered a huge pile of rocks. As she turned back, Salud would have fallen into the river had not her tresses got entangled in the branch of a tree. She recounted how scared she was at nightfall, imagining supernatural beings lurking around but at the same time mesmerised by the myriad of fireflies that lighted the place where she was hiding. She recalled having staved off hunger by eating raw eggs from a hen's nest that she chanced upon.36

One of her uncles, Miguel de la Cueva, a fellow Sakdalista who was also searching for her, discovered Salud hiding in a grove of bamboo. He convinced her to give herself up. She was presented to the authorities of Silang and then brought back to Cabuyao and then to Santa Cruz, the capital of Laguna province. She was incarcerated from 5 May 1935 to 1 October 1935, when she was set free upon payment of bail amounting to 2,000 pesos.37

While in jail, Salud was visited and interviewed by some American authorities. One of them asked her why she and the Sakdalistas had staged an uprising. Salud replied that the Sakdalistas were after “immediate, complete and absolute independence”. Participating in the plebiscite scheduled to accept or reject the Tydings-McDuffie Law providing for a ten-year transition before the granting of independence by the United States was unacceptable to the Sakdalistas. Salud thought that the Americans appreciated her reply.38

It must have helped Salud that her husband shared her aspirations since he too was a member of the Sakdal movement. Severo was a delegate to a Sakdal Convention, representing Laguna province. According to Salud in her 1966 interview, after the uprising Severo escaped to Mount Makiling, where he hid for seven months. He secretly went back to Manila but was later captured and imprisoned. He was released before World War II.39 Sturtevant mentioned that Severo, being a labour leader and aware of the fate of popular movements, counselled moderation, which Salud rejected.40

While Salud was incarcerated her children were left in the care of an aunt, which she confessed made her feel guilty. One of Salud’s sons recounted that one time they left behind their youngest sibling with a dog that had recently given birth. They heard the child crying, apparently out of hunger. When the siblings got to her, they saw her suckling from the dog.41
The trial of Salud and the Sakdalistas took four years. It was held in Intramuros, Manila. According to Salud, her children followed her during these hearings as this was the only opportunity for her to see them. A court decision was handed down on 3 January 1939. It read:

Wherefore, it having been proved beyond reasonable doubt that the Lapiang Sakdalista (Sakdalista Party) is an association which has for its objective the overthrow of the Government through forcible means, an act punished by the Penal Code, and that the defendants are members of the said party, some of them being also officers and organizers, the Court finds the said defendants (with the exception of Benigno Ramos who has not yet been tried) guilty of the crime of illegal association and hereby sentences them.\(^{42}\)

Salud was the only woman Sakdal member who was imprisoned for being one of the leaders of the Cabuyao Uprising.

According to Salud,\(^{43}\) she was sentenced to a term of six to ten years of imprisonment and fined 5,000 pesos but she did not serve the full term. After being imprisoned for one year, seven months and three days, she was pardoned by Manuel Quezon, president of the Commonwealth government, the very person whom the Sakdalistas detested. The Sakdalistas viewed Quezon as being in cahoots with the Americans in withholding independence from the Filipinos. They perceived him as misleading the people by saying that the Commonwealth government was transitional when in reality he wanted US interests to continue in the Philippines. According to the Sakdalistas, Quezon was from the privileged class and the government that he headed catered to the interests of the elite and not to the lower class. Moreover, the Sakdalistas referred to Quezon as *dugong Kastila* (Spanish blood), which reminded the ordinary folk of the cruel and oppressive Spanish colonialists.

**Struggle after the Uprising**

After accusing Quezon of collaborating with the Americans, during the liberation of the Philippines from the Japanese Salud herself was accused of being a Japanese collaborator and imprisoned. She was arrested by the 48th Infantry Regiment of the United States Armed Forces of the Far East guerrillas on 4 February 1945 and was arraigned in court on 17 October 1945.\(^{44}\)
In her testimony, Salud stated that Benigno Ramos, founder of the Sakdal movement, had invited her to be a member of the Makabayan Katipunan ng mga Pilipino (MAKAPILI, Association of Patriotic Filipinos). This organisation was described in the court “as an organization of military character for the purpose of giving material support and physical as well as moral assistance and aid to the Empire of Japan and the Japanese Imperial Forces in the Philippines”.\footnote{45} It is pertinent to point out that Ramos had sought asylum in Japan in December 1934 and directed the activities of the Sakdal movement from that country. Ramos was welcomed by radical Japanese Pan Asianists who claimed Japan should take a leading role in liberating Asia from Western imperialism. Ramos convinced the Japanese to support popular anti-colonial movements such as the Sakdal. During the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, Ramos returned to his homeland and worked with the Japanese.

Salud testified in court that Ramos’ invitation came a month before she was arrested. She said that she was told to oversee a MAKAPILI plantation in Barrio San Jose and was given five Filipino guards by the Japanese to protect the plantation. According to Salud, the Japanese provided rice for the 60 Filipinos working on the plantation. She added that she was given a .38 calibre pistol by the Japanese and mentioned that four Japanese officers frequented her home.

On 16 December 1946, the People's Court (a court established to try cases of collaboration in the Philippines) ordered the provisional dismissal of the case against Salud “on the ground that witnesses which the prosecution intended to present in this case are not available”.\footnote{46}

Salud denied that the Sakdalistas were in league with the Japanese.\footnote{47} It is possible to conjecture that Salud, like other Sakdal members, saw the Japanese as liberators of the Filipinos from the American colonialists. Japan’s Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere espoused Asia for Asians but with Japan as the leader. Many of the mainstream nationalist Filipino elite also worked with the Japanese during the war, for similar reasons or out of self-interest, making the issue of collaboration a very murky one.

After the war, Salud continued to oppose the rich who held on to big landholdings. In one of her battles she took on the Tuason family over the Tatalon Estate in Quezon City. Salud said: “The reason why I neglected my children is because I helped fight the avidity of the Tuasons in Tatalon.”\footnote{48} Thus she continued to cast her lot with the dispossessed, although it is notable that she did not join the Hukbalahap
movement, which began during World War II and claimed to fight for both independence and peasants’ rights to land. Perhaps the Communist ideology of the Hukbalahap did not appeal to Salud.

Salud’s Legacy

When interviewed at the age of 72 by Sturtevant and asked whether there was bitterness in her heart after the failed Sakdal Uprising, Salud replied: “I was not bitter. I did what I thought was right. We lost and I was punished. The principles we fought for, and my faith in God, strengthened me.”

Looking back to that fateful day of 2 May 1935, when the uprising was quelled by government forces, Salud felt that it was not a failure. Her words were: “no uprising fails. Each step is a step in the right direction.” These words echoed Salud’s thinking that change, whether economic or political or both, constituted a process, be it evolutionary or radical. One piece of evidence for this optimism was that as an aftermath of the Sakdal Uprising, the Commonwealth government adopted measures to improve the conditions of peasants through Manuel Quezon’s Social Justice Program.

Salud considered the Sakdal Uprising a shining moment in the history of the Philippines. It probably represented a high point in her life too. She explained that despite being advanced in age, talking about the Sakdal movement rejuvenated her:

We have talked a long time, but I am not tired. Whenever there is talk about the Sakdalistas, I become younger and stronger. I feel like it is 1935 again. That was the moment. [My emphasis.] Everything led up to the uprising. That was the high point of all our lives. Afterwards things were never the same. Later people and principles became confused. Few people think well of Sakdalism these days. They should remember what happened in May 1935. They should also remember why.

Asked if she had any words to impart to the youth of the Philippines, Salud answered: “I no longer have anything to say. It’s really up to them. They should love their country. They’re Filipinos. They should help their fellow Filipinos rise.”

By some strange coincidence, Salud passed away on 2 May 1979, on the 44th anniversary of the Sakdal Uprising in which she had played a key role. She was 85 years old. Her fellow Sakdalistas acted
as pallbearers when she was interred at the North Cemetery in Manila. Jeremias Addia, a fellow Sakdalista, recited the following verse before her coffin was lowered:

Ang gawaing maglingkod sa lahi at bayan,
Kakambal ng dusa at kamatayan,
At ang maaring ngayo'y kasalanan
Bukas makalawa ay kabayanihan.
(To serve one's race and country,
Is intertwined with suffering and death,
And what today may be considered a crime
May tomorrow be a heroic act.)

Addia's prophecy was not fulfilled in the case of the Sakdal in general and Salud Algabre in particular, reflective perhaps of the continued marginality of the appreciation of the peasants’ struggle in the national history of the Philippines. The political struggle and fragments of the life story of Salud were fortunately documented in the interviews used in this chapter. They serve as an argument for the use of oral history as a method in the documentation of women in nationalist movements, especially women from the peasant class. It is the only way their story can be heard and preserved for posterity.

Notes


12. Ibid., p. 289.
15. Ibid., pp. 289–90.
16. Ibid., p. 290.
18. Ibid., p. 290.
22. Ibid., p. 292.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., p. 293.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., pp. 293–4.
28. Ibid., pp. 293–8.
29. Anido, “Face to Face with the Generala”, p. 3.
32. Anido, “Face to Face with the Generala”.
34. Anido, “Face to Face with the Generala”.
38. Ibid., p. 297.
39. Ibid., p. 298.
40. Ibid., pp. 286–7.
44. People's Court Files. Box #133, Folder #1, Case #4573. Case of Salud Algabre, 1946 (University of the Philippines Main Library).
45. Ibid.
46. People's Court Files. Box #133, Folder #1, Case #4573 (University of the Philippines Main Library).
50. Ibid., p. 296.
51. Ibid., p. 299.
52. Kintanar and David, “Salud Algabre, Revolutionary”, p. 82.