



THE ROLE OF THE MAGUINDANAON WOMEN IN THE BANGSAMORO ARMED STRUGGLE FOR THEIR RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION

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INTRODUCTION

Abstract

This paper aimed to examine the role of the Maguindanaon Women in the Bangsamoro armed struggle for their right to self-determination. In Buluan, Maguindanao, the first Local Executive who ruled the Municipality was a lady in the person of Bai Bagungan Pandita, widow of the late Datu Enok and who later remarried Datu Hadj Paglas Palacasi, Sr. who at the time was appointed as a president of the Municipal District. Her noble vision of inculcating to the minds of her fellow Muslims the importance of education to one's life and development manifested by her advocacy campaign for basic education to Muslim populace was the first Muslim woman catapulted to the position in the Philippines during that time. Her leadership ended when she passed away during Second World War. This study utilized the qualitative research approaches. This approach was employed by the researcher because it involved the field survey among identified Bangsamoro women who were participants/combatants of the Moro armed struggle. It was purposely done by the researcher to gather information on the basic socio-demographic profile of the respondents, their economic status, and knowledge about the Bangsamoro women in the armed struggle and the role they played. The roles played by the Maguindanaon women in the Bangsamoro armed struggle to support the male Bangsamoro in the armed struggle are (a) Production Committee, (b) Medics under the military or Bangsa Moro Army, (c) TransCom or Transportation and Communication, (d) Education Committee, (e) WAC- Women Auxiliary Corps, (f) Committee on Indigent, and (g) Health and Sanitation Committee. These committees were institutionalized under the Women's Bureau.

Keywords: Maguindanaon women, Bangsamoro, Armed-struggle, Right to self-determination

INTRODUCTION

The World's History is interlaced with women's role in all walks of life. This is true in almost all great civilizations in the world. Archaeological evidence from Europe and the Middle East has suggested that Stone Age civilizations practiced goddess worship and were organized as matriarchies—social orders with women in charge. However, from the time of the earliest written records, these civilizations had been overtaken by patriarchal cultures that worshiped male gods and in which men were political, religious, and military leaders, and women were kept in subordination. In the time of the ancient Greeks and ancient Romans and in the early Christian era, women were excluded from public life and were made subordinate to men. For example, Greek philosopher Aristotle argued in his Politics that women were inferior to men and must be ruled by men (Dahl, 1961).

But in most Asian countries during the classical period women made their astounding role in almost all walks of life. For example, Deborah, an influential judge of ancient Israel in 1125 B.C., leads an army under Barak to defeat the Canaanites, who have long oppressed her people. In Vietnam, Trung Trac (39-43 B.C.) loses her husband, a feudal lord, to occupying Chinese rulers after he complains about China's plans to levy new taxes on local Vietnamese aristocrats. In revenge, Trung Trac and her sister, Trung Nhi, raised an army and drove out the Chinese. The Vietnamese establish an independent government at Me-Linh, seat of the Vietnamese government during the kingdom of Au Lac. Trung Trac rules as queen of an independent state for four years, until China recaptures the territory and returns it to Chinese rule.

The wife of King Odenathus, the Roman ruler of Palmyra, Zenobia yearns to rule for herself. She is believed to have caused the assassination of her husband so that she can act as regent on behalf of her son. Zenobia expands her realm into Egypt and Anatolia, but is conquered by the Roman emperor Aurelian. Like most rulers, emperors of the Tang dynasty in China use marriage to create strategic alliances and to maintain the support of powerful provinces and families. While royal women exercise great power through palace intrigue, none rules in her own right until Empress Wu ascends the throne. Concubine to one emperor and wife of his successor, the widowed Wu then rules as regent for the next Tang emperor. Finally, in 685 A.D. she deposes her son to become empress. She will continue to rule for 20 years, until forced out of power at the age of 80 (Lerner, 1978).

Sultan Iltutmish, an early ruler of Delhi, chooses his daughter, Raziyya (1236-1240 A.D.), to succeed him. Raziyya must fight to hold the throne, and she rules aggressively, leading her army in battles against rebels. Some Muslim leaders will not accept her, however, and she will be killed after four years of rule. Spanish explorer Gonzalo Pizarro in 1528 sends his second-in-command, Francisco de Orellana, on an expedition down the Napo River in the Andes Mountains (in modern-day Ecuador). Orellana follows the Napo to its confluence with the Amazon and then continues downriver, becoming the first European to travel the Amazon from the Andes to its mouth in the Atlantic Ocean. He reports encountering a race of female warriors on his journey, which he names Amazons after the women of Greek mythology. His description of the Amazons captures the public imagination and, according to many scholars, lends the river its name.

Pakistan's president Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is imprisoned, then executed after a coup by General Zia ul-Haq. His daughter, Benazir Bhutto, heads the Pakistan People's Party and calls for free elections, facing brief imprisonment herself. After Zia dies, Bhutto's party wins the election and she becomes prime minister in 1988. Bhutto is the first woman to be elected head of an Islamic country (Lerner, 1978).

In Buluan, Maguindanao, the first Local Executive who ruled the Municipality was a lady in the person of Bai Bagungan Pandita, widow of the late Datu Enok and who later remarried Datu Hadj Paglas Palacasi, Sr. who at the time was appointed as a president of the Municipal District. Her noble vision of inculcating to the minds of her fellow Muslims the importance of education to one's life and development manifested by her advocacy campaign for basic education to Muslim populace was the first Muslim woman catapulted to the position in the Philippines during that time. Her leadership ended when she passed away during Second World War.

When the violent conflict started in Mindanao during the first quarter of the 1970s, many Bangsamoro women were seen in the war theatre, performing different roles to complement the roles of the mujahideens in the battle fronts. What are the roles of Maguindanao women they performed in the Bangsamoro struggle? It is along this general query why the present study is being conducted.

METHODS

This study utilized the qualitative research approaches. This approach was employed by the researcher because it involved the field survey among identified Bangsamoro women who were participants/combatants of the Moro armed struggle. It was purposely done by the researcher to gather information on the basic socio-demographic profile of the respondents, their economic status, and knowledge about the Bangsamoro women in the armed struggle and the role they played. The second approach of this design in gathering data was through the focus group discussion (FGD) and in depth interviews/Key Informant Interviews (KII). An instrument was constructed for each respective approach. Locale of the Study This study covered the areas of Cotabato City, Pikit and Aleosan Municipalities of North Cotabato; Datu Odin Sinsuat, Pagalungan, Datu Montawal, Sultan Kudarat, General Salipada K. Pendatun, Talayan, Datu Piang and Shariff Aguak Municipalities of Maguindanao Province. These communities are identified as the theatre of conflict during the early years of the Bangsamoro armed struggle. These areas are also the place of origin of the respondents.

This study was employed purposive sampling procedure. Respondents are those earlier identified Maguindanao Bangsamoro women who are involved in the Bangsamoro armed struggle for the right to self-determination, with respect to the kind and level of the roles they played. Two (2) Maguindanao women from each of the twelve (12) identified areas served as respondents to be surveyed in this study. They were chosen based on the data gathered from news articles, published documents, project reports, and information from Bangsamoro leaders

whom the researcher met prior to the actual conduct of the survey and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). For the Key Informant Interview (KII), two (2) males identified and selected pioneer cadre officers coming from the Bangsamoro fronts shall be the respondents. While the two (2) female respondents were taken from their 24 female companions. Regarding the FGD, twelve (12) coming from the twenty four (24) total female respondents was interviewed. In other words the total number of the respondents should be twenty six (26).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The various factors that influence the Bangsamoro Women of their involvement in the armed struggle, their lessons learned, hopes for the participation in the armed struggle and expectations from it.

American Colonial Administration

The gesture of political accommodation made by the early American officials to the Bangsamoro is commendable and highly appreciated by the datus and sultans. This was the very reason why these Bangsamoro leaders preferred to remain under the American flag and become federal state of America, rather to join in the Philippine independence. The following political set-up was not recognized by President Quezon and Filipino leaders after independence. To reckon with, during the early American colonial administration and in April 7, 1900 in particular, President William McKinley issued some-sort of a Letter of Instruction which was officially transmitted to the then Secretary of War Elihu Root. The Instruction called in part for the establishment and application of "tribal organization and government" for the Moros similar to that applied among North American Indians. Partly, too, the Instruction contributed to the enactment of the Legislative Council Act No. 39 on February 19, 1904 and approved by the Philippine Commission on March 11, 1904. This act provided for the government of the Moros and other non-Christian tribes [Gowing, 1977].

The Philippine Bill of 1902 which was passed by the U.S. Congress on July 1, 1902 recognized, according to Charles B. Illiot, the distinction between Moros, Pagans and Christian Filipinos. Consequently, the Bill provided for different forms of government for the different groups of people. It should be noted that the Philippine Legislature was composed of two Houses: the Philippine Assembly and the Philippine Commission. The latter was in charge with the full authority over the Moros and the other non-Christian tribes [Gowing, 1971].

On June 1, 1903, the Philippine Commission enacted an organic law [Act No. 787] which provided for the organization and government of the Moro Provinces. With its governor and legislative council, this functioned independently of the legislation enacted by the Commission for the Christian north. This provided for a time until its abolition in 1913 a considerable *de facto* [italics, supplied] autonomy for the Province. Atty. Michael O. Mastura [1982] has the brief accounts to follow:

The Moro Act of 1903 [Act No. 787], therefore instituted a government with governor, legislative council giver broad autonomous powers, and created certain necessary executive office... Likewise created was a constabulary force to be composed of Moros commanded by the

White [American] Officers, under the direction of an assistant chief of constabulary. Provision was also made for the establishment of a public school system. In addition, the Legislative Council of the Moro Province was specifically enjoined by the Philippine Commission to enact a law which shall collect and codify the customary laws of the Moros [pp. 34-35].

Despite the special problems that Muslim Mindanao present, Peter Gowing [1983], an American Scholar on Moro Affairs, sees the shaping of American Moro policy as an extension of the policy formulated for the Christian population. Along with this common purpose, the Americans recognize as well Mindanao's economic potentials. As Friend [1965] has shown, the historical discussion of the Philippine independence act was centered obsessively on American economic interests. In the process, according to Thomas [1971], the development of Mindanao had been delayed by "Christian fears that substantial American investments might contribute to the alienation of those Southern areas from the rest of the Philippines".

Up to this time (1904), a dual system of government was applied: one for the Moros and one for the Christians. But in 1905, there was a proposal from the American-dominated Zamboanga Chamber of Commerce to separate Mindanao from the rest of the Philippines. This Chamber of Commerce presented a resolution to the Secretary of War William H. Taft and several visiting American Congressmen and asked that Mindanao and Sulu be formed into a U.S. territory by act of Congress for the following reasons: (a) The Mindanao-Sulu area was large and fertile; (b) It was thinly populated and the native inhabitants did not constitute any obstacle to American civilization; (c) The successful introduction of Western civilization and progress was made possible only through American colonization and enterprise; (d) American colonization and enterprise came only with liberal incentives offered by the government, which could not offered in other densely populated areas in the north; and (e) The area should never be subject to the legislative control of the Filipinos who were considered by the Americans as incapable of governing even themselves.

In 1909, when Col. Ralph W. Hoyt briefly took over as acting governor of the Moro Province towards the end of Tasker H. Bliss' term, he supported the idea and recommended the separation of Mindanao and Sulu from the rest of the Philippines. These areas could be called Mindanao Plantation, declared a U.S. territory for purpose of coaling station and Naval Base. For the inhabitants, they may be placed under reservations with all their rights and "under Military Police protection." The rest of the land was to be divided into plantations and forest reserves. These were open to American occupation, settlement and development. Thus, it would provide a "permanent foothold of absolute American influence in the Orient [Tawagon, 1987]."

In 1910, there was a large meeting between Moro Datus, Filipinos and the Secretary of War J.W. Dickenson who succeeded Taft. In that meeting, the first to speak were two Filipinos who said that the 70,000 Christians in the Moro Province, who were "civilized," "educated" and "property owners" were ready to govern the Moros then numbering 335,000 (Jubair, 1999; p. 69). The abolition of the Moro Province in 1913 was followed by the creation of the Department of Mindanao and Sulu [1914-1920] with Governor Frank Carpenter as the head of the

Department. This department was under the immediate jurisdiction of the Governor-General of the Philippines and the Philippine Commission, and it had authority not only over the five districts of the former Moro Province [Empire Province of Cotabato, Davao, Lanao, Sulu and Zamboanga], but also over the special province of Agusan and its sub-province of Bukidnon.

The Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes [1920-1936] was established at the abolition of the Department of Mindanao and Sulu and the direction of the affairs of the provinces in Mindanao and Sulu including the Mountain Province and Nueva Vizcaya was assumed by the Secretary of the Interior. In this Bureau, American officials no longer exercised direct control over the Moro affairs as a whole, though of course, the American Governor-General retained veto power over all Filipino administrators in the country. The task assigned to this Bureau was for the advancement of liberty and to foster rapid and complete manner of the moral, material, economic, social, and political development of the regions” and to render “permanent on the mutual intelligence between and complete fusion of all Christian and non-Christian elements populating the provinces of the Archipelago (Gowing, 1983).

Philippine Independence to the Early Marcos Administration

When the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces left the country, independence was granted to the Philippine by the United States. The timing was excellent for it perfectly coincided with the positive atmosphere created by the Japanese invasion. Fighting side by side against a common enemy (Japanese Soldiers) somehow gave the Moros and the Filipinos mutual approbation and satisfaction. “The remarkable opportunities created by the WW II, such as material rewards for jobs well done by the Moros in the service of the country and the United States were transitory. Under the Filipino rule, the condition of the Moros became worse than it was under the American” (Jubair, 1999).

In political situation, there was steady loss of Moro-controlled areas in Mindanao as one province after another slipped from the hands of the natives. Newly created provinces went also to the newcomers. The brief supremacy of the Moros in the local politics of the Empire Province of Cotabato was cut short when the government arbitrarily made its protégés gets elected (Rodil, 2007). Economically, a very large portion of the Moro population sank deeply into poverty and hunger. In every respect they lagged behind. Moro communities remained stagnant and backward. The situation, according to Jubair (1997; p. 106) was “so depraved that many believed the Moros were better off during pre-Spanish days than at present.”

Because of negligence, apathy and indifference of the national government towards the welfare of the Suluan, Congressman Ombra Amilbangsa of Sulu filed a bill [House Bill No. 5682] in 1961 seeking for independence of Sulu. In summary, the 1960s was marked by the harsh poverty situation in the Muslim areas. Economic destitution and political marginalization in the Moro communities brought about by the economic and socio-political neglect and discrimination against them in the government’s development administration efforts were some of the various dominant issues creeping in the Bangsamoro homeland in the 1970s (Muslim, 1994).

Various Factors that Influence the Bangsamoro Women of their Involvement in the Armed Struggle

The study discussed and elucidated the various factors that influenced the Bangsamoro Women of their involvement in the armed struggle. Respondents of the study collectively revealed the Jabidah Massacre also known as Corregidor Massacre, the political dislocation of the Moro leaders in the 1971 election, the Ilaga attacks, and the Martial Law in 1972 were among the foremost factors that drive and influenced the Bangsamoro women of their involvement in the armed struggle. As revealed by one of the respondents, “we joined in the Bangsamoro armed struggle because this is the last option to defend ourselves from the onslaught of the Martial Law of the Marcos administration and the government efforts to destroy the Bangsamoro society” (Interview, 2017). This struggle, according to Chairman Murad Ibrahim, is a “quest for human survival” (Interview, 2017).

As revealed by one of the respondents during the conduct of the interviews, “we were also forced to join in the armed struggle because of the situation of our family, the Bangsamoro children, and women were threatened by the series of attacks and massacres conducted by the ILAGA from 1968, and the human rights violations committed by the Philippine military armed forces towards the Bangsamoro people without any government intervention to stop it, thus, the only option to choose for the Bangsamoro women to defend themselves and the Moro communities is to join in the Bangsamoro armed struggle.” The Ilaga group was the most feared to many Muslim women primarily because of what its members did to their victims, like carving out ears, slashing nipples, plucking out eyes, and marking bodies with crosses. As pointed out by Dr. Muslim:

The Ilaga atrocities against the Bangsamoro started in the second half of 1970 up to the middle part 1972, barely a few months before the declaration of Martial Law by late President Marcos on September 21, 1972. Until the middle part of 1971, Ilaga operations were concentrated in various Bangsamoro villages in the municipalities of Maguindanao and the two Cotabato provinces (North Cotabato and South Cotabato) with mixed populations, but largely in the municipalities where the Bangsamoro were in the minority. In the second half of 1971, they reached the province of Lanao del Sur, particularly in the Municipality of Wao which was among the Christian Filipino migration. Then they spread to several Muslim towns in Lanao del Norte and Bukidnon. In 1972, Ilaga operated in Zamboanga del Sur. In other words, for a period of two years, practically all the Muslim areas in Mindanao were under siege by the Ilaga, with areas of Muslim concentrations serving as evacuation or refugee centers.

Ilaga atrocities include the Massacre of seventy (70) Muslims and wounding of seventeen others inside a mosque and a nearby school house in the barrio of Manili in Carmen, North Cotabato on June 19, 1971. While most of the Male residents were out working in their farms,

a group of about twenty (20) armed Ilaga members entered the barrio and told the residents who were mostly old men, women, and children to gather at a small mosque for a peace conference. Once they were inside, a grenade was hurled at them, and the armed men began firing and hacking at them. Simultaneously, another group of armed men fired at the houses of the same barrio. In addition, the few Muslims who were brought to the nearby schoolhouse were also gunned down.

The Manili massacre is just one of several incidents that befell Muslims towns in Cotabato for the said two years, many of which were not reported. In Cotabato areas alone, some 358 Muslims were killed by Ilaga members from January 1, 1971 to June 1, 1971. In the municipality of Alamada in Cotabato, Ilaga members burned some 56 Muslim houses in just two separate incidents (36 houses on January 18, 1971 and 20 houses in February 15, 1971. From April 6, 1971 to July 22, 1971 alone the Ilaga burned some 55 Muslim houses in Carmen Cotabato; 18 houses in Pikit, Cotabato; 25 houses in Kidapawan Cotabato; and 22 houses in Buldon, Cotabato (1994).

What did the Philippine government do about these massacres of Muslims, the burning of their houses and mosques, the looting of their properties, and their subsequent eviction from their towns that continued for two years? Except for the meagre assistance given to a small number of evacuees and refugees, practically there was none. The government did nothing to stop the atrocities. Most importantly, it did nothing to arrest individuals reportedly involved in the leadership of the Ilaga. In fact, according to the late Congressman Salipada K. Pendatun (1971), Ilaga commander named Feliciano Lucas alias "Commander Toothpick," a Christian who was widely known to have led a group that launched the first Ilaga attacks against Muslims in several villages in the Municipalities of the Cotabato province in the second half of 1970, was given "red carpet reception at Malacanang palace in Manila when he surrendered to then President Marcos." In the same vein, his privilege speech at the House of Representative, Congress of the Philippines, Congressman Pendatun elaborated that:

Late last year (1970), the President of the Philippines received a certain "toothpick" at the Palace of the People with all the fanfare and honours due only a visiting dignitary. But who is Toothpick? He is a plain outlaw, a cutthroat and a murderer who has a string of criminal cases against him. At the time the president of the Philippines honoured him with an audience at the Palace, there were several warrants previously for his arrest. But wonder of all wonders, after this renegade from the law has paid obeisance to His Excellency, President Ferdinand E Marcos, the latter knighted the outlaw and bade him go back his kingdom to bear more arms and commit further depredations. It occurs to me now that when toothpick was sent home, complete with military escorts headed by certain Captain Manuel Tronco, to sow further chaos and confusion among the Muslim of

that province. With the benediction and blessings of the Chief Executive, he resumed his predatory adventure in Cotabato and expanded his realm as far as into the heart of Cotabato City itself. All along, the military closed its eyes to the activities of Toothpick and the Muslims have strong reasons to believe that this notorious outlaw move according to a prearranged master plan drawn up by the military themselves (1971).

It was reported the Commander Toothpick's Ilaga group which was initially small grew enormously when he was reinforced by PC Captain Manuel Tronco. This led many Bangsamoro women to believe Toothpick's group to be a part of the Philippine constabulary. As a result many Tirurays, a non-Muslim indigenous group in Cotabato for whom Toothpick was reported to be "Robinhooding" against Muslim, joined his group. In other words, the government utilized the indigenous people (IPs) as instruments in fighting against the Muslim. These marked the misunderstanding between the moro and the IPs.

The Bangsamoro political leaders were also a very influential and strengthened the participation the Bangsamoro women as can be gleaned from the speech of Pendatun quoted above. The Bangsamoro leaders were also the foremost people behind who motivated and influenced the women in joining the Bangsamoro armed struggle (Interview: August 7, 2017). Another very important factor that influences the Bangsamoro women to join in the armed struggle was the lamentable situation of the mujahideen fighting to preserve the Muslim identity and their cherished faith – Islam, which they felt to be under siege or threat of liquidation. The atrocities which were given religious colour aggravated Bangsamoro women over the insults against their religion they saw in some government policies, in some text books, in the press, and in their interactions with Christian Filipino who continue to harbour prejudices against them.

The Roles Played by the Maguindanaon Women in the Bangsamoro Armed Struggle

When the full-blown Bangsamoro armed struggle for their survival and freedom from the clutches of oppression and colonialism of the Manila government was commenced in the first quarter of the 1970s, many of the young Moro Muslim women were seen in the thick of the armed confrontation helping the male combatants in almost all aspects of the armed struggle. Their participation was so indispensable that it completely complemented the role of the male Bangsa Moro Army (BMA) in the struggle. Under the leadership of the MNLF, the front organized an institution known as the Women's Bureau which is now called as Social Welfare Services (SWS) under the MILF leadership. In an interview conducted by the researcher on September 5, 2017, the respondents indicated that there were many roles given to the women under this bureau to support the male in the struggle and these are (a) Production Committee, (b) Medics under the military or Bangsa Moro Army, (c) TransCom or Transportation and Communication, (d) Education Committee, (e) WAC- Women Auxiliary Corps, (f) Committee on Indigent, and (g) Health and Sanitation Committee.

The production committee was responsible for the management of logistics and supply of medicines. The medic committee and its personnel were under the military wing of the front. They were usually registered and non-registered nurses including some licensed medical

practioners like doctor of medicine. They were responsible for the medication of the wounded military personnel, including civilians stricken by diseases in the community. There were also volunteers with little knowledge on medications. These volunteers were subjected to a rigid training by the license doctors in the front on how to inject medicine and other forms of first aid medications. The medics were also in charge to buy medicine in a nearby town or city. Thus they were always afraid of being caught by the government military forces. Similar to the functions of the medics was the Health and Sanitation Committee. This committee was in charge with the training and management of the evacuees on health and sanitation but they were not under the military wing.

Related to the work of the production committee is the committee on indigent. This committee was in charge with managing and supervising the planting of kamote/cassava and helping evacuees to manage themselves in the evacuation centre. The evacuation centers were identified by the respondents as located Barangays Buliok, Inogog, Kalbugan, Damakling, Kabasalan in Maguindanao, and in the forested area of Barrio Katul located in the boundary of the provinces of Maguindanao and North Cotabato. These evacuation centres were constructed with the help of the Pendatuns and Matalams.

In the transportation and communication, the Bangsamoro Women, in many instances, were responsible to withdraw and transport the wounded personnel, transporting the bullets and food supply to the male members in the battle front (Interview). They were responsible for the communication. Because of their role in communication, sometimes some Moro women were utilized by the government forces as intelligent to locate the whereabouts of the MNLF combatants. There were many Moro women arrested and reported to be an intelligent assets of the AFP.

The Education Committee was assimilated with men under Ustadz Khalifa Nando. The members of this committee were all educated and undergone the military and politicalization training in the front. In this committee, the women were responsible for Da'wah among Bangsamoro women to support the struggle. The committee were also tasked to recruit new members. While the Women Auxiliary Corps was the military unit under the front. This unit was also manned by the female officers who directly participated in the armed combats. They were carefully selected and trained by the cadre officers usually foreign trained. Basically, they were thought in martial arts. They were also trained to handle rifles like Carbine, Garand, .30 Calibre Machine Gun and Armalite. The M1 Carbine was design by the US in 1938. It was used by the US Paratroopers due its light weight character. M1 Garand is a .30 caliber semi-automatic rifle of a US standard rifle during the WW II and the Korean War. The 30 mm calibre is a specific size of automatic machine rifle for anti-personnel, anti-aircraft, and anti-tank. These rifles were utilized by the Bangsamoro women during the course of the armed struggle.

In the 1960s "banditry and criminal syndicate activities were existent in Mindanao, particularly in the Muslim communities. However, much of the turmoil then was due mainly to naked land grabbing, not that much written about conflict between the Muslim traditional system of land ownership and the secular Philippine land laws" (Muslim, 1994). The increase of incidence of land grabbing in the 1960s is more a product of the strong drive for further

agricultural expansion that emphasized large-scale production of cash crops during the period when Mindanao as a frontier area had closed. This problem involved the efforts of some of some rich and well-connected Christian Filipino capitalist and government officials to drive out the Bangsamoro and other minority groups from their farmland (Abbas, 1977).

The Challenges and Problems Encountered by the Bangsamoro Women as they Carry-Out their Roles in the Bangsamoro Armed Struggle

Military Training

Physical military training program of the Bangsamoro women were handled by male cadre officers belonged to the Top 90, and eventually, the Top 300. The Bangsamoro women confronted difficulties due to the sensitivities of their physical make-up and its exposure to the different kinds of terrains. As pointed out by one of the respondents: “exposure of some part of the body of a young woman to the training officers at that time was very difficult, especially during the early stage of the training when adjustment is not fully achieved. We experienced cramping, body pain and injuries brought about by the intense and vigorous military training in our training camp.” (Interview).

Another challenge to the young female trainees was the coming of their monthly period because they were forced to stop temporarily from the training for a while and resume after a couple days. Their resumption entailed coping up with the lectures and trainings they missed when they were temporarily out. A very challenging on the part female trainees was to avoid having love relationship with the male cadre officers because this was strictly prohibited by the MNLF central committee.

Amalgamation with Males

During the early years of the Moro armed struggle, the organizational structure of the MNLF was crude, very simple and basic in a way that it was real but not complete. They have no Islamization efforts to proselytize the members. The male and female members of the front were amalgamated without separation with each other. Because of this situation, some of the Bangsamoro women carried-out their roles but beclouded by temptations. Some of them eventually made some sort of illicit relationship with the male member of the front. The good thing was those scenarios were ended in a marriage relationship. But marriage life in the armed struggle was still a big challenge on how to play the roles in the family as wife and as a participant in the struggle itself.

Suspected spy

Those Bangsamoro women placed in the medical team were usually the members who were assigned to buy medicines outside the camp. In other words, they had the chance to go out from their bivouac to buy medicines in the town or in a city. Owing to this situation, “some them were enticed with money and bribed by a friend working in the government to disclose the whereabouts of their companion in the front” (interview: August, 2017). On the other hand,

some of the weak hearted Bangsamoro women were able to utilize by the government's soldier as effective spy. Because of this situation, and in many cases, they were suspected as doing espionage. In some instances, few Bangsamoro women serving in the medical team of the MNLF married to the soldiers of the Philippine government or the armed forces of the Philippines. Given these situations, in some instances, the Bangsamoro women were generally the objects of suspicion by their comrades in the armed struggle.

Difficult Role Carried by the Women in the Struggle

When fighting breaks out, women were part of the thousands of victims. They are often forced to take shelter in the evacuation centers with their children, while the husbands are left to secure their homes, property and livelihoods. Women and children are vulnerable to sexual abuse while living in the open space of the shelters and numerous cases of human trafficking have been reported. In these situations, the Bangsamoro women helped the wives who carry the multiple burden of being left behind to care for their children and earn a living for their families. Chairman Murad has the following story: "Women carried too difficult burden in the struggle because they have to balance their obligation and duty in the family and in the armed struggle. Their participation is a religious obligation towards the realization of Bangsamoro freedom."

The Impacts of the Role of the Bangsamoro Women to the Armed Struggle

The impacts of the role of the bangsamoro women to the armed struggle can be discerned from the result of the interviews made by the researcher. In an interview conducted by the researcher in the Central Committee of the MILF at Camp Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao; Chairman Al-Hadj Murad Ibrahim pointed out that "the impacts of the role of the Bangsamoro women to the armed struggle were very high because it encouraged more Bangsamoro people to participate in the struggle. Since women were among the sectors that were most seriously affected by the hardship in life brought about by the violent war in Mindanao, their participation in the Bangsamoro armed struggle gave complete pictures on the severity of political and socio-economic crisis in the Bangsamoro homeland. It mobilized all sectors in the Bangsamoro to support the Moro National Liberation front in their efforts to liberate the Bangsamoro from the clutches of oppression of the Marcos administration in the Philippines. In other words, the participation of the women strengthened the armed struggle because their roles complemented the roles of the male Bangsa Moro Armed Forces (BMAF). In the same vein, Muhagher Iqbal opined that the participation of the Bangsamoro women was so important because it mobilized everybody to participate in the armed struggle. In other words, the participation of the Bangsamoro women reinforced the program of the Moro fronts in strengthening the organization, self-reliance, and military build-up. The Bangsamoro armed struggle is like a big university that educated many women in the political, economic and socio-cultural aspects of life. Sharpened by the colourful experiences in the revolutionary armed struggle, the Bangsamoro women were able to develop their leadership skills and other related field of expertise. In others words, the Bangsamoro women in the armed struggle were enlightened and empowered due to the enhancement of their multi-faceted roles they

contributed to the struggle. This is the realization of the Islamic teaching, i.e., the empowerment of everybody. Their participation gave them an opportunity to relate themselves and improved their relations to their family, community and the Bangsamoro armed struggle itself (Interview).

Summary of Findings

This study has a total of 26 respondents. Majority or ninety three and thirty one percent (92.31%) of the respondents were female; while only seven and sixty nine percent (7.69%) were male. The female respondents represented equally the twelve (12) municipalities of Maguindanao province, two (2) municipalities from the Province of North Cotabato and Cotabato City. While the remaining two (2) respondents were male, formerly from the top echelon of the MNLF leadership but now occupying the Central Committee of the MILF in Camp Darapanan, Maguindanao. These areas were covered by the former Empire Province of Cotabato and included in the signed Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro (CAB). Some 84.62 percent of the respondents were belonged to the age bracket 51-60 years old followed by 27.5 percent of age bracket 41- 50 years old.

The various factors that influenced the involvement of the Bangsamoro women in the armed struggle for their right to self-determination are the prolong period of oppression, exploitation, neglect and discrimination they suffered with abolition of the Sultanate system of government and their incorporation into the Philippine polity; and certain triggering incidents. The armed struggle was not caused by the Bangsamoro but by the unbearable conditions they were in. The causal factors of their struggle are not in their personal chemistry, not in their culture, and not in their social structure. The struggle was not caused by some kind of an inherently flawed Bangsamoro personality. It was not caused by an alleged Islamic culture of terrorism or a warrior religion. It was not caused by rivalries among leaders. And it was not caused by hunger for power among some young Bangsamoro and their passionate desire to grab political power from older leaders.

What precipitated the armed struggle are the Bangsamoros sufferings and insecurities associated with their economic marginalization and destitution, political domination and incapacity, the inroads and constraints to their identity (which include their faith, territory and culture), and the threats (consummated and political) to their individual and collective physical existence or security. The above problematic conditions proceeded mainly from their various government policies, programs and activities involving the Bangsamoros since the beginning of their colonial experience.

The roles played by the Maguindanaon women in the Bangsamoro armed struggle to support the male Bangsamoro in the armed struggle are (a) Production Committee, (b) Medics under the military or Bangsa Moro Army, (c) TransCom or Transportation and Communication, (d) Education Committee, (e) WAC- Women Auxiliary Corps, (f) Committee on Indigent, and (g) Health and Sanitation Committee. These committees were institutionalized under the Women's Bureau.

The challenges and problems encountered by the bangsamoro women as they carry-out their roles in the bangsamoro armed struggle are :(a) Training (b) amalgamation with males, (c)

suspected as spy, and (d) Difficult role carried by the Bangsamoro women in the struggle. The impacts of the role of the Bangsamoro women to the armed struggle were very high because it encouraged more Bangsamoro people to participate in the struggle. Since women were among the sectors that were most seriously affected by the hardship in life brought about by the violent war in Mindanao, their participation in the Bangsamoro armed struggle gave complete pictures on the severity of political and socio-economic crisis in the Bangsamoro homeland. It mobilized all sectors in the Bangsamoro to support the unified Moro National Liberation Front during the early 1970s in their efforts to liberate the Bangsamoro from the clutches of oppression of the Marcos administration in the Philippines. In other words, the participation of the women strengthened the armed struggle because their roles complemented the roles of the male Bangsa Moro Armed Forces (BMAF).

The participation of the Bangsamoro women was so important because it mobilized everybody to participate in the armed struggle. In other words, the involvement of the Bangsamoro women reinforced the program of the Moro fronts in strengthening the organization, self-reliance, and military build-up. The Bangsamoro armed struggle is like a big university that educated many women in the political, economic and socio-cultural aspects of life. Sharpened by the colourful experiences in the revolutionary armed struggle, the Bangsamoro women were able to develop their leadership skills and other related field of expertise. In others words, the Bangsamoro women in the armed struggle were enlightened and empowered due to the enhancement of their multi-faceted roles they contributed to the struggle. This is the realization of the Islamic teaching, i.e., the empowerment of everybody. Their participation gave them an opportunity to relate themselves and improved their relations to their family, community and the Bangsamoro armed struggle itself.

Conclusion

The Role of the Bangsamoro Women in the struggle for their right to selfdetermination was so important in the socio-economic, political, and cultural development of the Bangsamoro armed struggle and their communities. The participation of the Bangsamoro women mobilized everybody to participate in the armed struggle. It reinforced the program of the Moro front in strengthening the organization, self-reliance, and military build-up of the revolutionary organization itself. Sharpened by the colourful experiences in the revolutionary armed struggle, the Bangsamoro women were able to develop their leadership skills and other related field of expertise.

The factors that influenced the involvement of the Bangsamoro women in the armed struggle for their right to self-determination are the prolong period of oppression, exploitation, neglect and discrimination they suffered with abolition of the Sultanate system of government and their incorporation into the Philippine polity; and certain triggering incidents. The armed struggle was not caused by the Bangsamoro but by the unbearable conditions they were in. The causal factors of their struggle are not in their personal chemistry, not in their culture, and not in their social structure. The struggle was not caused by some kind of an inherently flawed Bangsamoro personality. It was not caused by an alleged Islamic culture of terrorism or a warrior

religion. It was not caused by rivalries among leaders. And it was not caused by hunger for power among some young Bangsamoro and their passionate desire to grab political power from older leaders.

What precipitated the armed struggle are the Bangsamoros sufferings and insecurities associated with their economic marginalization and destitution, political domination and incapacity, the inroads and constraints to their identity (which include their faith, territory and culture), and the threats (consummated and political) to their individual and collective physical existence or security. The above problematic conditions proceeded mainly from their various government policies, programs and activities involving the Bangsamoros since the beginning of their colonial experience.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Since the peace process is now almost ending, there is a need to educate the survivor Bangsamoro women about governance for them to have good participation in the Bangsamoro government;
2. The need enhance the knowledge and technical know-how of the Bangsamoro women on the conduct of the peacebuilding; and
3. The need for the incoming Bangsamoro government to give pensions to the Bangsamoro women survivors of the armed struggle in recognition to their efforts exerted in the said struggle.

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