

The Lives of Women in Militarized Zones

LENY G. OCASIONES

Militarization has always been the response of the Philippine government to the age-old insurgency in the country. Yet very few studies have been conducted to document the lives of women who are trapped into such stressful and violent situations. This paper is an offshoot of a study conducted in rural Cebu, which is considered the hotbed of rebellion in the province and consequently, militarized. It reveals that militarization has profound and unique impacts on women, distinct from those of men, as strong patriarchal beliefs and practices prompt military and paramilitaries to use symbolics of gender differences and women's subordination in their strategies, leading women to experience militarization differently than men. It also explores the similarities and differences of the structural violence of poverty and exclusion experienced by women before and after militarization. Militarization compounds the economic, social, and cultural exclusion of women, making it harder for them to fulfill meaningful productive and reproductive roles in their daily lives. At the same time, far from being passive recipients of violence and intimidation, the women in the study reveal agency and capacity to become sole breadwinners of their families and defenders of their communities, challenging long-held patriarchal assumptions in Philippine society that women are weak and passive and men are dominant and in charge of family life.

Militarization is defined as the process by which a society organizes itself for military conflict and violence (Wikipedia 2008). It is a mechanism which privileges military concerns, giving "value" to

Leny G. Ocasiones is a faculty member of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of San Carlos in Cebu City. Email: locasiones@yahoo.com.

aspects of ordinary life normally not directly related to the military, and making people accepting of military values and solutions without their necessarily being aware of what is happening. In the Pacific, militarization is both a reason for, and result of, a growing acceptance and use of violence not only to settle disputes but as an aspect of everyday life (Alexander 2008). For the women in this study who lived with it, militarization is simultaneously a phenomenon that snatches the life of a loved one; an instrument for abduction; a tool for suppressing legitimate organizations; an agency that destroys valuable properties; dominant and arrogant men displaying their bravado during barrio (village) fiestas; and an institution that brings trauma and psychological problems to innocent civilians. For some women, militarization is an enemy that must be defeated in the name of peace.

The Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women (1995) recognized the seriousness of armed conflict and its impact on the lives of women. This is because armed conflict almost always involves militarization. The Conference's Platform for Action identified women and armed conflict as one of the twelve critical areas of concern to be addressed by member states, the international community, and civil society.

The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Program of Action adopted by the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights confirmed that "violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict are violations of the fundamental principles of human rights and humanitarian law" and that they require a "particularly effective response" (Gardam and Jarvis 2002, 760).

Anthropology has contributed a great deal to the evolving standards and practices of human rights, especially women's rights. It contributes to a growing literature on human rights which grapples with identifying commonalities and structuring interpretations so that essential human rights are universally respected (Messer 1993). In particular, anthropologists have often been concerned about gender-

based violence and how this has affected women's lives across cultures (Jenkins 1998).

Turpin (1998) cites factors why wartime conditions lead to an increase in gender-based violence. First, in wartime there is an influx of weapons into societies, and those weapons are often not controlled or limited to battlefield use. Second, state-produced media propaganda endorse violence as an acceptable means of conflict resolution. These factors, especially in the context of a cultural acceptance of violence against women, even in peacetime, put women at greater risk.

In Uganda, women have come to understand rape as a weapon of war (Turshen 2000; Eugene and Musisi 2001). Rape exacerbated women's vulnerability because of the many social and cultural issues related to women's "cleanliness" and "good behavior". Families and future husbands rejected women and girls who have been sexual slaves to soldiers. On returning to their communities, the women experienced shame and humiliation; some were taunted by men who said they were "used products that have lost their taste" (Human Rights Watch 1997, 3). If there is one set of fundamental functions of rape, civilian or martial, it is to display, communicate and produce or maintain dominance (Card 1996).

In Mindanao, the price of war has included not only the deaths of combatants from opposing sides but also of whole communities being forced to abandon the security and stability of their homes for crowded evacuation centers; children grow up believing that violence is an inescapable reality of life; and women helplessly watch them succumb to disease and die (Bolido 2003).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON ARMED CONFLICT IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippines has a long history of conflict, dating back to the arrival of Islam in the 14th century, to colonization by Spain (mid-

16th century to 1898), to domination and control by the United States (1898 to present) and including a Japanese interregnum from 1942 to 1945 (Constantino 1978).

While the Philippines is rich in natural resources, around 75 percent of the Philippine economy and some 70 percent of the population are connected to agriculture. However, around 8.2 million out of the 10.1 million agricultural force do not own land. Compared to its Southeast Asian neighbors, the Philippines has the highest number of people living below the poverty line (CIA 2002).

Infant mortality is pegged at 28.7 deaths per 1,000 live births, while the undernourished are 24 percent of the population, or over 17.2 million Filipinos. The jobless growth is 4.7 percent, so that 7 million Filipinos opt to go abroad in search of work (POEA 2002)

Compounding the nation's poverty is massive graft and corruption within the government. Between 1995 and 2000, an estimated 609 billion pesos was lost from the nation's coffers, according to the World Bank as cited in a Bayan Muna fact sheet in 2002, while social services such as health, education, and housing were cut back. Since 1991, one hundred percent foreign ownership has been allowed in many strategic sectors. Foreign exchange controls dropped significantly in 1993. Water, transport, telecommunications, roads and power, banking and shipping, airlines, and oil industries have been privatized and deregulated, resulting in more poverty and less access to basic services for the people (CWR 2003).

Government puppetry to colonizers and the failure to address basic problems of the Filipino people such as landlessness, hunger, unemployment, and non-delivery of basic social services are factors influencing many people to rise up against the government.

Political activism has taken many colors in the Philippines (de Dios 1987). The broad National Democratic Movement (NDM) operates above-ground, uses legal means such as parliaments in the streets,

and comprises organizations such as human rights groups and the women's movement.

Working underground is the National Democratic Front (NDF), which claims to have member organizations in all sectors (e.g. peasants, workers, women, professionals, and students) and includes the CPP and its military arm the New People's Army (NPA) and Makibaka (Free Movement of New Women). Muslims in Mindanao are represented by organizations such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

All groups are found both in rural and urban areas in the Philippines, especially the NDM and the NDF which use solid organizing work in their recruitment and expansion. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) claims the NDM and NDF are one, even branding the NDM as a communist front. Both movements deny any connection between themselves.

The two major rebel groups considered to seriously threaten the Philippine government are the CPP with its military arm, the NPA operating throughout the country, and the MILF operating mainly in the island of Mindanao. Both groups employ guerilla warfare in order to weaken the government.

The militarist policy of the Philippine government has resulted in massive human rights violations of civilians. In Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's first ten months of office, 544 cases of human rights violations have been attributed to the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Philippine National Police, and paramilitary forces (KARAPATAN 2002). Violations range from arbitrary arrest and detention, abduction, massacre, summary execution, desecration of dead bodies, desecration of places of worship, physical assault, torture, and use of civilians as shields or guides in military combat operations (Bulatlat 2003).

The literature on militarization in Cebu has been scarce and is limited to newspaper articles and fact sheets from the human rights

group Karapatan. Most materials on militarization are produced in the country's capital, Metro Manila, which barely mentions Cebu's experience of militarization. In 2002, then Cebu Governor Pablo Garcia complained of the lack of "military visibility" in the mid-northern areas where insurgents are reportedly based (Abellana 2006). In 2005, communist rebels attacked a military detachment in the mountain barangay of Sumon, Tuburan, one of the mid-northern areas in the province where the New People's Army is reportedly active (Varquez 2005).

In the 1980s, at the height of the Marcos dictatorship, farmers' organizations in Cebu's rural areas sprouted and proliferated. While most members of the organization are men and tackle only class issues, women who once attended only as representatives of their husbands slowly but steadily made a mark by becoming members and officers themselves.

Alongside the proliferation of legal farmers' organizations was the expansion of the NPA in the rural areas. For those who became discontented with the legal struggle and/or suffered human rights violations from the state, joining the NPA became a viable option. Some, although they did not join, supported the NPA by providing shelter, food and information to the rebel group. In the mid and latter part of the 1980s, military detachments were built in villages to suppress the growing rebellion in Cebu. This was the situation that women participants in this study found themselves in.

THE LIVES OF WOMEN IN MILITARIZED ZONES

This article documents the experiences of five women in militarized zones in Cebu considered as the hotbed of rebellion by the Philippine National Police (PNP) – the municipalities of Asturias and Tuburan and Danao City. I focused on their stories because my interviews with them elicited the most holistic representations of women's experiences in militarized zones. I chose them based on their

experiences either as direct participants/combatants or as civilians caught in the crossfire. Their willingness to participate in my study was also another important consideration for their inclusion.

Through the women's stories, I present a variety of insiders' perspectives on the impact of militarization. I have chosen to use pseudonyms for the women and their family members to protect their identities.

Not Your Ordinary Wife: Marina

In Philippine society, wives are considered *ilaw ng tahanan* (Filipino for "light of the family"). Ideally, the metaphor evokes the image of a person who assists and inspires all the members of the family. In reality, the metaphor reveals the limited scope of a woman's life, which revolves around staying at home, doing the household chores, nurturing the children, and being dependent on her husband and accepting his decisions without question.

Marina, wife of a farm leader, contradicts this stereotypical notion of a wife. She has four children; three live with her while the eldest one is in the city working as a house helper.

Marina was putting her youngest child to sleep when I arrived on the afternoon of our scheduled interview. Still tired after a four-hour trip from the city, I rested for a while before starting the interview. She took advantage of my resting to check on her farm and feed the animals. An hour later I woke up without Marina in sight. The children who were left at home said she was still at the farm. Around 6 p.m., Marina arrived bringing vegetables for dinner. Her eight-year-old son Michael prepared the fire on the makeshift kitchen counter. In an hour dinner was ready with boiled corn and mungo beans. The living room where I rested was transformed into a dining area as we sat on the floor, with the food in center of our circle. A small kerosene lamp lit the house as we ate.

After all the children were asleep, Marina and I talked. I learned that Marina grew up in a poor, farming family in another village, the youngest and the only female child in the family. She wanted to go to school very much, but poverty as well as her parents' desire to keep her in the house and provide reserve labor on their small farm stopped her from doing so. She only finished grade five.

Marina's parents separated for three years when she was still young. Although her parents reunited, their separation had such a strong impact on her that she continues to express insecurity around people who have never experienced living in a broken family. Marina has vowed never to let her children experience the pain she felt from her parents' separation. But militarization tested her vow.

Marina's husband, Mando, heads the farmer's organization in their municipality. This organization is active in protecting the rights of farmers and in advocating against issues that the organization deems a threat to the farmers' interests. Mando's work with the organization required him to travel from place to place to organize the farmers as part of strengthening and widening the organization. He was away from his family for days and even weeks.

When Mando was away, Marina would tend their small farm and take care of the animals along with her eldest son while also receiving a small share of the allowance of her husband provided by the organization. "It is never enough," sighed Marina as she enumerated the necessary expenses for food and her children's education.

Mando's frequent absence from their barangay was understood by the military as participation in the NPA, whose members are known to leave their families and live in the mountains to organize the masses to eventually overthrow the government. Mando's work earned the military's ire, and they in turn branded the organization as leftist.

One day in June 2003, when both Marina and Mando were home, two military men and a member of the paramilitary group CAFGU (Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit) arrived at their home. They invited Mando to their camp. Upon hearing the invitation, Mando became pale and had a sudden attack of migraine. Although nervous, Marina tried to remain calm. She implored Mando not to go with them if she was not allowed to accompany him. Marina even faced one of the military men and told him, "Sir, I won't let you bring Mando if you won't allow me to come with him." The military obliged Marina and took both her and Mando to the military camp in their barangay.

At the camp three military men took turns interrogating them. Marina remembers that one of them spoke Tagalog and that she did not understand much of what he was saying. Two Cebuano-speaking military men asked Mando questions. During the two-hour interrogation, Mando did not talk much; he trembled and seemed to be in shock. All questions revolved around Mando's alleged involvement with the NPA. The military tried to force Mando to confess that he is an NPA. After two grueling hours, the two were allowed to go home.

But that was not the end of the military's intrusion in the couple's lives. The following day, a CAFGU member went to their home again and asked to bring Mando, this time to the main detachment in Asturias. Angry, Marina faced the CAFGU and asked what more they wanted from them. "Why are you such a hassle? We're through with it; we've been there," Marina said to the CAFGU. The persistence of the CAFGU member and the desire to protect their children finally made the couple agree for Mando to go with the CAFGU member to the detachment. Throughout the ordeal, Marina was filled with grief and concern for Mando. She was overjoyed when he came home that night. He told her that the men asked the same questions at the detachment as they did earlier and that he seemed to convince them that his involvement in the farmer's organization was legal and does not include armed struggle to overthrow the government.

The third “invitation” was the worst. The couple was asked again to come to the military camp in their barangay. There they were interrogated separately. After hours of interrogation, the two met again and this was when Marina realized that Mando had been mistreated. “He was trembling, very pale, and I did not seem to know him anymore.” Marina recalled saying it was the first time that she saw Mando like that. “He would just stare at me, reflecting deeply and voice trembling,” Marina recalled. Mando told Marina that he underwent tactical interrogation and was forced by the military to confess where his arms were. Marina, on the other hand, was asked about the farmer’s organization and the degree of her involvement.

After the series of “invitations” from the military, Marina and Mando decided to ask help from the human rights groups based in Cebu City and to also have a health check-up after the series of migraines he felt after every tactical interrogation conducted by the military. There they were accommodated and Mando was even asked to be a guest on a radio program discussing farmers’ concerns.

All these actions earned them more anger from the military whose actions were exposed in the media. Threats poured in by word of mouth. Marina and Mando decided to let the situation cool off for a while. Mando took a leave from the organization and looked for a job in another barangay. Marina stayed in their house to care for the farm and the children.

Living alone fearful for the safety of her family and herself was not easy for Marina. “I was so afraid; we would even go to a hut near Mando’s sister because here at home I no longer want to sleep.” While telling me about her fears, Marina questioned what had happened to her family and reacted to the military’s accusation that Mando as an NPA keeps arms in their home. “What’s the use of arms to us when we are just farmers? We even find it difficult to buy rice which is more affordable. What more with arms when they are so expensive?”

The series of military invitations took a toll on Marina's health. She became intensely nervous when she would hear dogs barking at night or the sound of long arms thumping against the arms of the carrier. Her neighbors claimed they saw military men surrounding Marina's house every night. Even a year after the military's "invitations", Marina continues to harbor fears for their lives, especially Mando's. I saw Marina's fears and discomfort one night when I slept in her home. When the dogs barked, Marina hurriedly got up and peeped through the window of the house. When she saw no one, she went back to sleep.

A year after the harassments, Marina and Mando are still physically separated but their relationship is strong. The only thing that Marina regrets is that Mando had to give up his leadership in the farmers' organization. "It's true that I kept on complaining about his meager allowance, but I do believe in the principles of the organization," Marina revealed. As a construction worker in another village, Mando's work is irregular. Thus, the money he provides is minimal. Since the couple does not want to risk being harassed by the military again, Marina visits Mando on weekends, leaving the children in the care of her mother.

Marina was almost in tears when she described her situation. "It's such a difficult situation," she lamented. "Now I am both the father and the mother at home, tending the farm and taking care of the children."

Despite all the hardships her family has endured, Marina shows a quiet strength and determination that has kept her marriage and family intact despite the threat militarization poses.

A Hardworking Grandmother: Divina

Farming and poverty. This is what Divina remembers from her childhood. Since she can remember, she has been involved in farming.

She was still farming at the age of 63 when I met her in her brother's house. Now a grandmother of 20 children, Divina seems to have endless physical and emotional strength. One day after she had finished weeding on land she planned to cultivate near her brother's house, she told me of her plan to build a small nipa hut on the land so that she did not have to go home everyday after farming. Despite looking forlorn and tired, Divina was determined to find a way to survive.

Divina beams with pride recalling how her parents brought her up to be a disciplined and righteous person. A reprimand or a stick always awaited her every time she committed mistakes in her younger days. Hard work was also inculcated in her as one of the most important values in life.

During her teenage years Divina was sickly. She recalls that her parents had difficulty affording her medicine. They had to rely on herbs and the *albularyos* (native healers) in the village. During these years she met her husband, Dionisio. He used to help till their farm in exchange for a few pesos. *Mangubra* (to do farm work for a fee) is widespread where Divina grew up. At 16, Divina became engaged to Dionisio. When they finally decided to get married, they wanted to be independent from their parents. Dionisio found work on another farm on the boundary of two villages. But both villages demanded residence taxes from the couple, adding to the hardships of their first years of marriage. As Divina put it, "*Pwerte gyung lisura*" (very difficult). "But because of painstaking hard work, we were able to put up a home we can call our own."

Despite their persistent poverty, Divina and Dionisio managed somehow. They are proud to say that they raised their 12 children through their hard work. Their children were also an important source of labor on the farm.

In 1986, the peaceful life in their village was suddenly interrupted with the brutal murder, apparently by the military, of their neighbor's

son who was suspected of being an NPA member. People fled for safety after hearing the shooting. Divina and family hid in the bushes and stayed there the whole day. "We didn't have anything to eat the whole day," she recalled. The military scoured the village looking for NPAs and their sympathizers.

Days after, Divina's greatest fear happened. While she and her little children were at her brother's house, the military came to burn their house. At that time, her husband and three older children were still there. "It happened exactly right after we harvested our corn. All of it which we stored in the house was burned together with the house," Divina tearfully recalled.

The military claimed that neighbors reported that their house was an NPA safe house. The soldiers then stormed their house, fired shots, and gathered dried coconut leaves placed around the house. Then they burned in seconds the house that took years for Divina and family to build. Her husband and children were fortunate enough to flee from the burning house, however their animals were not as lucky. The soldiers repeatedly struck their dog with a piece of wood and took the pigs with them when they left.

After the attack, Divina and her family were left with only the clothes they were wearing. The pots, the gallons used for storing water were all destroyed. Divina recalled:

All our belongings were gone. We didn't have anything to cook our food on. It was just too hard. We had to rely on the root crops and settle in a makeshift house that we built amidst our farm. We were only able to eat rice or corn if we buy it from the store.

Still the military personnel were not satisfied with what they did. Days after they returned to the burned house and asked neighbors about the whereabouts of Divina and family. "*Sus, wa na gyud mi mahiluna ato* (we were never settled then)", as the military kept on following the family. The family had to move twice to other barangays

to be safe from further harassment by the military. Still, the military kept following them. Just when they had cleared the land for crops, the military would come and threaten them. Divina remembered that every time the military came and started harassing them, she would engage in a verbal tussle with them. As she told me this, she was smiling, adding that she is not always brave like this but at that time, it was something she felt she had to do to protect her family and whatever little property they had left.

In the village of *Kalunsing* a paramilitary group, *Putian*, took turns with the military in harassing them. The paramilitaries would come at night and ask for all her sons and husband. If they were not around, they would accuse them of having already joined the NPAs. While they interrogated the family members, the paramilitaries blocked the paths to their house to make sure that no one could get away.

A close neighbor who was suspected of feeding the NPAs shifted her loyalty to the military and identified Divina and family as among those who supported the NPAs. "We were the ones who had to endure all as we lost our house and all the things within it," Divina lamented.

If there was a positive result in what happened to Divina and her family, it would be the strengthening of family ties. Amidst the tension and difficulties they faced, including a brief separation for greater mobility, they found a way to regularly see each other and make sure everyone's okay. But Divina's health deteriorated along with the destruction of their properties. "I had a nervous breakdown, I couldn't sleep and I always shivered."

The education of the children was also affected. "They had to stop because we can't settle anymore," said Divina as she dwelt on the plight of her daughter, Bebi. By then, Bebi was a third-year high school student and was suspected by the military of attending meetings of the NPA. Then there was much talk about the military abducting young women involved with the NPAs and raping them. Divina and

husband decided to stop Bebi from pursuing her studies. "My daughter cried a lot," Divina recalled, especially when the military demanded Bebi's fatigue uniform used for the Citizen's Army Training (CAT) at school. The military men argued that Bebi might use it in NPA-inspired activities.

Amidst their problems, Divina recalled the support that her neighbors extended to them. Whenever they would ask for food, the neighbors were always willing to share their food which helped the family survive during their most difficult times.

There was a farmer's organization in their area but when harassment started and the people began to evacuate, it died. A fact-finding mission composed of different non-government organizations also visited their area and interviewed them and distributed kitchen utensils. Still, military harassment in their area continued.

Due to the harassment that they went through, many of Divina's children became involved in different farmer's organizations in the areas where they chose to live with their respective partners. It came as a surprise though, when one son was arrested in another municipality for arson. Local police suspected him of being involved with the NPAs in burning buses whose owners did not pay revolutionary taxes.

At 63, Divina cannot believe how much she has gone through. She attributes her own and her family's survival to their hard work. "If we didn't farm right away after every military harassment, then we would have been dead," Divina stressed as she continues to do farm work now that husband Dionisio is incapacitated from decades of farming. "His arms and hands can no longer feel anything and keep on trembling," Divina confided. Farm work has become Divina's main task.

Divina spent all her life raising her 12 children and in the process never had the chance to involve in the public sphere. Yet in doing so,

she was able to keep the family intact even single-handedly with the illness of her husband.

Mother Missing a Son: Narda

Narda, 56, had just arrived home from the farm when I arrived. She did not hesitate to share her experiences of militarization in their area, however she was self-conscious stating that she might not be able to answer all my questions as she had only finished grade 2. I assured her the interview would be about her experiences and nothing else.

At the early age of 9, Narda already helped her parents on the farm. She joined in *pangubra* or farm labor to help augment family income. But even with her contribution, life was still difficult. She recalled:

There were nights that we have nothing to eat so we would boil cassava and eat it. It was so difficult then that our father really asked us all to stop schooling so we can help in the farm.

It was during one of the village discos that she met her husband Concio. The couple married and worked their farm together. Narda eventually bore five children. Narda recalled that when her children were still young, she experienced intense nervousness every time they were sick. "One just collapsed suddenly; the other suddenly had pale eyes (*nisulirap ang mata*). That's why I can say that the history of my marriage is fraught with difficulties," Narda stated.

The village where Narda lives is known to be one of the strongholds of the NPAs. Narda swears they were never bothered by their presence. "*Di man na sila mangunsa* (They never bothered us). They would knock in the night, ask to rest for a while or ask for some leftover food. But only that. They were so courteous," Narda recalled. Frequent visits from the NPAs may have been a factor in her eldest son, Alvin, becoming fond of the rebels. The family supports the NPAs by providing information about the whereabouts of the military and paramilitary groups.

In 1986, military and paramilitary groups began going around to the houses in the village asking for information about the NPAs. Disappointed with the non-support of the local populace, they began harassing and threatening people, Narda's family included. While the majority of the residents evacuated, Narda's family remained, believing that they had done nothing wrong and not wanting to abandon their farm. Their decision to stay seemed to displease the military, which was hoping everyone would evacuate so that there would be no more support for the NPAs. The military maintained that the NPAs, like fish in a pond, would die off if the pond dried up. The soldiers arrested Concio claiming that his name was on the military's list of NPAs in the area. Narda defended her husband and told the soldiers:

Sir, I know my husband. He's been a very responsible one spending all his days in our farm. You can even see it. Who will do this now if you take him?

The military answered by saying that they would only question Concio and that within five days he could return home. Narda then said, "Okay, you can take him but don't you ever hurt him." The following day, Narda found Concio in the next village where the military detachment was located. Concio was filthy and said that he was asked to fetch water from the well for the soldiers. They were only given a short time to talk. Narda told him to be consistent with his answers because inconsistency could be used by the military to prove his guilt. Later, Concio was brought to a bigger military detachment in Bogo. All the while, Narda counted the days, hoping the military officers would keep their promise. When 21 days had passed since his arrest, Narda borrowed money to go check on Concio. With her youngest daughter, she braved the camp and demanded to see her husband. A soldier pointed to the kitchen where Narda saw her husband working:

He was cooking in the kitchen, already so thin and shabby. Our daughter ran straight to him and embraced him so tightly while crying. All I said at that very moment was, "How are

you?" Concio was silent most of the time and conscious of what he said, as the military might hear him.

Narda then talked to the head of the military and reminded them of their promise that they would only keep Concio for five days. The military officer explained that they had not yet made Concio's affidavit so he still had to stay. Narda told them that she would not go home if they would not free her husband. Narda's persistence eventually forced the military to draw up the affidavit on that day and let Concio sign it because they feared that she might broadcast their wrongdoings. Narda no longer remembers what was in the affidavit. What mattered to Narda was that she was able to bring her husband home.

But this was not the end of Narda's suffering. Months later, Alvin, her eldest son, together with an uncle was requested by her aunt who attended the fiesta in their barangay to assist her returning home to another village because she was carrying many things. Alvin did not feel well the night of the request, but Narda's aunt was insistent.

Narda was uncomfortable allowing Alvin to go especially because her aunt's husband, Tinong, was a member of the paramilitary group Civilian Home Defense Force (CHDF). Out of respect and trust for her aunt, Narda agreed. But she instructed Alvin to come back home the following day. But the next day Alvin and his uncle did not return, nor any day after.

It was Monday night when they left. On Tuesday and Wednesday when they did not come home, Narda became nervous. She tried to calm herself by thinking that he must have stayed longer with his grandparents who are fond of Alvin. But she could not explain why Waldo, Alvin's uncle, did not return since his wife, Narda's sister, was five months pregnant and he had a nine-month-old baby to care for.

Thursday morning when Alvin still had not arrived, Narda asked a neighbor who was going to the village where her aunts and parents live

to check on Alvin. When the neighbor came back with many stories, it became clear to Narda that her son and her brother-in-law were missing.

Information brought by the neighbor included that Narda's parents said that Alvin did not stay long with them on Tuesday. He insisted on going home right away so his parents would not worry. On Tuesday afternoon, people living near the military detachment were talking of the military running after some men. Wednesday, CAFGUs, including her aunt's husband Tinong, were massing from the military detachment located in the village halfway between Narda's village and the village of her parents and aunt purportedly because there were *dinakpan* (prisoners). Tinong arrived much before the rest of the CAFGUS that Wednesday morning.

The stories she heard made Narda suspect that Tinong had a hand in the whereabouts of Alvin and Waldo. Without wasting time, Narda looked for any available transportation to go to find Tinong and confront him. Once she found him, she immediately asked if he had a hand in the disappearance of Alvin and Waldo.

Narda had every reason to suspect Tinong's involvement in Alvin's disappearance. It was Alvin who informed her and the rest of the neighbors to be careful with Tinong because he joined the CHDF and was helping the military in its anti-insurgency campaign. "Just let him. He might just be after the monthly allowance provided by the military," Narda recalled telling Alvin.

Another day passed and there was still no sign of Alvin and Waldo. With the help of neighbors, Narda and husband Concio led about 30 people in storming the military detachment. The men brought machetes; the women, sticks. The military appeared surprised and asked if they were there for war. "It's up to you how you interpret our coming here. All we want to know are the whereabouts of my son Alvin and Waldo," Narda remembered saying to the military leader.

To this the military leader just answered, "So what's the problem?" Narda replied:

I have a very big problem, Sir, because my son is missing. I am no longer myself now. He was last seen here. If you think he committed a mistake, I'm his parent, you can always arrest him.

"If he was last seen here, does that mean we are responsible?" another military member retorted.

"If you were not responsible, I'm here to ask for your help to locate him," Narda replied calmly.

The military were not helpful. So Narda and the rest of the women asked if they could enter in the area under the school stage that the military was using as a store house. The military leader refused at first, but with more prodding, he obliged but gave them only three minutes to search. Narda and her friends wasted no time. Using dried palm leaves as torches, they saw no signs of Alvin or Waldo. What they found were ArmaLite rifles and other military paraphernalia. In anguish and anger, Narda and the women kicked and threw whatever they laid their eyes on. As they went out, Narda approached the military again and said:

Don't tell me that you don't have a child like me. If I did the same to your children, hide them as you did with mine, don't tell me that you wouldn't be worried, that you wouldn't go crazy. He was a very good son and some of you here know him well.

Nothing came from that visit but Narda and Concio were grateful for the help their neighbors extended. Month after month, Narda kept hoping that her son would return. Tinong and her aunt, after countless attempts by Narda to find out what they knew, moved to the city.

Narda claims to be stronger after all the difficulties she has gone through. "I have come to accept what happened to my son. I just keep in mind that many people have sacrificed their lives for change. I shouldn't complain." Just recently,

Narda learned that another military detachment will be based near her village. The last one left in the 1990s. Together with other residents in her area, Narda petitioned to bar the military from coming, citing as reason the case of her son and other missing people in their area.

Still Strong after Husband's Violent Death: Linda

As a child, Linda wanted nothing more than to finish school. But after completing grade five, her parents asked her to stop because they could no longer afford to send her to school. "When I stopped, I pleaded with them that I be allowed to study dressmaking so I can at least have a skill. Still they didn't agree," Linda sadly recalled.

As a result, Linda married at a young age. "I married when I was 15 since I couldn't realize my dream anyway." Like the majority of the women in her village, Linda thought marriage would give her the freedom to decide on her own and make life better. It did give her the freedom, but it was limited due to the poverty she and Dodo, her husband, experienced. Instead of making her life better, marriage proved to be burdensome for Linda.

Although Dodo was a hardworking and a faithful husband, they had to rely on Linda's parents' land for farming. Dodo was also engaged in buying and selling farmers' products in their village. Still, with their six children, his work was not enough to support them. "Poverty was the constant problem we had in all the years of our marriage," Linda told me. This poverty intensified when she lost her husband on their twentieth anniversary of marriage.

The military and the CAFGUs in their village considered Dodo "friendly" to the New People's Army. The military reportedly received information that Dodo fed the NPA fighters and let them rest in their house at night. I asked Linda if this was true and she said yes. Her husband's support of the NPAs was a reason for the couple's constant bickering. Eventually, Linda accepted Dodo's position.

Dodo's active support of the NPAs raised the ire of the military and paramilitary groups in their area. Whenever Dodo wasn't around every time they looked for him, Linda received the threats and physical abuses meant for Dodo. "Harassment? That happened frequently to us". She recalled the times when the barrel of a gun was pushed into her abdomen each time she faced the military and CAFGUs looking for her husband. They would come and ask for his whereabouts. "Well, I'm not a fool to tell them," Linda said.

Even when she was still recuperating after giving birth to their sixth child, Linda would always protect her husband from abuse by denying that she knew his whereabouts. She maintained this resolve knowing full well that the CAFGUs and the military would vent their anger on her.

On the fourth visit of the paramilitary forces to their house, Dodo finally decided to face them. He thought this might help lessen their suspicions about him and stop them from continuously harassing his family. He was returning from the well with some gallons of water when he saw the paramilitaries approaching. "I told him to just go and I'll be the one to face the military," Linda recalled. But Dodo insisted to face his accusers. When her husband faced the men, the combined forces of military and CAFGUs insisted that he go with them. That was the last time that Linda saw her husband.

How could she ever forget that day, just three months after she gave birth and the couple's twentieth wedding anniversary? Linda was teary-eyed recalling this day. She had not wanted Dodo to go with the men; she had insisted to go with him but the military assured her that everything would be fine since they were only taking Dodo to a neighbor's house. The presence of a distant relative who is a CAFGU member also pacified her. At eleven o'clock in the morning of the same day, the captain of their village informed her that Dodo was dead.

Nobody knew exactly why and how Dodo was killed and who killed him. Linda can only surmise that he refused to divulge any information on the whereabouts of NPAs as she knows perfectly well how loyal her husband is to the group.

Dodo's death was extremely painful for Linda, not only because of how he was taken from her, but because of how his dead body was desecrated. In Linda's words:

Dodo's hands were tied and used to drag his body, up and down the rocky mountain. It was only in the barangay captain's house where the military tied also Dodo's feet. Like a pig, with neck hanging, they carried him towards their detachment.

At that time when the barangay captain informed her of Dodo's death, Linda felt her whole body weakening. Linda immediately went to the village where she heard that Dodo's body was taken. Upon arriving, she was told that it had already been taken to the city. In the city, she was told that the body was already buried, but the officials did not tell her where. Linda never found Dodo's body. Some people told her they saw his body placed in a garbage truck which led her to believe that Dodo's body was dumped into the sea.

After futile attempts to look for the body of her husband and to file a case against her husband's murderers, Linda retreated to the confines of her home and refused to speak to anyone. Grief overcame her. Neighbors discouraged Linda to pursue a case against the military saying that this might provoke the military to go after her too. Dodo's parents blamed her for what happened, saying she could have stopped him from supporting the NPAs.

All the grief and stress took its toll on her body, especially since it was just three months since she gave birth. She had to stay in bed for two months, incapable of doing anything. Her hair began to fall out. Locals called her illness *bughat*, synonymous with relapse, a reoccurrence of symptoms of a disease after a period of improvement.

Her children supported her during this time, finding herbs to make her feel better. She felt better and improved.

After gaining back her strength, she buried herself in working at her small farm, continuing what used to be Dodo's primary task. She also considered joining the NPAs to avenge Dodo's death. But her children stopped her, stating that they could not bear losing another parent.

Linda decided to migrate to Mindanao with her children, hoping it would help her overcome the loss. They stayed there for two years and decided to come back because of the small farm they left behind. Linda stated that losing Dodo was something that she would never be able to overcome. Telling me about her loss, she had to stop for some time to cry. In their living room where we talked about her loss, the couple's wedding picture is the only decoration hanging on the wall.

A Woman Guerilla: Luisa

Luisa is what the military calls "NPA amazon," a woman who fights alongside her male NPA counterparts against government forces. Luisa did not strike me as an NPA fighter the first time I met her in her rented apartment in a lower-income neighborhood within Metro Cebu. She was busy fitting together dried seashells subcontracted from a neighbor who sells it for export. Luisa was soft-spoken, gentle in her words and actions. She was six-months pregnant and was on official leave from the organization.

Luisa, 41, comes from a farming family in one of the islands of Cebu province. She is the eldest among five siblings. They own the small parcel of land that her father is tilling. Her father also served as village captain for some years. They lived well enough that she was able to finish a degree in agriculture in one of the agricultural schools in Cebu. She lamented though that when she was in her elementary and high school years, she was not able to play or

participate in extra-curricular activities because she had to take care of her younger siblings.

After finishing college education in Cebu, Luisa returned home. There she found out that the Catholic Church parish needed a secretary to take care of all the transactions between the parishioners of the Church and the parish priest. In her desire to help in their parish and be near her hometown, she applied and was accepted. Soon after, she learned that their parish priest was a member of the Christians for National Liberation (CNL), an underground movement of church people affiliated with the National Democratic Front. Their priest asked for her and her family's support which they readily gave, not because they understood and accepted the organization's principles, but because the priest showed genuine concern for the welfare of their community. Luisa's house became a meeting place for the CNL members in their community

Months after working in the parish, Luisa and the priest fell in love. At first they kept their relationship a secret. It took some time before her parents learned and accepted their relationship. However, her aunts did not speak to her for a long time after learning about the relationship. They saw Luisa as a sinner, even a temptress, for engaging in a relationship with a priest.

When the priest's term ended in their area, they decided to settle in Cebu and live together. He was assigned to a nearby parish and she, with the help of the Mayor in their area who was the friend of his father, got a job at the Department of Agriculture as a livestock technician. There was not much work and she found herself bored and guilty of receiving a salary without much output. She transferred to the Provincial Capitol but was disappointed to learn of much corruption within the bureaucracy. She noticed that employees who were hired after her were promoted because they were "closer" to the bosses. On the other hand, Luisa had been there for a year and was still temporary in status.

Luisa gave birth at the age of 29. She continued to hide her relationship with the priest. Explaining their situation to her daughter later on became a problem for Luisa. Her daughter began to question why they could not go out together as a family like other families do. Luisa had to painstakingly explain to her daughter her parents' status and the need to preserve the secrecy of their relationship or her father priest would be in hot water.

With the help of her husband, Luisa transferred to a private organization that provided services in the countryside. Their services included providing farmers with seedlings and fertilizers, pigs and goats as well as trainings on farm technologies. This brought Luisa to poverty-stricken communities which made her realize the importance of directly participating in the struggle for change:

I was so happy with my work, immersing myself in the lives of the farmers. It was here that I heard about stories on the NPAs and their struggle. The concrete poverty I experienced with the farmers prompted me to eventually join them.

While Luisa became closer to the NPAs and fully comprehended their ideals, her partner priest became disgruntled with the rift within the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). While the majority of CPP members reaffirmed their principles and strategies of "encircling the cities by starting to organize in the countryside," a few influential cadres in the movement saw this as an ineffective strategy and pushed for armed insurrection in the city. Luisa's partner tended to support the "rejectionists" while Luisa supported the "reaffirmists." Their different positions became the source of constant quarrels and eventually led to their breakup. Joining the NPA was not an easy decision for Luisa. On the one hand, she had her daughter to consider whom she had to leave with her parents; on the other, she also had to become accustomed to the physical demands of being an NPA fighter. In 1998 when she was still on leave from the private organization where she worked, she decided to "integrate" with the NPAs, but chose to be there only for a week because of the difficult terrain.

Afterwards she returned to the private organization and reflected on what it was that she really wanted to do.

In 2000, Luisa finally decided to undergo another integration, this time for two months. In the integration, she underwent a 12-day politico-military training inside the NPA camp which included physical exercises, firing, grenade launching, wall jumping, tiger jumping and other activities. "But there was a time that I really had to rest because of my menstruation," Luisa recalled.

It was during the integration that she met and fell in love with another NPA fighter, Dino. They got married after two years of courtship within the CPP movement attended by the CPP cadres. At this time, Luisa was already pregnant with Dino's child. The wedding was well-attended by their comrades and families. Unfortunately, the event also reached the intelligence network of the military. Days after, massive military operations were conducted in the area where the wedding was held.

Luisa and her comrades were caught off guard, as were the civilian supporters in the area. Tensions rose, especially when the military was already just a mountain away. They were able to escape but along the way, they had to pass through a military checkpoint. Amidst all the tension, Luisa had a miscarriage. She and her husband decided that she should stay in the city so that she could have regular medical care. Another miscarriage occurred, and Luisa came close to giving up the struggle because of depression and also the prodding of her daughter. Luisa's daughter was jealous of her husband and finally convinced Luisa to look for a less dangerous work. Luisa found strength in Dino as he continuously reminded her of the principles that united them.

With a renewed commitment, Luisa plans to go back to the mountains after giving birth. As for her daughter, she sees to it that they have time for each other while she is still in the city. And this is what she often tells her:

Along with my desire to free the masses is my desire to give you a bright future. Our family is part of the society that we want to change.

In her childhood days, Luisa only had one dream: to be rich. Now grown up and aware of the harsh realities of life, she knows she can never live as a rich person in what she calls a “bourgeois society.” “I have already made a pledge and I intend to fulfill it. The struggle continues,” Luisa stated.

SUMMARY

The militarist strategy used by the Philippine government to defeat its enemy has profound and unique impacts on women, distinct from those of men. Faced with fulfilling their gender roles in the context of militarization, extreme poverty and the prevailing patriarchal beliefs of women as weak, passive, and objects of men’s pleasure, women suffer not only alienation from their families, loss of socio-economic opportunities and deterioration of physical health and well-being, but also gender-based violence.

The intersection of class, ethnicity, and gender played a pivotal role in the women’s experience in armed conflict, its subsequent impact on them and their responses. Being farmers, they belong to a class long deprived of land, equal sharing of produce and basic social services. Being Filipinos with a long history of colonization and imperialism, they suffer from the vestiges of a postcolony, such as militarism and pro-foreign policies. As women, they suffer within a gender system that sees them as fit only to do reproductive work which hampers their access to services, resources, opportunities, and results of development. All these factors complicate the suffering they experience due to armed conflict.

Representations of women as belonging to the private sphere are distorted and reflective of the Philippines’ colonial past and neocolonial status. This study illustrates that women have important roles in

resisting armed conflict and in peacekeeping through their membership in various organizations and participation in mass actions. The women's new socio-economic roles during armed conflict situations and their ability to take on new roles reveal women as actors drawing upon local rules and resources to act on their own and their families' behalf under dire conditions.

Through their various actions in the face of armed conflict, the women in this study contest a dichotomy between private and public spheres and conceptions of women as "the other" as colonizers, patriarchal society, and the military have conceived of them. Stereotypical conceptions of women based on the domestic/public dichotomy depict them as cowering in fear or fleeing from situations and responsibilities that result from armed conflict. This study shatters this stereotype by showing women to be capable breadwinners, decision-makers and defenders of their families and communities.

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