

WOMEN IN THE TEXT AND IN REALITY*

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Introduction

The topic —Women in the Revolution — is a broad one so I have limited myself to two aspects: first, women as they appear in the writings of Andres Bonifacio, Emilio Jacinto and Apolinario Mabini; second, the actual roles women played at the time of the Philippine Revolution. The aim of this paper is to see whether the view of women in these texts correspond to the reality of women during this period.

Women according to Bonifacio, Jacinto and Mabini

In Andres Bonifacio's essay, "What the Tagalogs Should Know," this statement appears: ". . .even women know how to read and write in the prescribed manner of us Tagalogs." This is in the context of Bonifacio's valorization of the customs of our ancestors during whose time women knew how to read and write. Implied by this statement is Bonifacio's observation that under the Spaniards, women have become ignorant.

There is also a reference to women in Emilio Jacinto's "Teachings of the Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan." According to Jacinto:

Do not look at woman as a mere plaything but rather as a partner and one who shares in the difficulties of our life; treat her weakness with the utmost respect and remember the mother whence you came and who nurtured you in infancy. What you do not wish others to do to your wife, daughter or sister, do not do to the wife, daughter or sister of others.

Worthy of note is the use of the terms "partner" and "one who shares" in reference to women. At this point I understand Lilia Quindoza

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Santiago's refusal to accept Rizal as a feminist because of Rizal's use of "helpmate" instead of "partner" in referring to women, as in this quotation from the "Letter to the Young Women of Malolos:"

Now that you have responded to our parched cry for the recovery of our country; now that you have shown a good example to other women who, like you, wish to have their eyes opened and be delivered from suffering, our hopes are strengthened, mocking misfortune because you are our helpmates, secure in our victory. No longer is the Tagalog woman bent and on her knees [but] full of hope in the time to come; no more is the mother who helps in blinding her child to being brought up in insult and humiliation.

We can therefore say that Jacinto had greater awareness of the woman question than had Rizal because Jacinto looked on women as partners of and sharers with men. According to Santiago, Rizal still bases women's roles on men's standards. Nevertheless, the view that women are weak and should not be taken advantage of is still to be found in Jacinto.

Mabini's references to women may be found in his writing on *The Philippine Revolution*.

Mabini writes thus:

I cannot end [my exposition of] these ideas without first making clear to my compatriots, my deep feelings of resentment everytime I hear about the rape of our women by our soldiers. It is true that there are just a few cases which may be difficult to avoid in times of war; nevertheless, I am sure that the first such instance would not have been repeated had it been firmly and unconditionally nipped in the bud by officers who would not condone such destruction. How can we expect foreigners to respect our own women if we set a bad example by not respecting them? And how can we expect the Filipino to be respected if our women are not respected? In the ancient history of the earliest nations, one of the greatest virtues recognized in a brave and honorable man was the respect for women because the behavior which protects the chastity and the life of one who is weak shows greatness of heart and nobility of soul. And it should be realized that this virtue was not just a mere need in that age of "romanticism" but a great need in the life of the nation, for if a woman is consistently respected in the society of which she is a part, she can easily make worthy and honorable behavior

her own. And if her children inherit these it would plant in their hearts the bravery and firmness of character for great undertakings and heroic acts.

Again, the reference to women's being weak which we find in Jacinto appears in Mabini's work. Mabini stresses that not taking advantage of women's weakness represents greatness of heart and nobility of soul. Mabini also echoes Rizal's view that having mothers who are aware of their rights paves the way for children who are similarly aware.

In the proposed constitution of Mabini, he includes a provision regarding women in the first article. According to this provision,

Filipino women may not exercise a public office which may carry with it jurisdiction; but they may exercise all those which not being of this character may be compatible with the dignity of their sex, provided that they do not lead a licentious life and may have the qualifications of capacity required by the laws.

On the other hand, they shall be exempt from military service and from the personal tax; but they shall pay the taxes belonging to the profession or industry that they may exercise. The women taxpayers who may have attained twenty-one years of age and should not be subject to paternal or marital authority will have the right to vote for any public office, unless they may have lost this right by reason of their leading a licentious life or are awaiting trial or are convicted for some criminal offense.

Women may study any branch of science or of the arts in the institutions of public instruction maintained by the State, by the provinces or by the pueblos, and may practice the professions corresponding to their certificates.

In this provision may be discerned several progressive ideas of Mabini regarding women. Although he would prohibit women from holding public office that carries with it a constituency, he does not prevent them from holding other public offices "compatible with the dignity of their sex." Worthy of note also is the provision that, once a woman has reached the age of 21, she is no longer subject to the authority of father or husband. The belief of Mabini that, at this age, a woman is capable of making decisions for herself is indeed remarkable. Similarly remarkable is that, this early, Mabini believed in giving women the vote. All of these show Mabini's great trust in women and his positive

view of them. It is just too bad that it was not his proposed constitution but that of Felipe Calderon which was adopted by the Malolos Congress.

Women and the Motherland

Although the men may have thus delineated the role of the Filipina, it may be seen that the women did not willingly stay within the molds which had been fashioned for them. This was shown in many instances and particularly when the Filipina became aware of what was happening to the Motherland.

It has been said that the establishment of masonic lodges in the Philippines was the fruit of heightened feelings against the frailocracy. These lodges became sites where discussions were held regarding the condition of the country and sites where freedom of speech and assembly took legitimate form. These lodges started with the men but it was not long before lodges for women were similarly established.

The establishment of a lodge for women may be considered the beginning of the women's awareness of an alternative order. If one looks at masonry as a way of hitting at the prevailing frailocracy in the Philippines, the establishment of lodges among the ranks of the women was a sign of their resistance against the existing order. Rizal, for instance, made known to Blumentritt that his mother and sisters no longer went to church because of the abuses of the friars, although they continued to believe in God and the Virgin Mary.

Rosario Villaruel is recognized as the first woman mason in the Philippines. The father of Rosario, Faustino Villaruel, was also a mason. Rosario was only 18 years old when she became a mason and was given the symbolic name "Minerva." She was the one who established the first lodge for women in the Philippines named *Logia de Adopcion*. Also a member of this lodge was Jose Rizal's sister, Trinidad, who was given the symbolic name "Sumibol."

Rosario has been described as educated and modern in her thinking. It was said that it was not her practice to kiss the hand of the friars and that she once inflicted harm on a friar who wished to take advantage of her. She became the subject of the friars' ire. She was tortured when she was arrested in 1896. She was dubbed "The Infirm Madonna" by Spanish newspapers not out of pity but in mockery.

Although the establishment of a woman's branch of the Katipunan was initiated by Andres Bonifacio in the face of suspicion falling on the wives of Katipuneros, the 29 women willingly accepted the task of concealing the existence and activities of the Katipunan from the Spaniards. Because of these suspicions, it was decreed that only wives, sisters and mothers of Katipuneros could become members. One easily understands the initial membership which included the following:

1. Gregoria de Jesus — wife of Andres Bonifacio.
2. Marina Dizon — wife of Jose Turiano Santiago and cousin of Emilio Jacinto.
3. Simiona de Remigio — wife of Tomas Remigio.
4. Benita Rodriguez — wife of Restituto Javier.
5. Josefa Rizal — sister of Jose Rizal
6. Trinidad Rizal—sister of Jose Rizal
7. Angelica Lopez — niece of Jose Rizal.
8. Carmen de Rodriguez — wife of Doroteo Rodriguez.
9. Marta Saldana — wife of Faustino Manalak.
10. Macaria Pangilinan — wife of Marcelo Santos.

The membership included 19 other women who are not now known.

When the Revolution broke out, the women did not hesitate to involve themselves in various ways. There were those who helped the revolutionaries by opening up their granaries. This was done by Melchora Aquino, better known as Tandang Sora, Macaria Geronimo (wife of Candido Tria Tirona) and Trinidad Famy (mother of Emilio Aguinaldo). Andres Bonifacio narrated how the palay from the granary of Tandang Sora was pounded and how, although there was still a lot of chaff, the rice was boiled so that the Katipuneros could eat. Aguinaldo also mentioned how Macaria Geronimo and his mother opened up their respective granaries to give rice not only to the Filipinos who were fighting but to their families as well.

In my view, the most admirable figure of the three was Melchora Aquino. When she was exiled to Guam in 1896, she was already 84 years old. Every time I look at the picture of her taken before she boarded the boat "Churruca," it reflects to me a truly strong and dignified woman. She stayed in Guam seven years before she came back to the Philippines at age 91. She died in 1919 when she was 107 years old and was buried at the North Cemetery in Manila until her remains were transferred to Himlayang Pilipino Memorial Park.

The participation of the women also took the form of giving food to the soldiers and looking after the wounded. According to Aguinaldo, the support shown by the townfolk, including the women, during the battle of Zapote was truly admirable. According to him:

The behavior of the people during this time was truly praiseworthy. Everytime there was gunfire, they would come, ready to help. The women and children brought food and drink. They brought the wounded to their homes and took care of them.

It is not unknown to us that many women participated in battle. Often mentioned are Agueda Kahabagan of Laguna, Trinidad Tecson of Bulacan and Teresa Magbanua of Iloilo. Agueda Kahabagan was with Artemio Ricarte when he attacked the barracks of the Spaniards in San Pablo. Trinidad Tecson took part in the battles in Central Luzon, particularly in the provinces of Bulacan, Nueva Ecija and Zambales. At Biak-na-bato, she took care of the revolutionaries who were wounded or sick. Married three times, her husbands were: Julian Alcantara, Doroteo Santiago and Francisco Empanado. Teresa Magbanua, on the other hand, was from Iloilo. She approached her uncle, General Perfecto Poblador, so she could participate in the fighting. But nothing equals the beautiful description of Alejandra Nocon, mother of the revolutionary Santos Nocon. This is how Santiago Alvarez describes Matandang Anday:

And Mrs. Alejandra widow of Nocon, known as Matandang Anday, well into her 50th year in 1896, in her intense love and help to the revolution to aid independence, wholeheartedly giving of her means for the needs of those defending our freedom, in all battles, would suddenly appear in the midst of our soldiers, holding in her skirt many hard, riverbed stones for throwing [at the enemy], a bolo and dagger hanging from her belt, weapons she intended for defense in her fervent desire to also fight in battle; apart from these, she brought with her a flour sack full of bread which she set aside for soldiers who were hungry.

There is also a mention of several women who were included in the revolutionary intelligence service. Included here are the names of Macaria de la Cruz, Pilar Jueves and Esperanza Solteras.

It was not just in these ways that the women showed their helpfulness during the revolution. Several women expressed their solidarity with the national goal of freedom by writing poetry, thus showing the creativity of women. In 1899, on the pages of the newspaper *Heraldo*

Filipino, a poem appeared written collectively by Victoria Lactaw, Feliza Kahatol, Patricia Himagsik, Dolores Katindig, Felipa Kapuloan and Victoria Mausig. Whether these were their actual names or not, their surnames were extremely symbolic. I am referring to the surnames “Himagsik,” [Revolution], “Kapuloan,” [Archipelago], “Mausig” [one who prosecutes]. Reproduced below is their poem:

*Come
let us bear arms
to show the nobility
of these Filipinas
Let us not allow
whatever country
to rule over us
her children

Let us fight
for our freedom
so long as one of us
is still alive
And nothing else remains
for them to lord over
save our blood
and our dead bodies

Should we be conquered
by these “Yankees”
we will die of suffering
just the same
Better to die
protecting what we respect
and hold to be
right and just.

Due to this
our Sacred Cause
true victory
is surely ours
And Heaven’s aid
will come our way
to help us
in our fight.*

The last stanza of this poem depicts the fight for independence as a holy aspiration, blessed by heaven and rewarded with victory.

Conclusion

This short paper has tried to show that the Revolution paved the way for a greater awareness among the women, leading them towards a goal outside their immediate personal and family interests. It elevated and broadened their interest towards a more inclusive motherland or Mother Filipinas. The Revolution gave birth to the new Filipina who is concerned for her country. Whether in the field of battle or in more peaceful ways, she has made this quite apparent.