

Narratives of Resilience and Solidarity during the Marawi Crisis: Preserving Marawi's Culture of Peace

Dr. Godiva Eviota-Rivera
Mindanao State University – Main, Marawi City
Email: godivarivera03@gmail.com

Dr. Rogelio Bayod
Cor Jesu College, Digos City
Email: roger.bayod@gmail.com

Atty. Aurora Lyn Racmat
Mindanao State University – Main, Marawi City
Email: auroralyn17@gmail.com

Prof. Omera M. Serad, JD
Mindanao State University – Main, Marawi City
Email: omera.serad@msumain.edu.ph

Abstract

This paper examines the reasons, impact, and effects of the Marawi Siege in 2017. The many unheard stories of the experiences of the people during and after the siege can provide a deeper assessment on the Marawi Crisis particularly on why terrorism in Marawi City and the factors that led to it. Further, it also intends to highlight the critical role of the Philippine Government in responding to the crisis. It is a common view that then President Rodrigo Duterte acted with sheer will in his military response to the crisis to protect and secure its local population, and to put an end once and for all the terror perpetrated by the Maute Group and the Abu Sayaf. Some siege survivors were interviewed by the researchers for first-hand knowledge and the latter through an emic perspective will offer their personal insights on the

crisis particularly on how the resilience and co-existence of Meranaw and their Christian neighbors were crucial in overcoming their struggle against the Islamic militants to sustain their everyday lives free from violent extremists towards durable peace.

Keywords: Marawi Siege, Extremism, Resilience, Solidarity, Culture of Peace

Introduction

The Marawi Siege in May 2017 reveals a complex state of affairs in the world as states and governments face threats from terror organizations that continue to advance their violent ideologies in vulnerable communities. Marawi became the battleground for the struggle against terrorism in the Philippines. The recent act of terrorism was led by the Maute group and Isnilon Hapilon's Abu Sayyaf. However, from what appeared to be threatening human race and its world, the simple acts of resilience and solidarity are concrete terms that opened a path to regain peace for the besieged Marawi.

Contrary to what mainstream media depicts in the national dailies or online news, the many unheard stories of the experiences of the people during and after the siege can provide a deeper assessment on the Marawi Crisis. This paper also intends to highlight the critical role of the Philippine Government in responding to the crisis. It is a common view that President Rodrigo Duterte acted with sheer will in his military response to the crisis in order to protect and secure its local population, and to put an end once and for all the extremism of the Maute Group.¹ The researchers will offer their personal insights of the Marawi siege through an emic perspective particularly on the constructive efforts of the Meranaw survivors alongside with their Christian neighbors in moving forward as an act of participation in attaining a durable culture of peace that the people of Mindanao have long dreamt of.

¹ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "President Duterte and the Birth of Radical Democracy in the Philippines." *International Journal of Politics and Security*, Volume 2, Number 3 (2020): 117.

Methodology

To be able to achieve the objectives of this study, the researchers conducted several fieldworks from November 21 to 23, 2022 which primarily involved interviews with several local informants who had first-hand experiences of the siege and had an openness to share their insights. Since most of the researchers are living and working in Marawi City and given their role to actively engage in an authentic storytelling as well as in the gathering of local narratives from the ground hence the experiential-theoretic transition model is at work in processing the variables of the study particularly in analyzing the data and in the discussion of inferences.²

Extremist Groups and the War in Mindanao

Mindanao has a reputation of being a land of conflict, although such may be considered as a form of orthodoxy, according to Patricio Abinales.³ The leading militants in the island are the Abu Sayyaf group, who is well-known for kidnap for ransom activities. The historical account of the realities in Mindanao includes the birthing of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and later, its splinter faction, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The two Muslim separatist movements were a reaction against the historical and socio-economic injustices that they have experienced. Most importantly, these movements aimed for self-determination. For many years, Mindanao was not given a fair attention by the national government in the development agenda. A huge part of the country's budget and economic resources have been largely concentrated in the center of governance --- the imperial Manila. The struggles and injustices that eventually resulted to war in Mindanao can be attributed to such an

² Mohammadreza Zolfagharian, Bob Walrave, Rob Raven, & A. Georges. L. Romme. "Studying Transitions: Past, Present and Future." *Research Policy*. Volume 8, Number 9 (November 2019). <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048733319301039>. Last accessed December 1, 2022.

³ Patricio Abinales, "War and Peace in Muslim Mindanao: Critiquing the Orthodoxy." *Mindanao: The Long Road to Peace and Prosperity*. Ed. Paul Hotchcroft. (Manila: Anvil, 2015), 39.

age-old domination, which has caused many Muslim Filipinos to “suffer a form of indignity”.⁴

According to Jonathan Head, a tradition of armed resistance against the central government dates back centuries when it comes to Mindanao.⁵ In fact, the Spanish colonial administration had not gained control of the island, and the succeeding US administration after the Spaniards sold the Philippines to the Americans had fought fierce battles with the Moros who resisted colonial rule. According to the historian Renato Constantino, the Spanish colonizers excluded the island from its administration of the colony.⁶ Due to its lack of progress, the island has become a fertile ground for other militant organizations, including the kidnap-for-ransom group Abu Sayyaf, which uses Islamist ideology in their propaganda.

The “divide and conquer” tactic of the Americans had been effective when they invited Christian settlers to Mindanao. These groups, upon the encouragement of the Commonwealth Government of President Manuel Quezon, occupied vast tracts of lands which displaced both Muslims and Lumads or indigenous peoples.⁷ In the late 1960s, the Moros revolted against the government after the Jabida Massacre, although the rebellion dates to the Spanish period. says Salah Jubair.⁸ Nur Misuari founded the MNLF as a struggle against the historical injustice committed against the Moro people. The MNLF armed struggle had ended with the signing of the 1996 Peace Agreement between the MNLF and the National Government, resulting in the creation of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Based on the assessment of Amina Rasul, that peace agreement now appears broken due to the inability of the National Government to deliver on its promise of bringing economic progress

⁴ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “Situating the Mindanao Agenda in the Radical Politics of President Rodrigo Duterte,” *IQRA: Journal of Al Qalam Institute*, Volume 4, Number 1 (2017): 21.

⁵ Jonathan Head. 2017, May 31. “Maute rebel group: A rising threat in the Philippines.” In *BBC News Bangkok*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40103602>. Accessed December 1, 2022.

⁶ Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*. (Manila: Tala Publication, 1974), 28.

⁷ Heidi Gloria, *History from the South*. (Davao City: Research and Publication Office-Ateneo de Davao University, 2014), 194.

⁸ Salah Jubair, *The Long Road to Peace*, (Davao City: Institute of Peace Studies, 2007), 10.

and equal opportunities for Muslim Filipinos.⁹ The Bangsamoro Freedom Fighters (BIFF), also a splinter group, came into the public's attention after a long journey of peace negotiations by the MILF and the government.

Years of war and conflict have created deep wounds and have cultivated a warrior culture that has led to the "radicalization of Islam among young men, which also flooded Mindanao with guns and other weapons".¹⁰ The Abu Sayyaf is a prominent fixture in such characterization. The radical group came to the public's attention in 1991 through a series of kidnappings and other atrocities, including bombings. The Abu Sayyaf was named after a mujahideen commander in Afghanistan.¹¹ They operate in the islands of Sulu and Basilan and became known for beheading their captives.¹² But in their many years of fighting the state, the group obtained significant losses and deaths. In 2014, Isnilon Hapilon swore his allegiance to the Islamic State (IS), also declaring himself the amir of a South East Asian caliphate.¹³

When Isnilon Hapilon moved to Lanao del Sur to escape from the continued pursuit and operation of government forces in Sulu and Basilan, the alliance between ASG and Maute Group was formed. The Maute Group was founded a few years ago by Omar and Abdullah Maute, natives of Lanao del Sur. They both studied and were radicalized in the Middle East: Omar at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, and Abdullah in Jordan.¹⁴ Both attended the local Dansalan College, which they burned to the ground during the Marawi Siege.¹⁵

The war in Mindanao only serves as the background of the Marawi crisis. Inspired by the Islamic State (ISIS), the Maute Group brought with them a radical ideology as demonstrated by their attack in the town of Butig before they besieged Marawi City.¹⁶ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, in his study on President Duterte's radical approach to the Marawi crisis, explains that the two terror groups in Marawi "had months to prepare before the siege, and had gathered ammunitions

⁹ Amina Rasul. *Broken Peace: Assessing the 1996 GRP-MILF Final Peace Agreement*. (Makati: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2007), 81.

¹⁰ Head, "Maute rebel group: A rising threat in the Philippines."

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Maboloc, "President Duterte and the Birth of Radical Democracy in the Philippines," 117.

¹⁶ Ibid.

and supplies.”¹⁷ The presence of Isnilon Hapilon, who was captured in a video depicting the planning phase before the actual siege, confirmed an already established alliance between the two militant groups.

Why Marawi City?

In 1980, the city council of Marawi named Marawi as an “Islamic City,” a decision that brought joy and pride to the inhabitants of the city. As an Islamic City, Marawi is known for its Islamic heritage as showcased by the presence of its historic mosques and Islam as its religion. In 2017, the city was in terror. The significance of the Marawi battle, for Geoffrey Hartman, was not obvious at its start given some conflicting reports and the propaganda that surrounded the siege.¹⁸ Hartman argues that “the battle for Marawi is a wake-up call for Manila on the threat posed by the *terrorist coalition*, and the government should take steps to constrain the ability of these groups to build further support.”¹⁹

The Marawi Siege had shown the military capabilities of the combined forces of the Mautes and the Abu Sayyaf, which made them more attractive to aspiring fighters, both foreign and domestic.²⁰ A local resident in Marawi whom we interviewed said that it was surprising to know that during the siege foreign militants fought with the Maute Group. *The foreign fighters were even more brutal because when they asked you to recite a Muslim prayer and if you cannot perfectly recite it, they will immediately shoot you.*

Maboloc points to the roots of the crisis as having been the historical as well as the socio-economic injustices experienced by Muslims while Franco contends that the government needs to approach the problem more holistically by incorporating socio-economic and political aspects in its strategies.²¹ What was apparent,

¹⁷ Ibid., 118.

¹⁸ Geoffrey Hartman. 2017, June 19. “Marawi Battles Highlights the Perils of a Stalled Peace Process in the Philippines.” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/marawi-battle-highlights-perils-stalled-peace-process-philippines>. Accessed December 1, 2022.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

however, is that President Duterte acted with a sense of urgency, using the state's military might to thwart the terror attack. For Maboloc, such was a manifestation of the former president's radical approach to state governance.²² Indeed, Jihadism in Mindanao should be understood against the backdrop of the Moro separatist conflict that has killed more than 120,000 people and displaced millions, and faltering efforts to find a political solution to that conflict.²³ Since the Southern Philippines is the only place in the region where ISIS has managed to assert itself, the seizure of Marawi City has, to a certain extent, been considered a propaganda victory and strategic success for the wider jihadi cause.²⁴

The Marawi Siege: A Revelation of our Vulnerability

In times of terror, the world's vulnerability becomes obvious. Fragility of the human race is gradually unfolding itself as too many disorders in the society are in place. As terrorism and violent extremism continue to threaten the meaning of everyday existence, humans are vulnerable to uncertainties and anxious dispositions. Even sophisticated and developed countries that possessed new surveillance technologies have not been spared from many terrorist attacks. Such aggravating human condition shows a fact that terrorism is an urgent concern of humanity. What then should we do? Should we just accept the fact that more human beings will be victimized by terrorism at any time of the day? In his essay, *"God and the world's disorders,"* William Sloane Coffin quoted Albert Camus's words: "Probably every generation sees itself as charged with remaking the world. Mine, however, knows that its task will not be merely to remake the world. Its task is even greater; to keep the world from destroying itself."²⁵

The truism of the above assertion has been more obvious during the five-month long Marawi siege when people in Marawi, both Muslims and Christians while facing the hardest in the world, have worked hand in hand to re-build everyday peace in the city. The story

²² Maboloc, "President Duterte and the Birth of Radical Democracy in the Philippines," 117-118.

²³ Franco, "Addressing Militancy after the Battle for Marawi."

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ William Sloane Coffin, "God and the World's Disorders." In *Walking with God in a Fragile World*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14.

of the Marawi Siege and the lessons learned after the bloody battles would dismiss the long-held bias against Muslims as terrorists and traitors and Christians as land grabbers and opportunists. Through genuine collaboration that was meant to save each other during the siege and beyond the effects of such a terror attack have strengthened their bonds as friends, and as brothers and sisters. The sharing of their unified hope to live despite their cultural diversity amidst terror has drawn an essence of co-existence. Co-existence shall be their respond (and ours too) to the generational challenge to heal the world.

Walking with God in a Fragile World

Frederick Buechner opens his essay, “Walking in the world with a fragile God” with a conviction that the world is what it is because God seems to have made it that way.²⁶ Using the creation narratives, the fall of the first parents, Adam and Eve and the great flood during the time of Noah found in the Christian bible particularly in the book of Genesis, Buechner argues that all human history will be equally in peril the day God gave human beings the freedom to choose.²⁷ What Buechner implies in his essay is that the return of chaos is a perpetual possibility. He also insists that there is always another holocaust getting ready to blaze up and that there will always be another Ivan the Terrible or Saddam Hussein waiting in the wings.²⁸

While Buechner suggests that the missiles are always in their silos needing only the push of the wrong finger on the right button to unleash the unthinkable, he also provides hope that God had been present in all the experiences of his people not as a strong God but as a fragile God. For Buechner, it is not just the world that is fragile but also God; it is not just the world that is vulnerable to the worst that mankind can do, but God is also vulnerable.²⁹ The siege may have translated Buechner’s characterization of God into reality however the siege survivors have magnified God’s omniscience and omnipresence for their will and hope to live under God’s power. Human hope does not question what God has planned for us. Rather we pray to God for our survival. *Qadr* (fate) and *Sabr* (perseverance) strongly manifested

²⁶ Frederick Buechner, “Walking in the world with a fragile God.” In *Walking with God in a Fragile World*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

in the survivors' will to live during the siege. Culturally, *kathathabanga* of the Meranaw has been a prominent scene, all throughout the siege. It means, care for each other in times of need. It is also a depiction of a collective care in the Meranaw society. In a fragile world, our walk with God is a walk with *qadr*, *sabr*, and *kathathabanga*. These three are values of resilience of Meranaw which is also true to the Christian faith.

The once beautiful, progressive, and promising business centers of Marawi City had been decapitated and its buildings ruined during the bombardment to push the terror snipers out. We saw the devastation ourselves. The attack resulted to more than a thousand deaths, and many more wounded, and three hundred thousand innocent civilians displaced during the siege. We do not intend to make a religious proposition. We just want to highlight how the people of Marawi, both Muslims and Christians, experienced the "presence" of God as they had struggled for safety and for keeping the non-Muslim brothers and sisters of the Meranaw secure in those seemingly endless days of war and violence. We cannot dismiss the fact that the siege has also paved a way for sufferers to possibly question the immanence of God. However, informants of this study revealed how the siege made their faith to God/Allah stronger.

The love of one's neighbor has been a positive revelation of the predicament of terror. When the person we love suffers, we also suffer because that is what love is all about. This was becoming more alive than ever in Marawi during the siege. There was no religion that divides people. There was only love and strong desire to help each other. The culture of peace and peaceful co-existence had been practiced in Marawi even before the siege. However, the siege proved that people can be their brothers' keepers. Many of those we interviewed revealed that there was no distinction between Muslims and Christians when it comes to providing help. The goal was to secure everyone and leave Marawi for their safety during the ISIS-led attack. This was shared by a Meranaw from a prominent political family:

During the intense days when we can see the government troops waiting for the clear signal to advance their assaults and the members of the ISIS roaming around in "civilian" mode riding motorcycles to check the presence of the Philippine army, we were still

held captives in one room. While it might be easy for us and our families to leave, we decided to be with the group to provide support and assurance. We provided Meranaw clothes to Christian women and long sleeves to Christian men who have tattoos, and we were the ones who spoke and answer some questions of the terrorists.

Meranaw are famous for their cultural practice called “Maratabat”. A Meranaw family would exclaim, “we rejoice and suffer together.”³⁰ This cultural practice was rooted in their strong regard for their family and kins. It entails a moral duty to help and honor their relatives. In an article entitled “Our Marawi: The Resilient Maranao” written by Haroun Alrashid Alonto Lucman Jr. at the height of the siege, he claimed that of the 84,000 locals who were displaced during the Marawi siege, only 17,000 stayed in the evacuation centers, while the rest stayed at the homes of their relatives.

In an ordinary setting, this strong sense of family ties is only directed to their fellow Meranaw. However, during the siege, their sense of family solidarity had been broadened to include their Christian neighbors and other Muslim tribes. A Meranaw government worker, who is one of our informants, said that “*during the exodus, you can see food and water being displayed along the street so that the evacuees will have something to eat. And this is all for free. No distinction whether you are Muslims or Christians. This is also evident in the neighboring places where Christian and Muslims offered free food and shelter to the evacuees.*”

Understandably, however, in some places like Iligan City and Cagayan de Oro City there are Meranaw who own land and places of abode. In this way, many Meranaw chose to stay with their own relatives when they were displaced by the violent conflict. But at the beginning, there was an atmosphere of fear and doubt among their non-Meranaw neighbors in these cities because of the suspicion that the Meranaw who evacuated to Cagayan and Iligan had been giving sanctuary or a place of protection to the local terrorists. However, the local communities felt assured because the same realized that even among the Muslims, the anger against the terror groups was apparent

³⁰ Haroun Alrashid Alonto Lucman, Jr. 2017, July 9. “Our Marawi: The Resilient Maranao.” Mindanews. <https://www.mindanews.com/mindaviews/2017/07/our-marawi-the-resilient-maranao/>. Accessed December 1, 2022.

for destroying the image of Islam. One thing that was also highlighted during the Marawi siege is the negation of the slant that terrorism was upheld by the Meranaw communities.

Another fact that must not be ignored is the role of local leaders in sparing certain areas of Marawi, especially in Mindanao State University (MSU-main campus), which is considered as one of the most important institutions in Mindanao. Since, the university was spared from the brutality, it later became a place for evacuation for the internally displaced persons. *The exchange of fire between government forces and the terrorists can be heard during the siege*, said one of our informants who was a resident of the campus. According to a local resident who was trapped in the city during the siege:

Torment was a sight along the roads to the university campus due to ransacked houses, bold letters "house checked by AFP" painted on walls of some residences, starving stray dogs and cats, foul smell of garbage, and the difficulty of securing food. Mind filled with anxiety. Feelings drowned with fear. Actions controlled by insecurities. These ugly images carved by terrorism unto our minds have been a painful memoire of the past when 2017 Marawi Siege altered our mode of existence. Even before the onslaught of Covid-19 pandemic, the people of Lanao del Sur already had their share of unprecedented shift in terms of how life should be dealt with in times of violence and how should we mean each other's presence when terrorists insisted on homogeneity in a community with diversified faiths such as Marawi City. Quite the opposite of monstrosity, there was an exemplary depiction of resilience in time of terror and beyond, engraved by the faculty which now becomes a prominent character of Mindanao State University anytime, elsewhere, and whosoever she will be with.

As a matter of fact, Pres. Habib Macaayong, then President of Mindanao State University System demonstrated resilience by not abandoning the campus and his entire constituents during the siege. During the first night of terror, he fearlessly stood for innocent civilian residents by immediately transferring non-Meranaw male students to the administration buildings for safety while female students, mostly

with Christian faith, were given a *kumbong* (a piece of cloth worn by a Muslim woman to cover her head and neck). In the following days, transportation was made available for an *exodus* away from the conflict. Military trucks positioned in the campus before dormitories and private cottages were emptied. Despite an immeasurable anxiety that befell the campus, the MSUS president managed to secure his people especially the non-Muslim residents. Other top officials joined the goodwill of the university president by empowering his people to continue with their duties. For them, MSU has become a shield from the danger of false ideologies.

An informant told the researchers: *As Mindanao's premier university, MSU is primarily tasked to unify diverse cultures and peoples. This type of integration is the unique mandate of MSU, the university's raison d' etre. Aware of the risks to teach while terrorists were still on the ground chasing death (though a little far from the campus although faculty and students can see buildings burning and bombs falling from the fighter planes of the Philippine Air Force, the choice of both faculty and students was to be alike our exemplary leaders. Though some were quite hesitant to travel back and forth from Iligan City to Marawi City, the bold ones, most of whom were the college deans, the department chairs, and then gradually the regular faculty members, dared to travel the road to MSU amidst the on-going urban war.*

Marawi in 2017 was Iraq's Mosul: Stories of Hardships and Resilience during the Siege

Amnesty International conducted field works and interviewed survivors of during the siege. While the focus of their report is to document the human rights abuses committed by both the rebels and the government troops, we can see different stories of hardship as well as resilience in their report. According to that report, the IS-linked militants regularly targeted civilians especially, Christians and carried out extrajudicial killings by shooting them or slitting their throats.³¹ This was confirmed by our informants when they said that during the siege, most of the hostages were asked by the terrorists to recite shahada (an expression of Muslim faith) and when you cannot

³¹ Amnesty International, "Philippines: 'Battle of Marawi' leaves trail of death and destruction." November 17, 2017. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2017/11/philippines-battle-of-marawi-leaves-trail-of-death-and-destruction/>. Accessed December 2, 2022.

recite it properly you will be severely punished or killed. Many survivors who were once held as hostages experienced different hardships as they were treated as slaves and human shields under the hands of the terrorists, including Fr. Teresito Soganub, who was vicar general of the prelature of Marawi.

An informant narrated to us the experiences of their friends who were held captive for more than a month by the Mautes. These hostages were unable to sleep during the gun battles and was only able to drink rainwater to survive. The same hostages could not escape their captors due to the gunfire and daily bombardments. But one of them was able to use her lipstick to write a small “SOS” word on a wall of the building where they were trapped. That “SOS” word was seen by the military drone then their rescue. According to the reports, 920 militants, 165 soldiers and 47 civilians were killed in the fighting, and more than 1,780 hostages were rescued from the IS-linked militants. But restrictions on access to Marawi during the conflict have precluded any independent corroboration of these numbers.³²

Resilience is born in communal stories of hardship. One informant told us that her patience and physical endurance were tested when she and her families were caught in between the fighting of the government troops and the militants for many days. While waiting for their rescue, they strengthened each other’s faith and morale. Those who were trapped for almost a month continued to support each other while trying to figure out ways to escape. Some of their companions who forced themselves to go out into the open during the conflict were killed by the militants in the streets.

It is important to mention the critical role that the telecommunications company did play during the siege. Rescue operations were done through the help of mobile phones. Determining whether the militants are still present in the buildings or in other places were also done through the help of the telecommunications company, which had been mandated to track the inflow and outflow of communication. According to our informants, some of their friends were traced due to the signals which resulted to their successful rescue. Similarly, according to them, many of the terrorists were tracked using such communications technology.

In hindsight, it can be said that the government troops had difficulty in neutralizing the terrorists. The struggle to retake Marawi

³² Ibid.

was the largest urban engagement for the Philippines armed forces since the Battle of Manila during World War II.³³ According to Franco, the Maute Group seized the city in an operation ISIS propagandists likened to the capture of Mosul in Iraq.³⁴ It remains unclear how much operational guidance the Maute Group received from the ISIS core in Iraq and Syria during the battle.³⁵ The protracted battle to defeat the terror group highlighted limitations within the Philippines security forces in information gathering and urban warfare, Franco noted.³⁶ According to Franco, these weaknesses, in turn, result at least partly from Manila's struggle to adapt to the growing threat posed by jihadist cells adept at decentralized operations, after years fighting more hierarchical Mindanao secessionist groups whose structure emulates conventional military forces.³⁷

Despite the hardships that they experienced with the urban warfare during the siege, there is an inspiring story from Major Emeterio Armada. Major Armada was designated as the Logistics Officer and Company Commander of Engineer Maintenance Company of the 500 Combat Engineer Battalion, Philippine Army. Given only one week to prepare, the major and his men were one of the first troops to be deployed within the Main Battle Area at Brgy. Lilod Bliss, Marawi City when the crisis broke.³⁸ Faced with the daunting task of leading his team (majority of whom had never seen action for most of their service) into battle, Major Armada showed his exemplary leadership quality by showing courage and bravery as well support to his troops.³⁹ Major Armada and his men provided combat support to the troops within the battle area as they were tasked to clear the rubble in the major roads of the city and conducted engineer operations to unblock Mapandi Bridge from burnt vehicles and other wreckage so that armored assets could pass through.⁴⁰ On top of that,

³³ Franco, "Addressing Militancy after the Battle for Marawi."

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Mizpah Eunice Aguilar, 2019, August 8. "The Face of Resilience: The Story of Major Emeterio Armada." *One Voice*. <https://onevoicemagazine.com/the-face-of-resilience-the-story-of-major-emeterio-armada/>. Accessed December 2, 2022.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

he and his men freed up the street leading to the Bato Mosque from heavy debris, thus re-establishing the main supply route.⁴¹

During the military operations, he employed tactics and techniques as a Scout Ranger, utilizing the elite force training he had acquired in 2009 to keep his men protected from extremist snipers.⁴² He had to adapt to the situation. He used his critical thinking skill in the midst of the battle and enabled the abilities of his men to operate at full potential.⁴³ Major Armada also had to find ingenious ways to bring supplies to his entire unit, which included food, fuel, ammunition, personnel protective equipment, and even personal individual requirements.⁴⁴ His training in Resource Management aided him to exhaust every means possible including intensive coordination with those in the rear of the battlefield, securing supplies during transit, and ensuring safety of those bringing logistical requirements, to get the supplies to where they were needed.⁴⁵

Preserving the Culture of Peace

Marawi is famous for its culture of peace and inter-religious dialogues. One of the models in terms of actualizing the culture of peace and inter-religious dialogue is MSU's main campus in the City. Marawi has hosted various peace forums and has been active in the Bishop and Ulama inter-religious dialogues. While there were occasional eruptions of violence due to clan war or political conflict, the city had been relatively peaceful before the siege.

The impact of the siege had been diverse. For instance, it has pushed the faculty members and the administration of MSU to maximize their efforts to build peace. It has optimized their peace lens to see more clearly the driving forces of violent conflicts and how to process conflict transformation. It has widened their responsibility to conduct peace initiatives in a more inclusive and collaborative manner. Before the siege, they relied so much on the administrators to build peace but at this time, the faculty and students rely primarily on each other's abilities and capabilities to translate their peace constructs into concrete entities that would benefit our respective

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

communities. *“Our college hallways are now a venue for peace communication advocacy. No more repeated ghost storytelling but more about stories of survival. No more tensions but excitement and smiles for every peace-building policy designed and implemented by us.”* These words were proudly shared by one of our informants. Another informant has these inspiring words:

We went an extra mile through transcending our fears for we were so convinced that time (even until now) that once an MSUan, one is always a warrior of peace and a neutralizer of violent extremism. We were not only able, but we have the capacity to transform our traumas into narratives of peace. We were able to strongly direct our trajectory into a national peace university by demonstrating our capacity to craft a course on Fundamentals of Peace Education (FPE 101) which has a system-wide application; meaning all students of the MSU campuses (the tertiary students in particular) are required to learn the basics of peace-building to create a culture of peace within the self, with other selves, with the environment, and with God. Our goal as survivors of the Marawi Siege is clear; that is, to transform a conflict prawn community to a place of peace where human existence and the whole of the universe are never tortured but nurtured.

Another informant added these words: *All such moments have started to form a beautiful memoire of resilience, which is rightly characterized as the power to meaningfully stay alive and to walk with each other as brothers and sisters during the reign of terror they have witnessed and experienced during the siege. People of Marawi, particularly, the MSUans, have truly exemplified God’s love during the siege and even beyond. They choose to show love and concern for each other. Muslims and Christians in the city continue to help each other especially during the siege. Today they continue to walk as brothers and sisters who dream of a peaceful and progressive Marawi.*

Toward a Peaceful and Progressive Marawi

Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM) Chairman Secretary Eduardo Del Rosario stressed that peace is key in sustaining the progress now taking place in the only Islamic City in the country.⁴⁶ He further stressed in that report that, “more than the facilities and infrastructure, lives and communities are now being rebuilt in a progressive and peaceful environment.”⁴⁷ Economic vibrancy in Marawi City has been noted as evidenced by the dramatic increase in the revenue collection by the local government from P500,000 prior to the siege to P30 million in 2020.⁴⁸ When we visited the most affected areas in Marawi, we have seen signs of hope for a peaceful and progressive Marawi after the siege. There is on-going construction of destroyed mosques in the area called Ground Zero by its residents – a manifestation that the Duterte administration had been culture-sensitive. The construction of a new plaza and a beautiful recreation center, with a huge sports stadium facing the Lanao Lake, is almost finished. As we went into the city, we observed the operations of many business establishments. Marawi is back to life. As we have observed during our investigation, we can see signs of hope that peace and dialogue will continue to reign in the city.

Asking for his comment on the recent development of the city, a Meranaw said he is very happy that the government is serious with its promise to rebuild Marawi. At first, he admittedly said that he got angry with Duterte for destroying their city but when he knew that if the plans of the MG were not thwarted, they could result to more devastation of the city, he changed his mind and he is now grateful to the government for acting swiftly to restore peace and prosperity in Marawi. The same sentiment was shared by another Meranaw educator. She said that at first, she was angry with what the government did to Marawi but when she knew the activities of the ISIS inspired MG, she said that terrorism has no place in Islam that is why she is happy that the government has the political will to really suppress the MG and their local and foreign counterparts. She is also hoping that the rehabilitation of Marawi will continue. She is even excited to witness the new face of Marawi.

⁴⁶ Department of Human Settlement and Urban Development, *News*. 2021 May 23. See <https://dhsud.gov.ph/>. Accessed December 2, 2022.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Many things still need to be done. But hope springs eternal in this part of Mindanao. The development of Mindanao will depend on the right decisions of its leaders and the strengthening of its democratic institutions. People must be liberated from the pangs of poverty, domination, and the indifference of others. While the people in Manila and the critics of PPRD have raised their concerns over what they called as the “China-led” rehabilitation and the role of the local people in the rehabilitation of Marawi, the composition of the Task Force Bangon Marawi is an assurance that local people and their leaders are the real actors in the rehabilitation and rebirth of Marawi. The key to peace is their sense of solidarity which has been apparent during the crisis. Indeed, these narratives of peace, resilience, and progress point to a way forward that bespeak of empowering the people and ending centuries-old biases that exclude countless lives.

Conclusion

The Marawi Siege in 2017 must be understood under the background of the presence of separatist insurgency, massive poverty, marginalization, historical injustice, and the absence or lack of inclusive governance due to elitist democratic practices that favor the few and exclude the many. The Marawi Siege is a testament to the need to protect and preserve peace. People have the capacity to overcome any hardship. The everyday co-existence of Muslim Filipinos and Christians reveal the importance of solidarity. The resilience of the Meranaw speak of the power of such type of solidarity. The examples of some leaders mentioned in this study reveal that there are well-meaning human beings who are willing to sacrifice their lives to protect their neighbors and secure the greater good of the community.

But the threat of terrorism is still present around the world and even in Mindanao. The way forward is for the people to embrace their sense of solidarity. The same is crucial in realizing justice and equitable development, without which any place could become a fertile ground for extremist ideologies. The political will of then President Duterte played a vital role in wiping the terrorists from Marawi City. However, we cannot just ignore the historical injustices that must be rectified. The exclusion of Mindanao from national progress and development is one reason why extremist groups continue to grow. But as a people, the Meranaw have shown that every

difficult hardship can be overcome. The same should hold true for every Filipino.

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