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# A Global View of Women's Involvement in Peacekeeping Activities in the Philippines, Indonesia and Cambodia

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Related literature showed that women's participation in peace building activities are for the survival of the family and for the protection loved ones. This paper looked into the peace building activities of women from three Southeast Asian countries: Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines, to see: 1) if women from these three countries also engaged in peace building for the survival of the family; and 2) if their engagement in peace building activities served as opportunities for them to become empowered or did it greatly support and extend the existing traditional roles assigned to women. Profiles of seven out of 1000 PeaceWomen were examined to find answers to the inquiries raised above. These profiles, particularly the women's activities, were compared and contrasted. Results confirmed the literature. The seven women peace activists from Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, engaged in peace building activities to ensure that the children, youth, women, and the members of their respective communities were safe and secure. Furthermore, the peace building activities that these women initiated still supported the traditional image of women as protectors of life, and caretakers, and extended the performance of women's traditional roles, such as childcare, in their respective societies. It is proposed that women should not just be limited into this sphere of peace building, but should also be included in the decision-making arena thereby enhancing women's image and role in their respective societies, providing a new face to any peace processes and the status of armed conflict in these countries.

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The recognition of the fact that gender roles are cultural determinants that influence power distribution and activity profile in society is essential to the attainment of a culture of peace. (Adhiambo-Oduol, 1999, p.187)

**G**ender roles assigned to men and women have long been recognized to impose limitations on what both sexes can do and can achieve. A patriarchal society dictates that a woman's rightful place is inside the house. If she goes beyond this imposed space, her personality, and worse, humanity is then questioned.

As societies evolve, factors that make it difficult for women to remain inside their assigned area, i.e. the home, arise. One of these factors is the economy. A financial crisis or an unstable economy is a condition that is both beneficial and detrimental to women. It is beneficial for women because it is used as a "valid" or substantial reason for them to seek paid work. In a traditional society, married women who insist on getting a job and working outside the house, regardless of whether their husbands can take care of the

household expenses or not, are looked at differently. Other women, including family members, would question the necessity to work outside the house. The act of questioning itself signifies that there is something wrong with a woman's decision to go out of the home to work.

Conversely, a financial crisis that leads women to work outside the house is detrimental to women because it usually increases her workload. This might not apply to all women, but this is the usual scenario for the working woman. Even if she has a job outside the house, it does not relieve her of the tasks inside the house. What it creates is a more burdensome situation for a workingwoman or mother in that she is expected to handle both tasks efficiently.

Apart from the phenomenal participation of women in the labor sector, the occurrence of armed or violent conflict has also prompted women to go out of their "designated" areas in society. One of the reasons motivating women to join peace activities, such as mediation and reconstruction, is survival. In her article about the role of the women's movement in Latin America, Valenzuela (1999) narrated that the organization was primarily formed because of the difficult economic condition. The women wanted to help each other cope with the struggle they were in through small economic activities, such as soup kitchens. Another reason why women engage in peace activities relates to human rights, of both women and children. In Russia, a group called "Soldiers' Mothers Organization" was formed. The women in this organization had sons who were serving the army and were experiencing grave brutality from their juniors or seniors inside the military institution. The abuses or initiation rituals done on the neophytes caused psychological disorders among other things, thus making these mothers call for the "civic control of the Russian Military service" so that it could function "normally" (Zdravomyslova, 1999, p. 167).

It is worth noting that women's motivations to engage in peace activities are connected to their concern about the welfare of their individual family and its members. The assumption of this research is that women's participation in peacemaking or peace building are skewed towards women's empowerment in their respective communities through greater participation in decision-making processes on community events that greatly affect their lives. The questions asked in this paper then are:

- 1) Could these reasons be the same for other women engaged in peace activities in other countries, particularly Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines; and
- 2) Do engagement in peace activities serve as opportunities for women to become empowered or do they just support and extend the existing roles assigned to women?

## **Related Literature**

### *Cambodia*

The violent conflict in Cambodia is related to state control. This type of conflict is usually motivated by ideology as exemplified by “revolutionary movements, decolonization campaigns or simply mechanisms for the transfer of power from one set of elites to another” (Project Ploughshares, 2009, Types of Armed Conflict, ¶2).

For quite some time, Cambodia was engaged in a civil war, not to mention, four years of mass genocide. Under the Khmer Rouge, the country was devastated. When the Vietnamese came in 1979 and established a communist government, the members of the Khmer Rouge and non-communist forces resisted this form of government. From this resistance followed a series of violent conflicts in the country. The fighting temporarily halted when the opposing groups signed the Paris Peace Accords of 1991. Elections were held in 1993, although the members of Khmer Rouge did not participate in this election, and instead returned to insurgency.

The death of the Khmer Rouge legendary leader Pol Pot, further disbanded the group. Nonetheless, coup d'état after coup d'état followed, until finally a ceasefire was reached in February 1997. Just months after the ceasefire, violent clashes between the government troops and the Khmer Rouge arose. However, as the Khmer Rouge group became smaller, it stopped being a military threat in Cambodia.

### *Women in Cambodia and their engagement in peace activities.*

Ledgerwood (1990) noted that under the Khmer Rouge the women in Cambodia were “ranked within the social hierarchy” (¶5). Cambodian women were ranked based on their fulfillment of the cultural ideals. For example, women are of high status if they behave appropriately or when they “know how to run a household and control its finances” (Ledgerwood, n.d. ¶5). But the status of women in Cambodian society has evolved overtime. In the past, daughters had to be protected, whereas in modern Cambodian society, one could see young girls riding their bicycles and selling vegetables to contribute to the income of the household. Ledgerwood also asked Cambodian women about the differences of their lives compared to that of their mothers in relation to the ideals imposed by Khmer Rouge. The women’s answers indicated more concern about how they could sustain their families than over these ideals. But as much as women got involved economically, the Khmer Rouge standards still remain in the present Cambodian society.

Cambodian women’s engagement in peace activities began in the 1980s with the Women's Association of Cambodia’s nationwide literacy campaign. The association also looked after the many orphans caused by the war as well as “developed a nation-wide system of cooperatives to regenerate local social and economic activity” (Suchoua, 1998). More political participation opened up for the women in Cambodia with the

signing of the Paris Peace Agreement in 1991. Women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were then formed. Khemara, the first woman NGO in Cambodia, arranged activities that addressed the problem of domestic violence and sexual exploitation. It also lobbied for the implementation of some articles in Cambodia's constitution to ensure that human rights were recognized and respected. Other women NGOs mostly dealt with "human rights, education, information, health, development, religion, counseling, training, re-establishing traditional skills, crafts and arts and textiles" (Galabru, n.d).

### *Indonesia*

The conflict in Indonesia, particularly in Aceh, is all about state formation. In contrast to that of Cambodia, Indonesia's case is not focused on who gets to control the country but more on fighting for autonomy or a secession of Aceh from main Indonesia.

Aceh is characterized by a depressing human rights situation. Its people have experienced years of exploitation and repression from the Indonesian military. Underground activities of rebels began in 1996, as deaths of both civilians and combatants came out in the news a year before. The Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka or GAM), which conducted covert activities against the Indonesian army, re-emerged in 1998 with greater strength. This was due to the return of exiles and the type of political climate that Indonesia had at that time. The counterinsurgency activities that the group ran further increased the number of abuses in Aceh and, since then, violent conflict spread to other parts of the province. In 2002, the government and GAM signed a peace agreement, but after a year, the violent clashes between the two parties rose again. A military campaign launched by the government in Aceh for several months caused the resumption of violence. Encounters continued until 2004, although at a lower intensity. Another peace agreement was signed in 2005 and was implemented the following year. This agreement granted the Aceh province a certain amount of autonomy.

### *Women in Indonesia and their engagement in peace activities.*

While Indonesia was undergoing a series of violent conflicts, the status of women in the country appeared to be better than those in Cambodia. The article, "The Status of Women in Indonesia" (n.d.), reported that by the years 1990 to 2000, a large number of women were already literate. The gap between men and women's literacy had decreased from 14% to an 8%. The same article reported that urban women were finding employment and some were even making it to government positions. However, as in the United States, women in Indonesia still received less compensation for their work compared to that of men.

Regarding Indonesian women's participation in peace activities, solidarity came out as a common feature of the peace activities. The All Aceh Women's Congress and Papua Women's Congress, both of which occurred in 2000, were events that articulated the importance women peace activists in Indonesia placed on working together to overcome

the aftermath of conflict in their society and in their lives. Sadli (2004) noted that in both events, participants emphasized “bonding together to build strength” (Women as Active Participants in Peace Building, ¶3). She also wrote that much of the concern of Indonesian women for restraining violent conflict is a burden on them especially if their husbands die.

Women on the other hand view conflict as a necessary evil in communities. When husbands or sons are killed not only do women have to bear the pain of losing a child or a husband, but they are often not able to grieve because they have to take care of their surviving children. In many cases women as victims of violence have to assume responsibilities as head of the family without any means of income. They are required to care for the physically and emotionally injured, and tend to the rehabilitation of their homes as well as their own lives. Therefore, it is not surprising that women tend to focus on the cessation of violence. (Sadli, 2004, Women’s Perception of Peace, ¶3).

### *Philippines*

The Philippines has the same type of conflict as Indonesia—state formation. A number of Filipino Muslims called for more autonomy from the mainland, considering that there were already some regions in the country that have become a part of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

The years 2000 and 2003 were the most significant years to the country in terms of armed battles between the government and Muslim secessionist groups. These were the years when the Presidents of the country declared all-out-war on the Muslim rebel groups, producing a high number of internally displaced people (IDP), casualties, and deaths. From 2003 until 2008 isolated attacks still occurred in the southern part, until the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Government of the Philippines (GOP) decided to come to the negotiation tables. A Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) was discussed between the two warring parties in response to the call for greater autonomy. However, all discussions became futile when the signing of the agreement was aborted, as some of the cities that would be included in the new autonomous region disagreed strenuously. With the suspension of the memorandum, violent conflict once again erupted.

### *Women in the Philippines and their engagement in peace activities.*

Irrespective of the violent conflict in the southern part of the country, women in the Philippines occupy the same role traditionally assigned to women in general (i.e. perform household chores, assume more responsibility in rearing the children). Recent surveys, however, showed that more women were becoming educated as compared to men. The employment of women in corporations and institutions were also reportedly increasing.

But a closer look at the job sector would reveal that women were mostly hired in jobs that were somewhat extensions of the domestic chores (e.g. teaching, nursing). A number of women who had impressive credentials and were eligible for high positions, were underemployed as males usually dominated these positions. The double burden that workingwomen or mothers carry is also a common scenario in the country. And yet world statistics claimed that women in the Philippines lived under better conditions than those of their Southeast Asian neighbors.

Regarding women's participation in peace activities, Rasul (2005), in referring to Muslim women, noted that the rising activism of these women was "a direct response to the double burden women bore: although primarily responsible for the welfare of their families, they lack access to programs and support" (p. 5). She further noted that even if the women were not responsible for the violent conflicts, they carried its heavy burden on their shoulders as they invested more efforts to keep their families together.

### **Methodology**

In order to answer the questions of this paper, profiles of women engaged in different forms of peace activities from Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, were collected and examined. The names of the women were obtained from the 1000 PeaceWomen list of the PeaceWomen Across the Globe. The PeaceWomen Across the Globe is an organization that aims to strengthen the influence of PeaceWomen in all contexts of peace, security and sustainability. The 1000 PeaceWomen List has the names of women who were collectively nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.

In selecting the profiles, the categories created by the network in grouping the women were looked into. Only women belonging to the categories related to peace building, peacekeeping, or peacemaking were considered. There were a total of eight categories: 1) armed violence; 2) mediation; 3) reconciliation; 4) reconstruction; 5) analysis of mechanisms that endanger peace; 6) analysis of peace building mechanisms; 7) internally displaced persons; and 8) peace education. Not all of these categories had women peace activists from the selected countries. Only the areas on: 1) mediation; 2) reconstruction; 3) analysis of peace building mechanisms; and 4) peace education, had women peace activists from the three countries selected in this study. From these four categories, the selection of women's profiles were narrowed to the following categories: 1) analysis of peace building mechanisms and 2) mediation.

In each of these two categories, a woman peace activist was selected. In the case of the Philippines, since there were several women in that country who engaged in the analysis of peace building mechanisms, random sampling was employed in selecting the profiles to be examined. Two women were picked. Another methodological limitation of this paper is that the comparisons done among the women were restricted into the types of profiles that the PeaceWomen Across the Globe had for each woman peace activist. Overall, a total of seven women peace activist's profiles were examined.

In discussing the women's profiles, the paper did not intend to minimize or undermine the works or activities of these women peace activists. As mentioned earlier, this paper aims to provide another gender perspective, particularly in terms of how women's traditional roles are or are not extended to their other activities outside their "assigned" domain. Thus, pseudonyms were used to provide a certain level of anonymity of the women peace activists. It is important to mention that the women might be grouped under a certain category, but this does not mean that they only engaged in the activities where they were categorized. Some of the women were also involved in other peace related activities, that is, they could be engaged in mediation and in reconstruction at the same time.

## **Results**

### *Women Involved in the Analysis of Peace Building Mechanisms*

Four women profiles were examined under this category, beginning with a woman from Cambodia. A former schoolteacher, Botum's idea of peace and peace building is healing. She said, "Humanity can be healed and evolve only through peace building and solidarity of the community" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d. Biographies, par.4). Botum engages in peace building activities and conflict resolution to fight poverty. For her, peace building activities provide a venue for people in communities to come and work together, and from this, partnerships are formed and communities become more productive and more equipped to building a brighter future, especially for the children.

Botum's approach to peace building is through providing training in conflict resolution, peace building, and capacity-building to several stakeholders, such as NGOs, government officials, and communities. She once formed a volunteer group to provide training to municipal officials in Phnom Penh. These municipal officials proceeded to develop a training curriculum for peace building and conflict resolution and also networked with other regional organizations. The result of this endeavor was the formation of an alliance that engages in conflict transformation.

"The corrupt judicial system" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶6) was the reason why Botum and the formed alliance decided to train NGO personnel to facilitate local conflict resolutions. The training Botum and the alliance gave targeted changing the "participants' own behavior in problem solving, and on the strategies to make those changes" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶9).

Through the training that she has given, Botum hoped that difficulties in peace building and conflict resolution would not bar the people from committing to dialogue and working together. She hoped that by going through peace building activities, people would soon forgive and forget and focus more on supporting each other in achieving a better life. Botum committed herself to all of these activities even as she raises two children and takes care of her parents. She conveyed that there are a few women in

Cambodia who have skills in peace building and conflict resolution and so she aimed to become a role model for them. She also wanted to train Cambodian women who are interested in these matters.

Arti is a woman peace activist from Indonesia. She earned her post-graduate degree from Netherlands and has worked as a church activist since she was a teenager. She was sent to Germany to participate in a meeting that planned on setting-up refugees camps in Sulawesi. From then on, she has worked on providing food and organizing shelter for refugees, with or without institutional support.

Arti's vision of peace also involves concern for others. For her, a peace activist should not only think of one particular group to rescue but to "try to make everyone survive" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, para.1). This is the reason why Arti frequently visits refugee camps to listen to the refugees' stories and experiences. Arti saw that storytelling helped reduce refugees' anxieties. She collected the stories and shared them with other refugees in other camps for them to reflect and learn on. These stories were also made available to those who wish to help the refugees. Some refugees who saw the benefit of storytelling, volunteered to listen and collect stories from other refugees. Arti also created emergency education programs for children. With all these activities going on, Arti was able to create a Crisis Center and was able to earn the trust of both Christian and Muslim communities. The trust gained was a big step in initiating reconciliation talks among Christian and Muslim communities.

Being a woman and working for peace was not without difficulty. According to Arti, her being a woman, a Christian, and a church activist, made it difficult for her to be accepted right away by Muslim communities. She had to deal with the suspicions from these communities. Fortunately, her peace building activities made her gain their trust. As of the writing of this paper, Arti runs the Crisis Center and remains active in church activities as the chairperson of a commission looking over children and women's conditions.

Two women peace activist in the Philippines are presented in this category. The first is Barbara, a political science graduate from one of the country's prestigious universities. Beatrice is the other peace activist, who, since the '80s, founded and chaired peace coalitions and convened peace conferences among NGOs and other cause-oriented and political movement groups.

Barbara came from a large family of peace workers. In her profile, she was described as having "large intelligent animated eyes" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶1) that somehow communicated willingness to listen intently to any story. This woman's involvement in peace activities are visible in the framework of peace developed by the Philippine government as well as in the talks between the government and the communist rebels in the '90s. She brought the indigenous people's issues to the

peace table as a member of the government's negotiating panel. Barbara was also an advocate and a contributor to the creation of the first peace zones in the Philippines.

Peace for Barbara is a daily deed that responds to the changing "face of war although its drumbeat remains constant" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶1). Barbara emphasized that preventing war is also a peace activity and so acts towards peace, should be done at the moment it is needed, with the awareness of its effect on the bigger situation. It is interesting to note that for Barbara, the simple act of a mother picking up a crying baby is already a form of peace act.

Barbara works among the people and carries their grassroots sentiments to conferences and forums. She is a researcher, writer, and orator who ensures that the conditions of the people, particularly indigenous people she has talked to, are brought to the fore and acted on. She has been instrumental in the passage of a law that "placed indigenous people's tradition in the Philippine Constitution and government systems" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶1).

Barbara is a single mother. She raised two daughters who are now both successful professionals. As of the writing of this activist's profile, one of her daughters is working as a physicist in the USA and the other one is working as a peace adviser of the country's Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process. Barbara expressed that it is "a woman's first role to be a peacemaker," (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶1) although she believes that anyone who acts on a crisis is a peace worker. She is also called "Manang Barbara" (Manang means elder sister), in the peace community, for her "empathy for the plight of others, especially her own people, the Ibaloy tribe" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶1). In addition, her peace advocacies have been recognized to combine "her gentle side as a woman [and] her firm convictions, delivered in a 'clear, unwavering voice'" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶1).

As written in her profile, apart from analyzing peace mechanisms, Barbara is working on the protection of indigenous people's ancestral domain from mining industries. These mining industries "extract resources on a large scale" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶1). Barbara sees the coming of these mining industries as an intrusion to the lives and traditions of indigenous people to the point of displacing them.

Beatrice is the other peace activist from the Philippines. She has been the executive director of a peace institute and participated in movements that pursued dialogues and liaisons at the national level between the Philippine government and rebels. She also engaged in research and training on conflict resolution.

Beatrice defined peace as the absence of armed conflict and a condition where each individual is respected and their needs attended to. She mentioned "children going to school and women respected and having the same rights as men, as part of a peaceful

society, along with the expansion and devolution of political power, in recognition of the diverse culture and geographical locations of the people in the country” (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Biographies, para. 24). This description of peace, according to Beatrice, could be achieved if peace advocates or ordinary citizens work together with the government. She knew that attaining this kind of peace would take some time but she encourages everyone to hope and perform acts of peace even in small amounts in their daily lives. “Hope is the lifeblood of peace advocacy,” she said (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Biographies, para. 25).

At the time her profile was written, Beatrice was working as the adviser on the peace process to President Macapagal-Arroyo. Her job entailed

... advising the President on all government strategies, programs and activities related to peace building, overseeing four current peace talks and the implementation of two signed final agreements, the rehabilitation and development of conflict areas, and an affirmative action agenda for Muslim Mindanao. (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d. Bibliographies, ¶19)

In addition, Beatrice calls on “civil society to undertake initiatives to reduce violence and lead efforts that will result in healing and reconciliation” (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d. Bibliographies, ¶19).

In summary, the women described in this category differ in terms of where they operate and the type of peace building activities they engaged in. The peace building activities of the women from Cambodia and Indonesia were mostly done at the grassroots level. The two women from the Philippines were involved in national peace panels or were working with the government. None of these women’s profiles reported that they were directly involved or affected by the violent conflict they were fighting against. The four women’s profiles confirm peace as a result of concerted efforts from various actors.

#### *Women Involved in Mediation*

Three women’s profiles were examined under this category. The first is that of Bouppha, a “small, quiet, humble, and engaged Buddhist Cambodian woman” (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶2). This woman experienced the violence of armed conflict when her father was arrested and she never saw him again. Bouppha and her mother were also arrested and were about to be killed. They were fortunate that someone helped them escape, whom they found out later, was also killed. Her profile described her as someone who dresses simply and is soft-spoken, but “fearless” in matters related to her peace activity, particularly her peace walk. An admirer of Bouppha presented her as “a woman of compassion who tries to ease the sufferings she sees with the wisdom that comes from her own life’s experience” (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶5). This description is affirmed when she traveled to Thailand and met

with Thai monks, who were also committed to helping children and adults suffering from HIV/AIDS. Boupha also gave up her small merchandising business in order to fully commit herself to peace and Buddhist teaching.

The Dhammayietra or the peace walk is Boupha's most significant peace building activity.

It aims to promote compassion, loving kindness, generosity, honesty and tolerance. The pilgrimage also aims to increase awareness of preserving natural resources, promote HIV/AIDS prevention and love and compassion for people living with HIV/AIDS. (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d, Bibliographies, ¶12).

Boupha also stressed that this activity calls everyone to "a change of heart" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d, Bibliographies, ¶1). She said that the peace walk does not wait for war to begin but mediates by spreading information on peace and the precepts of Buddhism.

The peace walk disseminates the five precepts of Buddhism particularly to the youth in the countryside. Boupha preferred to teach the young mediation and the precepts of Buddhism because for her the young people will carry the messages further than older people. However, people from her place are pessimistic over the prospects of peace. Because of this, the support that she gets for the pilgrimage is nil. Boupha sees the same pessimism from the government. She articulated that they have mixed reactions towards the peace activities she conducts, that even the applications of those who wanted to participate in the pilgrimage get lost in the bureaucracy. In addition, Boupha's activities are usually short of funds as well as of media coverage.

Like Boupha, Atin from Indonesia is also a devoted church member. She is described as a "fearless female pastor" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶2). In her quest for peace, this woman has gone to several islands in Indonesia in order to understand its diverse culture.

Atin's approach to peace is directed to children. She believes that by working with the children she is able to serve God. Since the '70s, she has worked in improving the education of children, especially street children. Atin has adopted a girl child and has two other children living with her. She expressed that she had gotten use to having children in her place, eating simple meals with them, and even using her own money to feed them and send them to school. She also gives them free counseling. Although these are not her children, Atin admitted that it "keeps her alive to see that children are happy and well educated" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶2).

I never want them to be neglected. Children need to grow physically and mentally. I want to help them obtain what they deserve in life, including

helping to shape their personality. (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliography, ¶2)

Atin's vision is that the children she has helped would also help others that could later on form communities that continuously support and help each other.

Apart from taking care of children, Atin also participates in mediations. Her participation in this endeavor did not really gain positive reactions from the people around her, particularly those from the Church Council. Atin reported that she had worked in the Church Council for 12 years without salary. Some of the members did not even appreciate what she was doing, but instead questioned her role in the mediation processes.

Some of them asked me to return home because I'm a woman. It's unusual for women to speak up, stand up and face challenges and negotiate with the military. It's not a wonderland for women.... (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliography, ¶2)

Atin also said that the government was also suspicious of what she was doing because she was not a native of the area. Before she could conduct church services as a pastor, she had to report to the military commander to get his permission. Atin did not approve of this process and so she left her work as reverend.

Belen is a peace activist from the Philippines. Her record of peace building activities ranges from creating an outreach program to assisting poor communities in her town, Basilan, to working with the Philippine Army in providing the civilian militia training on values formation, conflict resolution, and peace building. Belen is recognized for her work among farmers as she "initiated moves to have stewardship of 900 hectares of land bequeathed to the landless, many of them Muslims and ex-rebels" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶12). She also started an outreach program for these farmers that included, among others, the provision of potable water, medical and dental assistance, and skills training.

Belen was married to a military man but they never had children. Nonetheless, she engaged in taking care of the women and children affected by the war in her hometown. "I am childless but I have 40,000 children. The children in Basilan suffer the most from this senseless war and they need all the love and help we can give them," Belen expressed (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶1). Moreover, her profile noted that the recognition that she received for the peace activities she initiated or engaged in, were nothing compared to "the warmth and happiness she gets when she sees gratitude in the eyes of the children she has helped" (PeaceWomen Across the Globe, n.d., Bibliographies, ¶15). For Belen, the best reward she has ever received was a thank you note from a four-year old child who was kidnapped and then released because Belen negotiated it.

Interestingly, Belen's profile did not mention that she had some glaring obstacles to her peace activities. It could be assumed that her several engagements involving community organizing and her collaboration with the military, might have contributed to the greater appreciation of her peace activities, compared to the women from Cambodia and Indonesia.

To synthesize, none of the women engaged in mediation ever bore a child. Yet, most of their peace activities addressed the concern of the children or the youth affected by violent conflict.

## **Analysis**

The seven cases of women presented above are analyzed under two themes: 1) Nurture and 2) Acceptance.

### *Nurture*

In all of the profiles presented, the women were involved in peace activities that ensured that children, youth, women, and the members of their respective communities, in general, were safe and secure. This was a common scenario especially among women who were working at the community or grassroots level. This situation confirms Mathewson's (2007) claim that the concern that women have for the future, especially that of their children, dictates their commitment and the amount of commitment that they give to processes that would stabilize the conditions of their communities. This was an observation that Mathewson made regarding the women of Sierra Leone, and it appears to be the same for the women in Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. There might be women who participate or initiate peace activities in order to engender peace processes or empower women in general, but in the profiles reviewed, with the possible exception of Beatrice, this was not their primary concern.

In addition, examining the women's concept of peace in relation to the kind of peace activities they initiated or engaged in revealed that these women saw peace to mean building trust among the members of the community, securing the lives and future of the community, particularly the children, and ensuring that no one is suffering, either from inequality or trauma from violent conflict. For instance, one of Arti's (Indonesia) perceptions of peace is healing from the trauma caused by violent conflict. With this idea, she engaged in helping refugees via talking to them and allowing them to tell their stories. She shared these stories with others, including other refugees, so that they too might reflect on it and probably use it to heal themselves from the pain inflicted on them by violent conflict. Arti's notion of peace was definitely not devoid of any influence from society and her experiences. Based on the standpoint theory, "all understandings are socially constructed" (Houston and Wood 1996, p. 42). Arti's example, as well as Botum, Barbara, Boupfa, Atin, and Belen's, are operationalizations of the concept of *symbolic interactionism*.

Symbolic interactionism rests... on three simple premises. The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them... The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (Blumer 1969, pp.102-103).

Even if the activities that they had were anchored on a bigger concept (i.e. peace), and was always read as directed to achieving a community and culture of peace, it is undeniable that the peace activities of most of the women were actualizations of the traditional roles (i.e. taking care of the family) assigned or communicated to them by their respective societies. The peace activities of these women also reflected what Bruner (in Simmons and McCall 1966) referred to as expectancy set.

One's cultural belief system learned during socialization, the sum of one's experiences, and one's currently salient roles all contribute to the composition of what Bruner has called the individual's "expectancy set" .... (p. 63)

It is also interesting to find that the idea of motherhood has been absorbed by the women's psyches. Take the case of Boupfa, Atin, and Belen, whose peace activities were children or youth-centered even though they do not have children of their own. Four of the women who engaged in activities that analyze peace building mechanisms had no direct experience of the pains of armed conflict, and yet they engaged in activities that looked after the casualties or victims of violent conflicts. Douglas and Michaels' (2004) statement that "motherhood has become central to women's conception of femininity," obviously resonates from these women's activities. It also affirms Zdravomyslova's (1999) contention that "motherhood, framed as the biologically founded destiny of women, ascribes the main responsibility for 'life per se' to women" (p. 170).

### *Acceptance*

Acceptance is an issue among these women, especially those from Cambodia and Indonesia. The two cases from Cambodia showed less participation of women in peace building activities and less support from the community for the peace activities conducted by Boupfa, particularly the pilgrimage. There could be several explanations for these conditions, but the researcher is positive that these are some of the "dangers" that Borisoff (2005) referred to in her article, "Transforming Motherhood: "We've Come A Long Way," Maybe."

... choices that deviate from traditional gendered-scripts aren't risks—rather, they are dangers. What converts a choice from a risk to a danger is

the implied charge that women are misguided or selfish by wanting more than their God-given role of staying at home and raising children. (p. 3)

The women from Indonesia also articulated that they have been met with indifference by virtue of being a woman—in Arti's case, being a Christian and a church activist—and engaging in peace activities, even if their peace activities did not really involve decision-making, but more a "taking care" of the needs of the victims of violent conflicts. Wu (2002) stated that:

Others cannot invent themselves by sheer will, because no matter how idiosyncratic one's individual identity, one cannot overcome the stereotype of group identity. (p. 8)

What Inonge Mbikusita Lewanika (cited in Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002), President of the Federation of African Women's Peace Networks (FERFAP) said that "women establish their credibility as peacemakers at the grassroots level but they are marginalized from official negotiations," might apply to the women from Indonesia.

But this paper also contends that the women from the Philippines could not have gained their status if they did not have substantial experience and were not awarded or recognized for their achievements. This paper presumes that before Barbara and Beatrice were able to participate in peace panels, where they got to take part in developing peace frameworks and deciding on critical situations, they had similar experiences to those of the women from Cambodia and Indonesia. Even so, if one closely examines Barbara and Belen's peace activities and how they were perceived by communities and children, respectively, one could see that they had never abandoned the image of a woman as a mother and protector of the family. As Valenzuela (1999) noted in her article on the peace movements of women in Latin America:

Since women are viewed as moral authorities, their arguments only come to the fore when women are seen as mothers, wives or protectors of family. Women have usually worked for peace on the basis of traditional and idealized visions of womanhood and femininity: as mothers, as preservers of life. Consigned to the relative powerlessness of the private sphere, women moved into political life while maintaining their traditional protective role, becoming housekeepers and moral mothers to the nation. (p. 160)

The perception of Barbara as an efficient peacemaker because she combines her "gentle side" as a woman with that of "firm conviction," is one evidence, and evidence enough, that even in peace building and in women's participation in this arena, they are still viewed as mothers and eventually accepted because they are mothers, the "preservers of life" (Valenzuela 1999, p. 160).

With greater participation of women in the political arena or in areas that involve decision-making on peace matters, it is possible that women's contribution to peace building becomes more than nurturers of the casualties and victims of the violent conflict. Rather than just taking care of the consequences of violent conflict, they can partake in decision-making processes in their respective communities and societies and come up with reasonable laws or agreements that would prevent violent conflict from escalating or even from happening again. As Valenzuela (1991) stressed:

Democracy should consider the mechanisms by which women can be incorporated into decision-making and their agenda into the political processes. But they should not be limited to social affairs. If women are to contribute to peace through their participation in decision-making, they should also participate in areas traditionally considered of male concern, such as security, defense and so on. (pp. 160-161)

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The peace activities of these women from Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines had the same motivations with that of the women from Latin America and Russia, as mentioned in the introduction. They are in reactive roles as their concern over the welfare of the community, the family, most particularly the children, had driven these women to initiate or join in peace activities. Peace activities, therefore, that were initiated by the seven women discussed in this paper, support the traditional image of women and extend the performance of the traditional roles assigned to women in their respective societies.

Although traditional images of women undermined the peace activities and their contributions to the welfare of the society in the cases of Cambodia and Indonesia illustrate, they had the opposite effect on the women from the Philippines. This culture has evidently raised the value of women and has given them the space to participate in more decision-related peace activities. However, this does not necessarily mean that the women from the Philippines are already free from being seen as "mothers and preservers of life" *per se*.

Given the complexity of violent conflict, the researcher recommends that women should advocate and demand for their inclusion in decision-making processes related to violent conflict and peace. They should continue initiating peace activities at the grassroots level, but not stop there. In the words of Mathewson (2007):

It's not just a matter of fairness or equity: Creating sustainable solutions for conflict and post-conflict societies without the active leadership of women produces structural failure. Evidence shows that gender equality is not a pie-in-the-sky value, but a critical component for effecting long-term peace. (p. 9)

The findings of this paper have the following limitations: 1) the categories examined (i.e. analysis of peace building mechanisms and mediation); 2) the women profiles selected; and 3) the biographies published by the website from where they were culled. A suggested follow-up research would be to examine the other categories and include all the other women peace activists, using the same the inquiries in this paper. Other avenues to extend this study would include the following: 1) examining men's roles in NGOs engaged in peace-related activities and whether their forms of participation differ or are similar in substantive ways from those of the women peace activists, and if so, in what ways. Finding similarities would be interesting as it would suggest that the ethics of care are not solely enacted along the gender-divide; 2) interviewing men and women benefiting from the efforts of seven women selected peace activists, and finding out if those activities were transformative, and in what manner.

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