Discourses on Conflict Women: Surfacing the Women in Marawi in News-mediated "Development as Discourse"

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Abstract

Like myths in folklore, "development as discourse" constructs women. I argue that these representations of women, particularly in seven selected online articles produced by news media and development institutions about the recovery of Marawi City in the Philippines after nearly five months of conflict in 2017, obscure women's genuine aspirations and actual participation in rehabilitation efforts. Using the lens of Third World feminism and postdevelopment thinking, I point out how these media discourses on development mythologize women. Parsing "development as discourse" is essential not only for exposing the contradictions in media representations of women but also for surfacing the possibilities of reinterpreting the myths. Critical writing and reading can demythologize and liberate conflict women and other silenced Others.

Keywords: Myths, "development as discourse," postdevelopment, development journalism, representations of women, Third World feminism

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In their supposition that the world can be compartmentalized into dichotomous realities, binaries stand for inflexibility.

Yet, the creature that bifurcates into a woman and a fish is that most elastic of myths, containing endless permutations that subvert any and all of these realities: existence as a fish, as a woman, and as the half-fish, half-woman of legends: the mermaid.

Consistently, in the lore of many countries, the mermaid—whether as the eternal youth-granting *Ningyo* of Japan, the green-eyed *Iara* ravishing the sailors of Brazil, and New Zealand's guardian of the seas, the *Marakihau*—is a creature of potency and one fatal flaw (Finklea, 2016).

Is it because the storytellers were male and wary of women that the mermaid is constructed as beautiful but cruel, nubile but destructive, powerful but terrible? In the old tales, the mermaid is enhanced by power beyond the ken of her mortal sisters but prevented from fully ascending by a perverting flaw: her femaleness. Man's possession of the female deity summons punishment (storms, maritime destruction, and sea disappearances).

This half-woman bears the abuse herself. In "The Fable of the Mermaid and the Drunks," the poet Pablo Neruda (2004) writes about a mermaid who loses her way and ends up being used as a spittoon and ashtray by drunks until she swims back to "emptiness" and "death" ("Not knowing tears, she did not weep tears./… She did not speak because she had no speech.") (p. 17).

In the folklore of the Ilocanos, "this tongueless other" is also nameless (Garcellano, 2001, p. 109). Propaganda Movement writer and Father of Philippine Folklore Studies, Isabelo F. de los Reyes (2014) argued that *litao* is not the Ilocano's name for the mermaid but for the "traditional 'anito (god)' of the waters" (p. 87) for whom the mermaid was created as companion for eternity. Pre-Hispanic Ilocanos believed that, like men, the *anito* could not exist without their women. According to lore, the first mermaid was a mortal girl who, while sewing, dropped her needle into the river. Her mother forbade her to recover the needle as doing so may catch the attention of the river *litao.* When her mother's back was turned, however, the girl waded into the river and was "sucked in by huge bubbles" (De los Reyes, 2014, pp. 92-93), disappearing into the river god's thrall.

Industrious but disobedient and devious, this maid of Ilocano lore would have been a paragon of domesticity. Though she is transformed into a goddess with the power to enchant, privileged for being the chosen of the *litao,* her husband, the mermaid disappears from the world of mortals but is also "almost totally forgotten" in the cult of immortals, according to de los Reyes (2014, p. 93). His dismissal of the Ilocano mermaid is understandable:

How can the mermaid be worshipped if the people did not even bother to name her other than as the consort of the *litao*?

That is one interpretation of the myth. In these myths, the mermaid cannot be pinned down to a definitive version, opening other interpretations. What if, instead of being represented by men as storytellers, the mermaid thought for herself, spoke for herself, represented herself? What if she rewrote and reinterpreted her story, rescued it from being concealed by the less than innocent retelling by men of "her history" as "history," as if what he said is automatically what she said?

In other versions of the myth, the mermaid is a shape-shifter, more serpent than fish (Finklea, 2016). In the Christian view, the serpent is punished to crawl forever on its belly for using the temptations of the flesh to contest the power of God, the Patriarch (Pruitt, 2020). Yet, in the East, the snake is a powerful symbol, its natural sloughing of skin representing reinvention and recreation (Pruitt, 2020). De los Reyes (2014) traced the Filipino word for mermaid, "sirena," to the influence of the Spanish colonizers, who clothed our naked, tattooed ancestors but stole our identity and history. Traced to its Middle English origin, "siren" means, in both Old French and Old Latin, an "imaginary snake" ("Siren," 2021).

Tongueless, truthless

Reinterpretation is necessary for unearthing women in all narratives where they are represented, interpreted, and sometimes silenced. In graduate courses on media historiography and media and discourses on development, I learned tools for parsing dominant discourses not just for the undercurrents of presumptions relegating certain subjects to the margins and endnotes of history but also for the superimpositions intended to cover up those who have been the objects of historical "diminution, reduction and erasure" (Garcellano, 2001, p. 104).

Like her symbolic sister, the mermaid, women have been silenced and denied a medium to speak their truth. Poverty, race, and lack of literacy have led to the "silencing of the writer" (Santiago, 2002, p. 182) in men and women. Staggering under the additional onus of gender, women have suffered the "unnatural thwarting of what struggles to come into being" from "circumstances, inner or outer, which oppose the needs of creation" (Olsen as cited by Martin, 1984, pp. 11-12).

"The eventual female extinction—despite the reality of their presence—in the collective unconscious" (Garcellano, 2001, p. 109) is a historical inevitability due to narratives being dominated by men as historians, writers, and journalists.

Essays, which played a central role in the Filipinos' struggle for independence, proved to be "formidable tool(s) for forming public opinion" (Lucero, 2017, p. 220), most prominently during the Propaganda Movement. Except for Trinidad Pardo de Tavera, whose distinction was in the writing of scientific essays, the "more significant essayists" writing in Spanish from 1900 to about a decade after the Second World War are all men, according to the second edition of the Cultural Center of the Philippines's *Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* (Lucero, 2017, p. 220). In Cebu, notable essayists cited for writing for the newspapers from the 1920s to 1940 were all men but one. Maria Kabigon was the only woman cited as a notable essayist during this period in Cebu, according to the Cultural Center of the Philippines's *Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* (Lucero, 2017, p. 222).

The dominant male perspective silences the female Other on the assumption that men and women go through the same experiences and are moved, or not, by these in identical ways. Following this logic, there is no need to examine, distinguish, and separate the skeins of the narrative through gender-sensitive lens as historically, society is "not receptive to women's views and ways of signifying and giving meaning to the world through their writings" (Santiago, 2002, p. 19).

These historical constructions of women are being contested. Third World feminist deconstruction has surfaced how colonization caused the "downgrading of the indigenous political-scientific-cultural order," leading to a "deep form of subjugation on women's experiences and the expression of these experiences" (Santiago, 2002, p. 28). Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) writes of the "imagined community" of Third World women united in their "histories and struggles… against racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism, and monopoly capital" (Mohanty et al., p. 4).

In the oral literature of pre-Hispanic communities, participation was not limited to a particular gender as all genders took part in the activities that were the founts of the communal reservoir of riddles, songs, and proverbs: the shared experiences of "food-gathering, creatures and objects of nature, work in the home, field, forest or sea, caring for children, etc." (Lumbera & Lumbera, 2005, p. 2). The use of daily language in oral literature democratized the involvement of "any member of the community (as)… a potential poet, singer or story-teller" for as long as one possessed knowledge of the language and familiarity with the "conventions of the form" (Lumbera & Lumbera, 2005, p. 3). Only the epic required special abilities, such as "prodigious memory" and "melodic inventiveness," but performance was open to all genders (Lumbera & Lumbera, 2005, p. 3).

Before the Philippines was invaded by the Spanish missionaries and *conquistadores*, pre-Hispanic society had a culture recognizing diverse

genders, as well as the fluidity of intermingling or crisscrossing genders. This was exemplified in the pre-Hispanic communal significance of spiritual guides known as *babaylan, bayoguin, bayok, agi-ngin, asog, bido, binabae, balian, balean, babay,* and *balayan* (Garcia & Melencio as cited in UNDP & USAID, 2014, p. 15). Seventeenth-century Bisayan society had the *asog,* the male version of the female babaylan (UNDP & USAID, 2014, p. 15). To be perceived by the community as being like women, with better access to the spirits, the *asog* and *catalona* looked and performed as "somewhat-women" in demeanor, dress, and intimate relation with male partners (UNDP & USAID, 2014; Ribadeneyra as cited in Mananzan, 2003).

The pivotal roles of the *mujer indigena* (indigenous or native women) in religion, politics and society, both public and domestic, diminished until this was dissipated in colonial society (Mananzan, 2003, pp. 12-13). The *babaylanes*' voices and powers were repressed for rivaling and threatening the Spanish missionaries remolding the natives for Christianization (UNDP and USAID, 2014, p. 15). Catholic theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries advocated seclusion for women as the gender was lacking in "spiritual knowledge" and unfit to be entrusted with their own and others' "spiritual health" (Boxer as cited in Mananzan, 2003, p. 10).

The seclusion of women during the Spanish colonial period denied them of education, except for the "domesticating" type "confined to church, kitchen, and children" (Mananzan, 2003, pp. 23 & 25). Shut out from learning, specifically from studying and using the Spanish language, women were subjected to "systemic silencing" during the 327 years of Castilian rule. In Lilia Quindoza Santiago's (2002) study of 100 years of Philippine feminist poetry, Filipinas under Spanish rule were bifurcated in the social hierarchy, elevated on the pedestal as Christianized virgin daughters and Maria Claras but demoted in status from the formidable babaylan (native priestess) to the suspect *herbolario* (herbalists), *hilot* (midwives), *mangkukulam* (witch doctors), and assorted quacks parasitically feeding off folk superstitions and myths (Santiago, 2002, pp. 26-30). Not just a healer but a guardian of ancient knowledge during pre-Hispanic times, the babaylan became the *alipures* (minions) under Christianity, the female church volunteers who were the "blind followers" of priests (Santiago, 2002, pp. 26-30).

The bifurcation of Spanish colonial Filipinas was alienating and effacing. Dolores Stephens Feria (1991) argues how the "feminist schizophrenic break" (p. 7) from the powerful religious and secular values of the church and the state "damaged" the lives and writing of early twentieth-century pioneers Leonila Florentina and Magdalena Jalandoni. Florentina was ostracized by polite society in the third oldest Spanish settlement in the country, Ciudad Fernandino, for rebelling from her *ilustrado* (educated-class) background

to live like the "pre-Spanish free woman," choosing to leave her *alcalde mayor* husband to write poems that were driven by her passion to express but were viewed by her society as indiscreet and scandalous (Feria, 1991, p. 52). After her death, only 22 poems were recovered from a lifetime of compulsion to write. Florentina's public redemption came only after her son, propagandist Isabelo de los Reyes, moved for the posthumous circulation of the 22 poems in the salons of Paris and Madrid in 1889 and her inclusion in an international encyclopedia of women writers. Florentina's repute as the "Sappho of Ilocos" is "antisepticized… to an unbelievable degree" by the same "vigilant patriarchy" that decided that only the conventional of her poems are extant (Feria, 1991, p. 62).

Like Florentino, Jalandoni wrote 70 volumes of *corridos* (a popular narrative, often sung), poems, translations, novels, and an unfinished autobiography in Hiligaynon to primarily express herself and communicate to the people of Panay, many of whom bought her earliest corridos for "25 centavos in the *palengke*" (wet market) (Feria, 1991, p.68). The "Jewel of Iloilo" was the "most prodigious Philippine novelist of all time;" however, her *ilustrado* class and convent schooling were social structures that delineated and constrained her path to becoming the country's "first long term professional woman of letters" (pp. 63 & 70). That she is known by few Filipinos outside of Panay may be attributed to the fact that she wrote in Hiligaynon and only two of her works were translated in English. Of all the colonial structures, language is a useful instrument to enforce the order of visibility dictated by the Spanish patriarchy and colonization.

Choosing to write in their mother languages and consequently limiting their audience to their immediate society, Florentino and Jalandoni worked within the confines of Spanish colonial policies and values demarcating Filipino women. Spanish was the language of the ruling order as well as the Propaganda Movement that sought reforms in the colonial system to alleviate the suffering of the Filipino people. The intelligentsia, led by male writers and thinkers, acquired the facility of the colonial tongue due to their access to education and travels abroad. Women like Florentino and Jalandoni, regimented and secluded, used their mother languages, which made their works accessible to the common people long before the close of the nineteenth century, when the propagandists shifted from Spanish to Tagalog to communicate to the masses, who bore the brunt of Spain's oppression. More than a "change of medium," the purposive "shift in tactics" signaled that "reformism had been abandoned and the revolution had begun" (Lumbera & Lumbera, 2005, p. 45).

The pioneer women writers were from the ilustrado class, an accident of birth that accorded privileges but also constraints. Their subjectivities

were reflected in their writing. Plebian women, though, were silenced not just by gender but also class. The stereotype of the submissive, passive, and retiring Filipina endures despite studies showing that during the Spanish era, women already contributed significantly to the economy. While the men were conscripted into war or sent away as labor for church and government constructions, the women "stayed home," meaning they raised families and worked on the farms (Santiago, 2002, p. 29). In the 18th-century cigar and dress factories, women were the *cigarerras* and *custoreras* laboring to produce the outputs (Santiago, 2002, pp. 26-30). Analyzing primary and archival sources, Camagay (1995) identified seven occupations of "gainfully employed women" in nineteenth-century Manila: *cigarreras* (tobacco factory workers), *criadas* (female domestic helpers), *tenderas* (store owners), *vendadoras* (vendors), *costureras* (seamstresses), *bordadoras* (embroiders), and *mujeres publicas* (commercial sex workers). In historical accounts of the country's modernization, women are invariably relegated to the footnotes as "invisible farmers" and "reproducers" (Escobar, 1995, pp. 171-172).

The exclusion of Spanish colonial Filipino women, which silenced their voices and elided their subjectivities, was carried out in the print industry at the turn of the century. Bienvenido Lumbera and Cynthia Nograles Lumbera (2005) theorized, in the absence of definitive research findings, that the social expectations of the time did not extend to women writing or publishing their works. Without access to education, women were not exposed to the European and Spanish conventions of writing, particularly in essays, the preferred genre of male propagandists (Lumbera & Lumbera, 2005, p. 46).

It is in the more personal genres of poetry and letters, as well as in vernacular writing, that women expressed themselves at the turn of the century. Florentino and Jalandoni's personal and literary lives reflect a cohesiveness and seamlessness despite the strictures of the time; both women suffered hardships in both realms for going against colonial conventions and expectations. Yet, for literary historians, the absence of women publishing and contributing to the "self-conscious literature" penned during the Propaganda Movement and the Revolution of 1896, which gave rise to the Filipinos' inchoate consciousness of shared struggle and common desire for freedom and separation from the Spanish colonizer, relegated colonial women to be perceived as the tongueless, truthless sisters of the *sirena* (mermaid) of myth (Lumbera & Lumbera, 2005, p. 47).

"Development gaze"

One of the crucial "regimes of representation" (Escobar, 1995, p. 7) enframing women as tongueless and truthless is "development as discourse" (p. 214).

In the post-development analysis, development is a "historically produced discourse" (Escobar, 1995, p. 6) rationalizing a process that ostensibly aims but fails to solve poverty, consolidating instead the power of the state and the ruling elite. James Ferguson (1994) likens development to an "anti-politics machine" for "de-politicizing poverty" (p. 256). By focusing on purely technical solutions to poverty, which is rooted in powerlessness and oppression, proponents are not "doing nothing" with the failure of development; they are "doing something else" (Ferguson, 1994, p. 276).

These "side effects" of development are actually the "instrument-effects" for the "exercise of power" (1994, p. 255), argues Ferguson, drawing from Michel Foucault's theory on power. In the circular logic of "betterment" (Ferguson, 1994, pp. 257-267), the more development fails, the more the people suffer, the more the state has to intervene.

The failure of development brings about "etatization," which is the "knotting/coagulation of power" through the coming together of the state and the ruling elite/group into a unitary entity: "bureaucratic state power" (Ferguson, 1994, pp. 270-275). In this discourse, this "machine" hiding the complex interactions of "intentional plans," "unacknowledged structures," "systems of discourse," and "unpredictable outcomes" (Ferguson, 1994, pp. 275-277) is a deception, a pseudo-development.

Ferguson (1994) stresses the importance of sustaining the struggle to overthrow the dominance of development as a "problematic or interpretive grid" (p. xiii) that is more than a central organizing concept; "development as discourse" (p. xv) has an impact on actual human lives and create social consequences.

While Arturo Escobar (1995) also views "development as discourse" (p. 5) as imposing problems on persons, countries or entities represented as underdeveloped, he argues that "explor(ing) more fruitfully (the discourse may surface) the conditions of possibility and the most pervasive effects of development" (p. 6). Development has disenfranchised women, making their lives worse in the quest of ironically seeking "betterment," observes Escobar (p. 171). Interventions for modernization have multiplied a woman's work load while keeping her contributions to the economy as "invisible" (Escobar,1995, p. 171).

Escobar (1995) blames the "development blindness" arising from patriarchal structures that "organize a particular economy of visibilities" (p. 173). One manifestation of "development as discourse" is "enframing," which turns the witness into a spectator viewing development as if it

were an “exhibition.” In this “regime of objectivism,” the observer/narrator believes himself “detached and objective” while being “immerse(d)… in local life” (Escobar, 1995, p. 7). Serving as a “scopic regime” that carries out the “developmentalization” of the subject and the consequent “production of the social,” the enframing reduces women into these spectacles of underdevelopment as targets of modernization or recipients of aid (Escobar, 1995, p. 155).

How does the “development gaze” operate as an “apparatus of social control” (Escobar, 1995, p. 155)? He notes further, “The development discourse maps people into certain coordinates of control” (p. 156) and that “The aim is not simply to discipline individuals but to transform the conditions under which they live into a productive, normalized social environment: in short, to create modernity” (p. 156).

Enframing by media

In the Information Age, this enframing is channeled through mass media, particularly digital or online media with its borderless and real-time reach and relatively lower costs for dissemination, compared to the trimedia, the legacy media of print, radio, and television. Specializing on subjects concerning the advancement of persons, communities, and societies, development journalism functions as a “scopic regime” that carries out the “developmentalization” of the subject and becomes the “modern means for the production of the social” (Escobar, 1995, p. 155) when it is practiced without being sensitive to and critical of the gender perspective, as sieved by the legacy media and development institutions.

Mainstream journalism, as practiced in the Philippines, is guided by conflict, prominence, consequence, and other values associated with a “First World orientation” of newsworthiness (De Quiros, 1997, p. 31). As with other heavily contested subjects, development involves many claimants asserting their stakes, with the mainstream media prioritizing the claimants that represent authorities (i.e., the state, military, government functionaries) and the prominent and powerful who can deploy the resources, such as communications teams, to aggressively insert their claims in media content (De Quiros, 1997, p. 22). Communication through mass media is likened to a “struggle for hearts and minds” because, aside from involving a “war” among claim-makers (De Quiros, 1997, p. 22), “the media are primarily a business” (Coronel, 1997, p. 46), a reality delineating policies and practices in reporting and opinion-making that are shaped by constraints emanating from the market, the state, media ownership, and the news itself as a form of communication.

Offering the alternative to the commercialized, corporate-driven coverage of development by legacy media are development institutions' practice of development journalism. Government and non-government entities seek to balance the marginalization of issues they claim are ignored or treated superficially in legacy media by contributing press releases and other generated articles to media, conducting press conferences about their advocacies, or creating their own official websites and using social media for development communication. Non-government organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs), whether local or international, play a significant role in Philippine affairs, particularly in espousing and consolidating the views of various sectors that are relegated to the peripheries of the traditional power relations controlling Philippine society. Representing civil society and pushing for a "people's agenda," NGOs and POs have opportunities to incorporate their voices along with other claim-makers in public discourse, governance, and nation-building (De Quiros, 1997, pp. 21-29). With NGOs and POs also having access to public funds and undertaking projects that have an impact on communities, their ideologies and participation in development work must also be scrutinized, for instance, through their practice of information, education, and communication (IEC), particularly development journalism.

These two stakeholders—news media and NGO media—wield "power in discourse" (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 113) to expose the "embedded vulnerabilities and power relations" (Enarson & Pease, 2016, p. 4) in development decisions, such as those made to mitigate the consequences of disaster (Morrow, 1999, p. 1).

The governmental shift to a "development" approach for the reconstruction that takes place in post-war settings requires the participation of these conduits for the public sphere, the news media and the NGO media. As gatekeepers of information, these parties decide which messages for the public are prioritized for transmission, given less importance, or excluded. Power is accorded to development participants whose voices and messages are represented in public discourse; those silenced or buried in the discourse are made powerless in decision-making, planning, and implementation of development. Such communication power to confer power on or withhold power from those who are the subjects of their narratives, as well as those consuming these narratives, must be scrutinized and criticized.

It is with these media representation of post-disaster recovery that I undertake to study how the news media and the NGO media exercise "power in discourse" (Escobar, 1995, p. 6) through the dissemination of Marawi conflict women as a discourse, a "regime of representation" (Escobar, 1995, p. 6) that demonstrates development journalism's "ability to constrain the

choices of others, coercing them or securing their compliance, by impeding them from living as their own nature and judgment dictate" (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 113).

To study how the discourse of women in development (WID) brought women into the "space of visibility in development" (Escobar, 1995, p. 155), I analyzed the discourse in seven articles published online by news institutions (Bulatlat, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*) and development entities (CARE Philippines, Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility [CMFR], Thomson Reuters Foundation, UN Women Asia and Pacific, and World Vision), which were on the first two pages of articles retrieved by Google in response to my search for "marawi women recovery" conducted during the first week of May 2018. All of the articles carried the byline of the writers: five women and two men.

The siege of Marawi began on May 23, 2017 when the Philippine military clashed with the Abu Sayyaf and the Maute groups, which are affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group that is also known as ISIS (Betteridge-Moes, 2017). Located in Mindanao, Marawi became the site of five months of warfare between the government forces and the ISIL fighters, who declared the city as a "new caliphate of ISIL" (Betteridge-Moes, 2017).

During the so-called Marawi siege, President Rodrigo Duterte placed the entire Mindanao under martial law (Betteridge-Moes, 2017, para. 7). The siege involved many foreign fighters from Malaysia, Indonesia, Yemen and Chechnya, as well as child soldiers recruited from Marawi schools (Betteridge-Moes, 2017, para. 9). The Philippine government announced the end of the Marawi siege on October 17, 2017, following the killing of Isnilon Hapilon and Omar Maute, leaders of the ISIL-affiliated local armed groups, the Abu Sayyaf and the Maute (Betteridge-Moes, 2017, para. 8).

The five months of siege devastated the city, forced the evacuation of about 300,000 residents, and caused the deaths of "920 fighters, 165 government soldiers, and at least 45 civilians" (Betteridge-Moes, 2017, para. 17).

Rebuilding Marawi, the largest Muslim city in a predominantly Catholic nation, is estimated to cost around USD1.1 billion and will require years of reconstruction (Betteridge-Moes, 2017, para. 19). Like the rest of Mindanao, Marawi was under martial law until midnight of December 31, 2019 (Gotinga, 2019, para. 1). Residents forced to evacuate have expressed the desire to return to their homes even as experts warn of reprisals from other ISIL-affiliated groups.

The reconstruction of post-conflict Marawi is addressed by the previously mentioned seven articles, published online from September

2017 to April 2018, which are the focus of this analysis. These cover the time period of the Marawi siege, which is officially recognized to have started on May 23, 2017 and ended on October 17, 2017 with the declaration by President Duterte that the city was "liberated" by government troops from the armed groups (Betteridge-Moes, 2017, para. 13).

The reconstruction of Marawi is made complicated as it is set against more than four decades of armed conflict, which has claimed hundreds of thousands of civilian lives and displaced millions in the southern Philippine region (Guilbert, 2018, para. 6 & 7). While there is more to Mindanao than war, despite the representations in mainstream media, armed conflict complicates the communities' return to normalcy.

For instance, reporting on women's return to traditional crafts, such as weaving, focuses on the healing of the wounds left by war since traditional patterns reveal the people's stories. However, the women's recourse to weaving as an income-generating project is made complicated by the plight of the internally displaced persons (IDPs), the lack of micro-credit, the unfamiliarity and unwillingness of the younger generation to learn and practice a time-consuming craft, and the lack of markets in the post-conflict situation to absorb the women's products and extend advances or credit so that they may purchase weaving requirements.

Stories focusing solely on humanitarian assistance frame women as perennial victims awaiting rescue, when, in reality, Marawi women and men resort to their own efforts or family and community support to survive and recover as aid from the government and other development entities is irregular, insufficient, and fails to address the residents' actual needs. Despite public assurances that the damaged areas of Marawi City will be quickly rehabilitated, government projects to build housing and resettle the homeless and decongest evacuation centers have been delayed for more than a year since President Duterte declared the city as liberated. The city's rehabilitation is allegedly plagued by bureaucratic delays in the negotiations, lack of funds, and alleged corruption involving private contractors and mandated agencies (ABS-CBN News, 2017b).

Driven out by inhospitable conditions at congested evacuation centers, many Marawi residents desire to return to their communities and resume their disrupted lives but they are prevented from doing so by the loss of homes, farms, and schools; security concerns that require residents to secure a safe conduct pass to return to their localities; and difficulties to sustain a livelihood and not depend on dole-outs (ABS-CBN News, 2017a). There is a seeming disconnection between Marawi residents' pressing concern on livelihood and survival and the government's master plan to rezone Marawi City, settle issues of lot ownership, speed up temporary or

transitional shelters, resettle evacuees, and repair and re-open religious and cultural landmarks for war commemoration, tourism, and business. In Marawi, where many Moros claim lands based on their ancestry but have no land titles to prove their claims (Ayroso, 2017, para. 33), the government's master plan and rezoning proposal are culturally and politically alienating as these may be interpreted to mean the displacement of residents to give way to outside private enterprises and corporations (Ayroso, 2017, para. 32).

This disjunction between the people's and the authorities' conceptions of post-conflict rehabilitation may be due to the absence of communal consultation and participation in the creation of the official master plan plotting the reconstruction of Marawi, an oversight that non-government organizations (NGOs) and peace advocates want to address by incorporating more representative documentation, in media coverage, of the actual needs expressed by and initiatives undertaken at the grassroots, particularly by women. A major message that needs emphasizing is that post-conflict rehabilitation is a process taking months and years, which goes beyond receiving relief goods at evacuation centers. During the February 4, 2013 forum, "Huntahan, Balitaan, Kapayapaan: A Dialogue with Media and Mindanao Women on the Peace Process," held in Pasig City, Mindanao women testified about how personal sacrifices and self-reliance enabled them to survive during and after the all-out war declared by President Joseph Estrada against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in 2000 (Lapeña, 2013). Stakeholders, such as Noorus-Salam (Light of Peace), a national network of Aleemat or Muslim women religious scholars and leaders, peace advocates and women organizations, Isis International and WeAct, pointed out the need to surface the voices of women who take part in the Mindanao peace process by working on their personal and communal transformations to counter the dominant media stereotype of women as victims (Lapeña, 2013). Appeals were made to national dailies with their extensive networks of local correspondents to include these stories of women's agency and contribute to giving more visibility to grassroots women in the national consciousness (Lapeña, 2013).

Conflict women

Selected for heading the list of articles determined by Google searches on "marawi women recovery" in May 2018, the analyzed articles about the women in Marawi reflect various interpretations of the news angle of Marawi women as conflict women, a construct that orders the search for online researchers and news curators but also ties up all women in Marawi to the aftermath of the "Marawi Siege," a news handle that ignores other

historical events shaping the women of Marawi before and after May 23, 2017, the start of the siege. The news angle of Marawi women as conflict women enframes them in "development as discourse".

Since its introduction in the late 1990s, the women in development (WID) discourse has been embraced by development journalism practitioners who view WID's gender-sensitive lens as an alternative, making up for the gaps and omissions in reporting on women's participation by mainstream journalism, with its emphasis on sex, crime, fashion, and entertainment. As an information officer, and then media specialist in foreign-funded development projects implemented in urban and rural Cebu and Central Visayas in the 1980s-1990s, I applied the tenets of WID in segregating female from male participants in writing about project beneficiaries and target groups to inform policy makers, funding agencies, partner institutions, and the public about best practices in rural development, participatory development, and resource management.

However, WID provides the "best examples of universalization on the basis of economic reductionism" (Mohanty, 1991, p. 63). Despite the gender-segregation of data and gender-sensitivity underpinnings, WID, reflecting "development as discourse," assumes that development means sweeping economic progress for beneficiaries, and that women are a "coherent group or category prior to their entry into the 'development process'" (Mohanty, 1991, p. 63). In the simplest and most "simplistic" of WID formulations, all Third World women form an indistinguishable mass of needs and problems, awaiting aid or deliverance but are incapable of exhibiting agency to articulate their needs and come up with solutions (Mohanty, 1991, p. 63).

Women in underdeveloped or developing countries, particularly the Global South, represent different, even clashing social classes and cultures, which means they are affected differently by programs to introduce modernization or bring about progress (Mohanty, 1991, p. 63). "Women are constituted as women through the complex interaction between class, culture, religion, and other ideological institutions and frameworks" (Mohanty, 1991, p. 63).

Some of these "simplistic formulations" of WID are manifested in the seven online articles analyzed, representing development myths of conflict women that enframe the women in Marawi, even though there can be "no easy generalization in the direction of 'women' in India, or 'women in the third world'" (Mohanty, 1991, p.65). On the other hand, other articles also show the demythologizing that surfaces women's genuine aspirations and complicated struggles as they transform and are transformed by social forces in post-conflict Marawi's reconstruction.

The first myth is the "women's *well-being*" and "welfarist" focus of majority of the analyzed articles (Sen, 2000, p. 189). Two articles published on the websites of non-government organizations (NGOs) CARE Philippines and World Vision frame the women in Marawi as needing rescue. Uploaded on November 15, 2017, the article opens with the writer Jerome Lanit, emergency coordinator of CARE Philippines, describing the widow Dipumbae, 77, as "patiently" lining up to receive cash assistance in a village in Lanao del Sur where she "temporarily stays" with her 10 children and grandchildren after the "bloody armed conflict" forced them to flee Marawi (para. 1). The writer describes Dipumbae as "finally (seeing) a glimpse of light" (para. 1), the same metaphor used in the article title, "Glimpse of light after the battle in Marawi," which stands for the cash assistance given to the widow and other home-based IDPs and host families by the NGOs CARE Philippines, Agri-Aqua Development Coalition Mindanao (AADC), and Al Mujadilah Development Foundation (AMDF) (Lanit, 2017).

The article's portrayal of home-based IDPs uses the rescue frame, which is reinforced by the sole photograph accompanying the article that shows veiled women queueing before two groups of women with ledgers for noting the cash assistance being distributed (Lanit, 2017). Dipumbae provides the human face to the plight of IDPs, whom the CARE International and its Mindanao partners are assisting so that the "affected people (can) slowly pick up the pieces towards recovery" (Lanit, 2017, para. 17). The character sketch appeals to the emotions of readers for war survivors like Dipumbae, who, at an advanced age, has lost her home and store in Marawi and has to depend on cash assistance to provide for her grandchildren's school fees and the rest of her family's medicine and food.

The writer includes details that inform the reader about the plight of home-based IDPs: homeless families fleeing armed conflict and evacuation centers and forced to stay with relatives or other hosts who are also financially in need. However, the article stops short of addressing how the cash assistance will sustain extended families sharing households, both the IDPs and their host families. Dipumbae's anticipation of receiving "a little capital to start over" (Lanit, 2017, para. 14) is not elaborated on, in spite of the NGO listing "livelihood recovery assistance" (para. 17) as one of its "top priorities" to provide "life-saving and early recovery support" (para. 17) to the displaced population, along with psychosocial and sexual reproductive health support, and shelter repair. CARE Philippines counts women empowerment as one of its advocacies since, as the NGO elaborates under its official website's link on programs (care-philippines.org/programs): "girls and women aren't just the faces of the (sic) poverty; they're also the key to overcoming it" (CARE, n.d.). Promoting this advocacy requires a refocusing

of the news angle of the article to focus on how Dipumbae or other home-based IDPs use their agency to help themselves and their families beyond depending on cash dole-outs. The article's news angle enframes Dipumbae as a victim transfixed by dependence on external assistance to cope with the complexities of recovery instead of demonstrating what CARE claims to learn from "nearly seven decades of experience" (CARE, n.d.) in relief work, according to its official website: "that when you empower a girl or a woman, she becomes a catalyst for positive change whose success benefits everyone around her" (CARE, n.d.).

Figure 1. Welfarist enframing. This rescue frame projects women as victims receiving aid and downplays their agency for self-reliance. "Internally displaced women lining up for cash assistance" (Al Mujadillah Foundation, 2017).

The article's diminution of Dipumbae's struggles also downplays the complex survival strategies of IDPs made more vulnerable to post-conflict lawlessness, sex trafficking, and recruitment for extremist armed groups. WID's simplistic formulation of women's welfare is manifested in the March 1, 2018 article, "Women of Marawi," uploaded on the official website of World Vision, www.worldvision.org.ph. Writer Joy Maluyo (2018), the international aid organization's emergency communication specialist, presents three women whose stories, complemented by their smiling portraits, radiate tales of optimism and recovery. Scrap-material accessory maker Yasmin, food cart vendor Khaironisa, and "peace-building" (Maluyo, 2018, para. 11) worker Johara share the resolution to stop "crying" (para. 4) over their misfortunes arising from the Marawi crisis and their determination to "rise above (the 'crisis')" (para. 2). However, beyond the motherhood statements, the details are scant on how these women and their families survived the armed conflict; and what they are confronting as the city seeks a semblance of order and normality. In choosing to highlight the women's photographs over their narratives (i.e., photos more prominent in the page design and lay-out than the text, which is brief, almost caption-

like and uses the small, nearly illegible font size 9), the article writer and website editor failed to elaborate on the processes these women underwent to overcome armed conflict, loss, deprivation, and economic survival. Yasmin is a single mother raising two children from her earnings in making accessories and novelty items from scrap materials (Maluyo, 2018). Snack vendors Khaironisa and her husband lost all their five carts in the armed conflict; starting again with P1,000 as seed capital, they are back to cooking snacks (Maluyo, 2018). What difficulties did Yasmin and Khaironisa undergo? How do they meet risks, challenges, and opportunities as micro-entrepreneurs? Which of their experiences can give other women ideas for building resiliency or provide insights on the actual needs and support to enable women micro-entrepreneurs? Beyond participating in World Vision's cash-for-work program, the third subject, Johara, is a member of the Organization of Greeners Opportunity Project (OGOP), which she and her fellow beneficiaries formed as a self-help organization (Maluyo, 2018). The article glosses over this important initiative in collectivization, specially in exploring how the women view and carry out their roles in peace-building with their families and communities.

While the World Vision article's news angle on women's agency is an improvement on the CARE International feature's focus on dole-out assistance for IDPs, the World Vision writer treats the search for human security by Yasmin, Khaironisa, and Johara as a universal, homogenized process bereft of particularities and distinctions that relate every woman's situation and condition. The article's title of "Women of Marawi" consolidates the impression of a world view extending the colonialist discourse that Third World Women is a "singular monolithic subject," exhibiting the same interests and desires that are not affected by the women's differences in class, ethnicity, culture, circumstances, and contradictions (Mohanty, 2003, p. 19). The World Vision writer's decision to focus on the generic visuals of smiling women over the differences in each woman's responses to armed conflict and reconstruction illustrates the contrasts of ideological embeds in the representation of Woman as a "cultural and ideological composite" creating a "coherence of effects" resulting in the myth or social imaginary of the Third World Woman as symbolizing powerlessness, versus the dismantling of this First World Feminism construction to focus on the "real, material subjects of their collective histories" as women (Mohanty, 2003, p. 19).

The second omission in the World Vision article illustrating "development as discourse" is the lack of economic and political context framing the subjects' agency in the contested territory following the devastation of Marawi during five months of siege, particularly in light

of the government's blueprint vision of Marawi's reconstruction, with the private sector footing the USD 1.1-billion rebuilding cost (Ayroso, 2017; Inquirer.net, 2017, 00:31) and presumably sharing in the spoils of the giant malls-and-world-class-tourism vision of Marawi's recovery (Ayroso, 2017) following the "Build Back Better" development mantra of the Philippine government. What future awaits Marawi's micro-entrepreneurs and the informal economy as the government and its partners in the private sector shift in economic and business strategy?

The women's wide smiles and shining eyes captured by the photographs are visual red flags reflected in the clichéd expressions describing a falsely optimistic, geopolitically naïve world mirrored in the article: "the road to recovery is still long" (Maluyo, 2018, para. 14); "their city that is war-torn but not struck down" (para. 14) ; "these women and their families are battle-scarred but not crushed" (para. 14); and "we are all hopeful that what happened in Marawi City will not happen again in the future" (para. 12). Mohanty (1991) considers "such simplistic formulations (as) historically reductive... ineffectual in designing strategies to combat oppressions... (and only) reinforce binary divisions" between "people who have (power) (read: men), and people who do not (read: women)" (1991, p. 64).

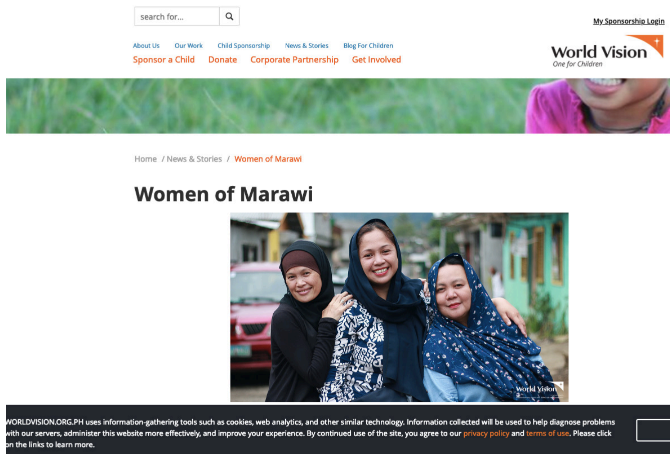

Figure 2. Women as a monolithic subject. Diluting the narratives of women's subjective experiences to portray the simplistic binary of powerlessness and relief exemplifies "development as discourse." Photo by World Vision (Maluyo, 2018).

The focus on the agency of women is a step up from the welfarist frame of development journalism stories to bring about the well-being of women. The "agent-oriented approach to women's agenda" (Sen, 2000, p. 191) works for "removing the iniquities that depress the *well-being* of women" (p. 191). From being passive recipients of benevolence and aid, women are represented as "active agents of change" (Sen, 2000, p. 189) and "dynamic promoters of social transformations that can alter the lives of *both* women and men" (p. 189).

Yet, articles on women's agency should explicate and demonstrate the subjectivities of women overcoming personal and structural iniquities. The developmental myth of superwomen glosses over such "complex interaction between class, culture, religion, and other ideological institutions and frameworks" (Mohanty, 1991, p. 63). This representation is present in Rina Jimenez-David's column published on April 6, 2018 in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer.* Entitled "Baby Doll and other unsung women," the essay focuses on seven women honored as "Unsung Women Heroes" for 2018 by the Soroptimist International of the Philippines (Jimenez-David, 2018).

According to Rep. Lorna Silverio, chair of the award-giving body, the honorees' volunteerism and sacrifices are made more meaningful by the women representing the "less privileged" (Jimenez-David, 2018, para. 3) classes, undergoing particular struggles in carrying out their advocacy with their communities. While the awardees prove that poverty and gender are not hindrances preventing women from helping other women and counter the WID reductionist assumption that "all third world women have similar problems and needs… thus, they must have similar interests and goals" (Mohanty, 1991, p. 63), Jimenez-David fails to present the particulars of their circumstances and struggles that would have fleshed out the enframing of women heroes as "superwomen" who change society but reveal no vulnerabilities and conflicts in their personal lives (Mohanty, 1991, p. 63).

As a newspaper columnist, I know the stringent word count that limits writers to an increasingly diminishing news hole, particularly for newspaper opinion columns. I speculate that Jimenez-David selected human interest details to capture the awardees' achievements. However, a reader seeking to surface strategies for standing up to oppressions and empowering the exploited will note the lack of depth and context in the article's "motherhood" statements portraying the women honorees as "nurturing," "mothering," and "saving." For instance, Jimenez-David plays up the cute nickname and doll-like features of Baby Doll or Sittie Nur Dayhanna Saruang Mohammad, a field coordinator given the distinction for reaching out to Marawi youth and IDPs about reproductive health (2018, para. 2). The single quote attributed to Mohammad in the column—"happiness lies in helping others" (Jimenez-David, 2018, para. 2)—hardly scrapes the surface of the journey of the subject, who reaches out to other IDPs while struggling with her own family's "sense of dislocation and insecurity" (Jimenez-David, 2018, para. 6). As a woman and as a writer, I am extremely frustrated by the writer's decision to include a quote so clichéd in its expression and dearth of meaning, and leave out the infinitely more complex narratives that could have probed the struggles of the speaker to become who she is (Jimenez-David, 2018).

Presentations of the complex and even the conflicted and unresolved expose women and men reading about women to the "manifold" and "multiple" "selves" that are constructed by but are also responses dismantling "regimes of representation," such as "development as discourse" and Western feminism's construct of Third World Women (Escobar, 1995, p. 214; Mohanty, 2003, p. 42). In honoring women exemplars, we must be ready to "change the discourse," not highlighting the superwomen myth constructed by media and society but surfacing instead the "rejected selves," the "objects of different reimaginings," and the "radically reconstituted identities" emerging in spaces involving "the most disarticulating forces and tensions" (Escobar, 1995, p. 215).

Veering away from development journalism's facile interpretation of WID as merely welfare- and dole-oriented, articles on women's agency must go beyond being a "catalogue of 'problems' and 'needs'" (Escobar, 1995, p. 212). Media discourses on women in development should highlight the right of "cultural autonomy": "the right to be who we are and have our own life project" (Escobar, 1995, p. 212).

Anthropologist June Prill-Brett (2015) points out that development journalism should do more than surface gender issues in development projects; these should tap into the writer's and then the reader's "sensitivity to the cultural context" in appreciating how "social structure and indigenous institutions" shape "traditional gender relations" (p. 204). Media discourses on development must be parsed for their "imposition of Western categories and technical knowledge" (Prill-Brett, 2015, p. 204) as well as "values, practices and ideologies… alien to most upland communities (p. 205).

On cursory reading, Kieran Guilbert's (2018) article about the Filipina farmers working with Coffee for Peace (CfP), a social enterprise that seeks to "conquer conflict with coffee" (as indicated in the article title) in "troubled Mindanao" (para. 7), surfaces two representations of "silenced women": women as "invisible farmers" (Escobar, 1995, p. 171) and "farmerpreneurs" (Guilbert, 2018, para. 15).

The Thomson Reuters Foundation article covers women's participation and leadership in areas they are not traditionally associated with: poverty alleviation, farming, entrepreneurship, resource access and management, conflict resolution, and peace negotiation (Prill-Brett, 2015, p. 204). Highlighting women's agency, particularly her participation and leadership, is a "crucial aspect of 'development as freedom'" (Sen, 2000, pp. 202-203).

However, when the barometer of "economic self-reliance and equity" (Prill-Brett, 2015, p. 205) is applied to the women farmers' engagement with CfP, the representations become contested. Like her neighbors, farmer Marivic Dubria has given up raising vegetables, which used to be her main

crops, to "grow, harvest and process high-quality Arabica beans at a time when global demand for coffee is soaring" (Guilbert, 2018, para. 4). Ever since Dubria exported her coffee crop to buyers "as far away as Seattle" (Guilbert, 2018, para. 4), she no longer has to look back to a time, five years ago, when she bought instant coffee in sachets because she was too embarrassed to serve visitors the poor coffee growing beside her vegetables.

The story is incomplete. As it is with incomplete narratives, what's missing is often the more significant. What will happen to Dubria when the global market for coffee will no longer fork over at least USD 5 for every kilo of Arabica beans? Will she still be praised for the hospitality of serving "thick, aromatic, treacle-like coffee" (Guilbert, 2018, para. 5) in the comforts of home at the foot of Mount Apo?

The binaries of coffee and conflict, prosperity and poverty are powerful for obscuring but not completely hiding questions raised about a social enterprise that since 2008, is claimed by the CfP writer as successful at convincing Christian and Muslim neighbors to "put down their guns and talk over coffee" (Guilbert, 2018, para. 12). How is the work load of Filipinas like Dubria, who comprise 80 percent of the CfP's coffee-growing partners? How does the CfP "take responsibility for the environment and other communities" (Guilbert, 2018, para. 5), which is one of the advocacies claimed along with providing IDPs' sustainable livelihood? How do CfP's coffee-growing partners benefit the local community when the coffee beans are sold at higher prices locally than when it is exported? How do native and settler communities and various tribes relate when they are encouraged to "harvest and process the beans together" (Guilbert, 2018, para. 13)? What are the experiences of the local people persuaded by CfP to replace their traditions with the "technical way of doing things" (Guilbert, 2018, para. 29)?

This narrative of coffee for peace universalizes all forms of conflict—Mindanao can be replaced with another conflict setting that is still hospitable to coffee cultivation—and reduces "development" to economic solutions that primarily benefit markets far removed from the local, the setting for another "catalogue of 'problems' and 'needs'" (Escobar, 1995, p. 212).

The remaining three of the analyzed articles (Ayroso, 2017; Mendoza, 2017; Silbert, 2018) are the most authentic in portraying the experiences and challenges of women in Marawi by avoiding the oversimplification of the recovery and rebuilding of Marawi City and presenting development as the "'anti-politics machine,' depoliticizing everything it touches, everywhere whisking political realities out of sight, all the while performing, almost unnoticed, its own pre-eminently political operation of expanding bureaucratic state power" (Ferguson, 1994, p. xv).

The photographs of United Nations Women's Asia Pacific regional director Miwa Koto meeting Marawi and Manila women leaders put Silbert's (2018) article at risk of being perceived initially as protocolarian news—with the imaginary caption of "humanitarian aid in the age of selfies and groufies"—but the writer succeeds in portraying through the text the "multiple hardships" (para. 1) faced by women "internally displaced by conflict and violent extremism" (para. 1). The twinning of poverty and radicalism as both cause and effect of the Marawi siege is presented as part of the context complicating the lives of the women in Marawi. The writer includes the plight of the "home-based" IDPs. Unlike the CARE Philippines article (Lanit, 2017) that glosses over the "temporary" (para. 5) rooming-in arrangements of IDPs staying with equally marginalized relatives or host families, the UN Women Asia and the Pacific article (Silbert, 2018) bares the increased financial burdens and social tensions of these home-based arrangements, overlooked or ignored by legacy media with its focus on the IDPs sheltered in evacuation centers. Given the complications of Marawi's recovery, Marawi women's agency is linked by the writer to the UN Women's aim to prevent the escalation of violent extremism and building resilient communities by disseminating the best practices of women in Bangladesh and Indonesia (Silbert, 2018, para. 9).While the "category of women is constructed in a variety of political contexts that often exist simultaneously and overlaid on top of one another" (Mohanty, 1991, p. 65), it is an important insight that the sisterhood can draw strength and resilience from the global community.

Mendoza's (2017) article about the impact of the Marawi crisis examines the viewpoints of many women, bringing home the point that women do not represent one "coherent group or category" (Mohanty, 1991, p. 63). Uploaded on the website of the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) on October 18, 2017, the writer interviewed a trained social worker volunteering to help IDPs in evacuation centers; a government social worker who seeks ways to grant what IDPs need beyond the usual humanitarian aid mobilized by agencies (such as badminton sets requested by adolescent girls who note that the boys have their basketball court to release the stress of living as IDPs); and women soldiers who understand the IDPs' reluctance to mingle with them and empathize with their longing to return to their homes (Mendoza, 2017).

By carrying multiple voices of women as insiders and outsiders of the conflict in Marawi, the CMFR article emphasizes cultural relativism: "the view that each culture must be understood in its own terms and cannot be judged against the standards of dominant groups" (Kim & Rambo, 2007, p. 198). Post-war rehabilitation is framed by the CMFR writer as far from

being a crisis requiring assembly-line stop-gap measures but as conflicted grounds where sensitivity to the cultural context, social structure, and indigenous institutions, dialogue, and empathy makes more inroads than welfare packages and development blueprints (Prill-Brett, 2015, p. 204).

In her interweaving of the different skeins of women's experiences, Ayroso's (2017) article uploaded on the website of *Bulatlat* on September 16, 2017 is poignant without sentimentalizing a nearly obliterated past, a fading, the inevitable "act of diminution, reduction and erasure" (Garcellano, 2001, p. 104) of women "not 'haphazardly forgotten' but deliberately buried" (p. 104) by the modes of governance and discourse that have always been "under the control of male gatekeepers" (p. 104).

The aspirations for Marawi's recovery clash in the perspectives of Sittie Rahma Asim, a single mother of two who sells clothes and grilled food, and the cartel of big foreign and local businesses responding to President Duterte's call for the "rehabilitation of the war-torn city" (Ayroso, 2017). Asim shares the views of Tindeg Ranao, the Marawi evacuees group that undertook the Lakbayan ng Pambansang Minorya in Manila to voice the call of the *bakwits* (local slang for evacuees): "Marawi is for the Meranaws and the people, not big business and foreigners" (Ayroso, 2017, para. 7). While Asim says that Meranaws like her "do not ask for charity" (Ayroso, 2017, para. 2) because they once managed to live within what they earned as "merchants with good business sense" (Ayroso, 2017, para. 3), their prospects for returning to their informal businesses are uncertain and precarious, given the "looming entry of big foreign and local businesses" (para. 5) that are partnering with the Duterte administration in Marawi's rehabilitation.

There is a foreshadowing of the people's loss when the writer contrasts the *bakwits*' desire to return to a "simple life"—defined by IDP Orao Sarip (Ayroso, 2017, para. 8) as a life of cultivating corn, rice and vegetables in his farm; sleeping soundly at night; eating three meals a day; knowing his six children go to school daily; and not imposing on their Iligan City kin with whom they are presently staying since the city siege—with the line-up of foreign donors that comprise the veritable United Nations of countries ready and willing to come to Marawi's aid "with strings attached" (para. 21). When I read in the *Bulatlat* article that the Armed Forces of the Philippines unearthed last August a 1953 presidential decree that classified 6,000 hectares of Marawi's 8,700 hectares as a military reservation, the image of Neruda's (2004) mermaid swimming by mistake into land to be turned into a spittoon and ashtray for drunks came unbidden.

Aside from surfacing the evacuees' desire for autonomy and self-determination—an often ignored perspective in mainstream and developmental journalism that elides the voices representing the *bakwits,* marginalized stakeholders in Marawi's rehabilitation—the *Bulatlat* writer presented the macro forces of state and neoliberal interests shaping the future of Marawi City, a contested space that pits "rejected selves" and "radically reconstituted identities" against "the most disarticulating forces and tensions" (Escobar, 1995, p. 215). The frame used in the *Bulatlat* article situates Asim and other Marawi residents in the gendered space created by post-conflict human insecurities: powerlessness, homelessness, economic vulnerability, social marginalization, trafficking, and other ways violence affects people's lives and livelihoods. Beyond the journalistic techniques of putting a human face on a social issue and inserting "story color" and human interest to appeal to readers' emotions, the human security framework of the article orients the readers to the ways violence and gender interrelate: "how violence is both gendered and creates gender" (Tripp, 2013, p. 5). In its presentation of the marginalization of Marawi's residents in the state and global interests' plans for the city, the article includes the dimension of "global structural relationships" affecting power relations. Inequalities within (state, military, and big business) and without (wealthier countries, donor aid, international institutions) "entrench existing power inequalities rather than challenge them" (Tripp, 2013, p. 17).

Of the seven articles analyzed, the context, depth, and complexity of reportage and analysis was noted in articles written by three women for a non-government organization (Silbert for United Nations Women), a media advocacy group (Mendoza for CMFR), and alternative media (Dee for *Bulatlat*). It is not so much the writer's gender as the lens used in reporting and representing women and their subjectivities that frames the women subjects. "Development as discourse" is pronounced in the writing of the other women despite their backgrounds in development work or journalism: Maluyo is an emergency communication specialist with World Vision and David is an editorial-page columnist for the *Philippine Daily Inquirer.* For the male writers embedded with development-oriented organizations—Lanit is emergency coordinator of CARE Philippines and Guilbert, with Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charity arm of the news conglomerate—the advocacy of their respective organizations predominates as the lens in reporting about and representing women in "development as discourse".

Extricating women

My analysis of seven online articles about women's role in the reconstruction of post-conflict Marawi was meaningful not just for surfacing and exploring the "silences" of women in development and journalism discourse. As narrated by the poet Adrienne Rich (1973) in her poem, "Diving into the wreck," the mermaid/merman must dive, alone, to find "the wreck and not the story of the wreck/ the thing itself and not the myth" (lines 62-63).

Some of the myths created by "development as discourse" and disseminated through the uncritical, superficial reportage of Women in Development (WID) by some practitioners in news media and NGO media focus solely on women's welfare and well-being, stereotyping them as victims and recipients of development dole-outs but failing to portray their efforts at self-reliance and self-determination. Another essentialist presentation is to portray women as heroes and superwomen, without contextualizing their struggles and glossing over their difficulties and dilemmas to bring about their survival and that of their families in post-conflict situations. Ignoring how women are affected by gender, poverty, race, and power structures and relations homogenizes them as sharing the same problems and needs, as well as diminishes their accomplishments to overcome these barriers and obstacles to bring about personal and social transformation. Reflecting the multiplicity of subjectivities and voices of women, demystifying the women in Marawi as conflict women implies portraying their search for human security—freedom from economic, cultural, sexual, and social oppressions and exploitation—in the context of cultural, political, social, and global forces shaping them.

As a former development information worker and current community journalist in Cebu, I support, based on the insights drawn from the analysis of seven online articles written by news media and NGO media, continuing efforts for media-NGO dialogue and exchange of learning to improve the visibility and depth of the news media's reportage and analysis of women's participation in development, as well as articulate the multiple voices of silenced or marginalized women and amplify their participation in national discourse and governance.

Postdevelopment theories are useful as frames for locating and extricating the lost woman. Uncritical acceptance of the power of development to "name women" is to become a party of our systemic erasure. Typified descriptions become a "way of knowing and a way of NOT knowing, a way of talking ABOUT women and a way of silencing women" (Escobar, 1995, pp. 179-180) from narrating their individual experiences as shaped by societal forces.

Unlike the nameless mermaid in ancient Ilocano lore, Cebuanos have a name for the half-woman, half-fish creature: *kataw.* A hybrid of *tawo* (meaning "person" in Cebuano), the mermaid's halves face eternal rejection but in its negotiation of narratives, this "rejected self" explores spaces for "radically reconstituting identities" for liberation, to rephrase Escobar. As self-critical writers and readers of text, women have the power to name and surface their silenced selves.

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