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Sakit at Pasakit: The Epidemics amid the Japanese Occupation in the Philippines, 1942 – 1945

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Abstract– Amidst the Japanese Occupation in the Philippines, where human atrocities took place, the Filipinos were not spared from epidemics and this condition added to the hardships and sufferings of the Filipinos. The Japanese period is always stereotyped in the Philippine history as the most violent colonisers, the risk and danger always come with the human factor, but we must also consider that risk and danger are not isolated on human action; natural factors can also bring these. This study will focus on the narratives and historical accounts were the natural calamities during that time 1942-1945 and the colonisers’ corresponding action in managing these calamities, especially in propagating their political and cultural propaganda.

Keywords Natural calamities · Biological calamities · Epidemics · Propaganda · Japanese colonisation · The Philippines · Sakit (sickness) · Pasakit (Atrocities) ·

1. Introduction

“We are, on the contrary, urged to share the blessings of prosperity with our fellow Orientals. We can be truly free as a nation only if we are also economically and culturally independent of the West”.

Jorge Vargas, Chairman of the Philippine Executive Commission, stated this phrase during the occupation period. This statement showed and justified the intentions and reasons of the Japanese in their colonisation in the Philippines. It is apparent in the various propaganda that the Japanese often presented in radio programmes and newspapers. Often also this propaganda aims and contains statements showing and promoting their personal goals but stated in artistic and deceiving announcements. The statements on the radio, newspapers and even

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brochures contain the intention to show that the Japanese are allies and not enemies, urging members Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon HUKBALAHAP (People's Army Against the Japanese) to surrender to the Japanese, encourage politicians to collaborate with the Japanese and invites Filipino to renounce the western culture and re-embrace the pro-Asian culture.

They used every opportunity in pushing their advocacy, whether in the period of convenience and especially in times of difficulty such as calamities. This research explains how epidemics become a calamity and how it affects the Filipinos amid Japanese colonisation. This will also explain how the Japanese colonisers demonstrate and take advantage of epidemics to promote their personal, political, and cultural ideals.

2. The biological calamities

There are three kinds of natural calamities, namely: the geo-physical is connected with the movement of the earth such as earthquakes that hit various parts of our country; the climatic represent the deluge, strong winds and rain, storm and flooding; and the biological that focuses on the spread of epidemics. The three most common epidemics during the Japanese occupation are leprosy, malaria, and tuberculosis. These diseases were widespread at that time and became a significant threat to the lives of the Filipinos and the Japanese.

2.1 Malaria

With the advent of the Japanese delayed many medical services for reasons of war, and among the more severely affected are those experiencing malaria. According to the report of the U.S. Military in December 1941:

The events of the Second World War have aggravated the burden of malaria in the conflict by the military. The number of malaria victims is almost the same as the number of war deaths in battle. After the attack on Pearl Harbour, in just a few weeks, they are encamped in hot, humid forests full of mosquitoes; 200 to 700 people recounted suffering fever and delirium, resulting in nearly 24,000 deaths.

In November 1942, in the past six months, the Bureau of Health had 25 763 cases of malaria in the provinces of Central Luzon. The casualty number is 2.27%, or 576 people. The 42.68% is conditional worst called benign tertian malaria, 29.82% are malignant tertian malaria, 20.46% are mixed malaria infection, and 0.04% is conditional quartan malaria or the worst type of malaria.

From 1943 to 1945, the recorded number of people tested positive for malaria has reached 572 000. They continued to live despite the sickness and the violence

brought by the Japanese. Even the struggling guerrillas struggle with this disease, so to remedy it, they used the cinchona tree as a cure that was once found in Bukidnon province.

The government issued a decree to cure diseases caused by mosquitoes such as dengue and malaria. The Bureau of Health has warned the public to follow specific guidelines to eliminate *Culex* and *Aedes* mosquito species that carry malaria. In addition, they have set up groups in each district that serve as exterminators of mosquitoes. They often use gasoline and kerosene as sprayers on canals and damp areas to eradicate mosquitoes, but in the absence of these, they are better at mechanical suppression such as cleaning and drying in the downed areas, clearing canals and covering estuaries. Instead of kerosene and gasoline, they used bayate (a vine whose fruit is as big as a grain of coffee) as an effective sprayer and killer of mosquitoes. Accordingly, vaccination against people living with high levels of malaria such as Bataan, Pampanga, Quezon, Bulacan, Cavite and Laguna was also promoted to target people with the disease that mosquitoes can cause malaria. As a result of these measures, report of the Bureau of Commissioner of Education, Health and Public Welfare, after nearly a year's outbreak of malaria epidemics in the provinces of Bataan, Batangas, Bulacan, Isabela, Laguna, Pangasinan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Rizal, Tayabas and Zambales was controlled by the Bureau of Health. In their submitted records from November 23, 1942, to March 31, 1943, there were 38,951 malaria cases in 11 malaria hospitals and 15 malaria wards in various provinces and Manila. Of these 38,951 cases, only 1.33% died and all recovered.

2.2 Tuberculosis

This disease was one of the leading causes of death in the American occupation in the Philippines. In 1936, it was estimated that 32,235 people died from tuberculosis, which is almost equal to the five leading causes of death in that year, such as malaria, influenza, dysentery and typhoid. The leading cause of the spread of this epidemic is lack of proper education, lack of sanitation, poverty and malnutrition. The situation worsened with the arrival of the Japanese in the Philippines; many hospitals, dispensaries and wards were damaged by the war, and some became Japanese military camps.

The Tribune, on August 12, 1943, reported that approximately 80,000 people were diagnosed and treated in the establishment of the Tuberculosis Division for six months. From January to June, 27,512 persons were given dispensary treatment, home treatment is 493, 418 have been entered into the tuberculosis institute, and 51,319 were examined. In contrast, the Bureau of Health and the Philippine Tuberculosis Society released a report on the number of tuberculosis patients before and during the Japanese occupation, found in the table below.

Before the Japanese Occupation		
Year	Number of Patient Tested	Number of Positive Cases
1939	262,804	16,652
1940	261,143	15,294
1941	175,701	10,804
Total	699,648	42,804
During the Japanese Occupation		
1942	27,312	4,418
1943	45,113	7,419
1944	29,581	5,948
Total	102,006	17,785

Source: M. Quisumbing, *the Eradication of Tuberculosis: The Greatest Health Problem in the Philippines*

It can be seen that the number of positive cases declined because they only tested a smaller number of patients, so it is unclear whether the number of victims of this epidemic at that time decreased.

2.3 Leprosy

Aside from tuberculosis and malaria, the Filipinos also faced the struggle of leprosy even before the Japanese in the Philippines. From Manila in April 1942, in conjunction with the Death March, was leprosy (a disease caused by bacterial infection that affects the skin, peripheral nerves in the hands and feet, mucus in the nose and eyes). They built a military base, the Japanese arrived in Coron, not far from Culion (Leper Colony). They visited Culion, and unfortunately, they attacked the storage of food and confiscated all rice and other supplies they found there, which led to a lack of basic needs of the residents and gave way for some to flee in their fear of the Japanese. Just like the 45 people evacuated aboard a small boated, the Japanese soldiers killed them when they approached Panay. The continued existence of the epidemic in the middle of infliction of the Japanese in this area is estimated nearly 2,000 was left from nearly 5,000. Among these 2000 lepers, almost 700 immediately died in the first year of the war for malnutrition, lack of enough medicine and medical attention, and fear and hunger.

To alleviate poverty and hunger, the hospital staff took some steps under the leadership of Dr Jose Velasco (chief pathologist), and one of them is exchanging products on another island where they exchange their clothing for food. Although the situation was poor, they also used their illness to survive the Japanese exploitation somehow, because when they claimed that foods such as chicken and other food came from Culion, they were not taken by the Japanese in fear that they

would be infected with leprosy. The lives of those who lived there continued, and some described their lives as follows:

Simeon (Dumang-og, Cebu) - We were looking for something to eat. We exchange our shirts for rice in Kabulihan town. We are often afraid of the Japanese, so at night we go out to find something to eat, and we are always near the mangroves so we can hide by the time we hear the Japanese boats coming.

Dolores (17 years old of the outbreak of war) - At the outbreak of the war, everyone was filled with anxiety that the Japanese might migrate to Culion. The nuns were concerned that no Japanese or even guerrillas could take no wives and families - as happened in Manchuria. One nun suggested finding a leper's wife to watch over us. So I decided to marry Juanito Lausan. There was no order in Culion. Many were hungry and had nothing to eat. Others died from eating poorly prepared "crabs".

Hipolito (10-year-old boy scout during the war) - I was in first grade when war broke out. Since I was a young scout, I responded to Dr Nolasco to help those in need. Me and my friends Pastor Sabar, Juan Patubo, Simeon dela Cruz formed the group to look for something to eat. I was ten years old and the youngest in the group, but I was their runner. One day in 1942, news spread that the Japanese would burn Culion. I realised it was worth reporting ... so I sought after the guerrilla leader in Paragua. On my way home, I moved to Paragua without informing my parents. I travelled alone for almost a week, eating only cassava and bananas. It was a tough challenge to find Amores (guerrilla leader), when I told the news, he immediately sent me back. I saw only the ocean next to Culion burning on my way home. I missed the air and ocean battle, but I saw only corpses floating in the sea and smelled for almost a week.

3. Biological calamities and Japanese propaganda

Inferred from these accounts, the epidemics contributed to the misery, and these changed the lifestyle of Filipinos and the management of Japan to respond to the needs and demands of that time.

The Japanese advance their propaganda even in the time of an epidemic. Through this, they are addressing the concern of the Filipino people while progressing their personal goals and presenting themselves as allies and not opponents. Most of this propaganda is presented through images, posters, news articles and projects through different Japanese institutions.

IMAGE NO. 1

A poster in the contest organised by the Department of Health and Welfare
(The Tribune, November 22, 1942)



IMAGE NO. 2

Winner of the poster making contest hosted by the Department of Health and
Welfare (The Tribune, November 22, 1942)



Meanwhile, the 1st and 2nd pictures are the winning posters in the contest conducted by the Bureau of Health and Welfare, aiming to promote citizens' awareness in solidarity to combat the epidemic. The fifth picture shows a grown man or woman with the caption, "Stop, Look. Health is Wealth: The New Philippines depend on Strong and Healthy Citizens" this was used as propaganda by the Japanese in their establishment of the Kapisanan ng Paglilingkod sa Bagong Pilipinas KALIBAPI (Association of Serving New Philippines) launched on December 30, 1942. In the statement of Commander in Chief Masaharu Homma:

... The new organisation will represent the total population of the Philippines ... the Executive has been developed to stimulate the consciousness of Filipinos about loving and serving the people and unite the Japanese Military Administration ...

The Japanese used the KALIBAPI as supporters of the Japanese Military Administration to easily promote their policies like the complete expulsion of Western thought in the consciousness of Filipinos and accomplish the plans of the Japanese contained in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Most of the members of this are used in the propaganda as spokesmen under the Bureau of Publicity in spreading the goals and activities of the Japanese through the press, radio, cinema, theatre, posters, meetings, rallies and other activities with direct coordination with the Japanese military. So this poster by the Japanese conditioned the consciousness of Filipinos to unite and join the upcoming establishment of the KALIBAPI and used the biological calamity to encourage Filipino to nurse their public health to prepare for the establishment of the new and innovative Philippines supervised by the Japanese.

The 2nd picture gains 1st place in the contest mentioned above of posters and entitled "Exercise ... The Way to Health and Happiness." Maybe a simple note, but it also contains propaganda oriented in cultural aspects. One is constantly reminded of the Japanese culture to exercise or Radio Taiso. It is strictly enforced during 7:00 am to all officers and employees, students and even ordinary citizens, by following the steps with music played by the radio station (managed by the Japanese), it has shown the simple act of showing Japanese superiority through obedience of the Filipinos in their command. According to Ricardo and Lydia Jose, the Japanese preferred to instil in our consciousness the discipline by Radio Taiso, where the invisible authorities command the Filipinos through radio. So when the Filipinos followed the reminder, we 'avoided the sickness and shaped our discipline by following the Japanese.

To meet the needs of malaria, they also showed their gentleness through the free distribution of medicines in places where there is widespread epidemics such as

Bataan, Pampanga, Bulacan, Cavite, Laguna and Manila. General Hideki Premier Tozyo sent the 4,500 drug tablets of quinine. They are immediately distributed to various hospitals, clinics, dispensaries, and some public offices in the management of the Health Bureau, saying that the outcome of these drugs is the gradual reduction of cases of the said epidemic.

Associated with the inhibition of epidemic malaria and distributing essential quinine medicines to the sick, “prevention is better than cure” the Japanese launched a project through the Philippine Malaria Relief Association to distribute mosquito nets to serve as a barrier from the mosquitoes that carry the disease malaria. Almost 2,000 mosquito nets were sent to different provinces of the Philippines such as Bataan (Balanga, Abucay, Pilar, Orion, and Orion Bagak), Tayabas (Quezon), Batangas, Pampanga, Manila and Laguna. The mosquito nets are made of abaca by selected Filipinos, usually orphaned children and widowed by the war. The distribution of mosquito nets was estimated and managed by the Bureau of Public Welfare to ensure that the needy or poor people who cannot afford them will only receive the mosquito nets. According to the executive secretary of the Malaria Relief Association, Dr Manuel Olympia, the first priority are the people in the province of Bataan who were affected by the epidemic and victims of war.

The mosquito nets were provided to safeguard the Filipinos from the mosquitoes to prevent malaria; it is also used to show the good side of the Japanese, especially to the victims and survivors of the war. By distributing mosquito nets with quinine and other basic needs, they want to erase the harmful effects and violence brought about by the war in the eyes and minds of the Filipinos. However, ultimately, mosquito nets and medicine are not enough to relieve the pain of abuse and violence they also caused.

The released newspaper article tells the rules, response, and strategy to express their political and cultural propaganda. The article is the means to tell and explain that they have come to help and will only succeed if the Filipinos will properly collaborate with their policies.

4. Conclusion

During these epidemics, the Japanese had shown their kindness by helping and responding to the victims, but it failed to change the perspective of Filipinos at that time. They probably experienced more severe difficulties than the epidemics they experienced in the Japanese hands. These epidemics have contributed to the suffering of the Filipinos while also in the hands of Japanese atrocities.

As a whole, this research narrated the condition of the Filipinos as we are subjected to the Japanese s emphasising the role of environmental factors (natural

calamities) and how they used this to advance their personal goals and show their propaganda in expressing their vision for the Philippines, to the latter, the benefit is not for the Philippines but in the hands of the Japanese. Filipino or Japanese need to respond and cope with the motion of nature brought by the biological calamities based on the demands of the situation and opportunities. Filipinos' vulnerability and resiliency for every epidemic contribute to a lack of basic needs (food and medicine). The Japanese are changing and advancing their strategies to use the epidemics as propaganda for their interests and political and economic purposes.

In the end, displaying pictures and the narratives from news articles was not enough to completely overcome the Japanese to promote their propaganda. Yes, it was successful but only through paper, but it is not translated into reality, consciousness and mentality of the Filipino people.

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