

As I See It

Where are the co-conspirators in the massacre?

Monday 30 November 2009, by [CRUZ Neal](#) (Date first published: 30 November 2009).

DATU UNSAY MAYOR ANDAL AMPATUAN JR., now detained at the headquarters of the National Bureau of Investigation in Manila as the mastermind of the Maguindanao massacre, may be just a fall guy, or a sacrificial lamb. This was an opinion expressed by two prominent Muslim leaders, Amina Rasul and Nasser Marohomsalic, when asked about it.

For such a gruesome and grisly crime, it is not likely that the younger Ampatuan, son and namesake of the clan's patriarch, Maguindanao Gov. Andal Ampatuan Sr., did not consult other members of the clan. Possibly, he consulted, and got the nod, of the patriarch himself. So why is Junior the only one detained? And why not in the police jails where other suspects are detained? He has a comfortable cell all to himself in the NBI headquarters.

In fact, Jesus Dureza, a former presidential adviser on the peace process, had to "negotiate" with the clan's leaders to let him take Andal Jr. to Manila so that the national government can show it was doing something about the mass murders and quell the public clamor for action. The old man probably agreed to give up his son to give the rest of the clan some breathing spell. Justice Secretary Agnes Devanadera herself had to helicopter to General Santos City to take custody of him from Dureza and take him back to Manila. Journalists noted that Ampatuan Jr. was not handcuffed as is the usual practice with ordinary suspects.

But Andal Jr. is no ordinary suspect. Apart from the fact that he is supposed to be the mastermind of the cold-blooded and premeditated mass killing of at least 57 non-combatants, he is the favorite son, and probably heir apparent, of the clan patriarch himself to whom the President owes a debt of gratitude for making her win in his province in the 2004 presidential elections, and some of her candidates in the 2007 senatorial elections. The young Ampatuan must not be treated like an ordinary suspect. After all, the crime for which he is charged is far from ordinary. Besides, she cannot treat the Ampatuans like ordinary people. They know a lot about the 2004 presidential elections and how GMA got so many votes in Maguindanao. Offend them and they may sing like canaries about what they know about those two elections in their province.

But why only Junior? Sure he was seen giving orders at the scene of the crime. Sure, the wife of Vice Mayor Esmael Mangudadatu phoned her husband that she was slapped by the young Ampatuan, but it is not likely that, like George Washington, he did it all by himself. He must have told other members of the clan, possibly the old man himself. So they are co-conspirators. So why have they not been charged, or arrested, or even interrogated?

Obviously, Malacañang thought that with Junior behind bars, the noisy public would stop complaining about the slow action of the national government. And considering the slow wheels of justice in this country, the case won't be decided until halfway into the term of the next president, at which time the heinous crime would be forgotten and those accused of it would get off with pats on the hand, or even acquitted on some technicality or other.

Even if convicted, the killers may be quietly paroled or pardoned when nobody is looking if GMA is elected speaker and a “friendly” president succeeds her in Malacañang. GMA is known to be friendly to criminals, such as convicted rapist Romeo Jalosjos and the convicted assassins of Ninoy Aquino.

And where are the other co-conspirators? In their opulent mansions in Davao and Maguindanao. There were at least 100 armed men who gunned down the victims. Not one of them has been arrested. Two military and police officers who were at the scene of the crime have been relieved but not charged. They are going to be used as prosecution witnesses, the government said. But where are the policemen and Cagfus who participated in the murders?

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Back to Rasul and Marohomsalic: These two Muslim leaders think that the implications of the carnage may be deeper than it looks. For in the Muslim culture, women, children, the elders, the weak and the sickly, are accorded the highest respect. And yet they were among those machine-gunned and buried in the mass graves beside the roadside in Maguindanao. That is “un-Islamic,” the two said. So it is possible that the real masterminds are not Muslims.

Asked who they think these “real masterminds” are and what could be their motive, they replied that the motive could be an excuse to impose martial law. A state of emergency has already been declared in Maguindanao and neighboring provinces. If violence continues (and considering the hatred and the Muslim penchant for exacting a “tooth for a tooth,” this is likely), or bombs explode in Metro Manila or elsewhere, the next step could be the declaration of martial law. And you know what that means.

Rasul and Marohomsalic also said that the national government should impose the constitutional ban on political dynasties. As I said in an earlier column, family dynasties foster “warlordism.” [1] Because of the votes that dynasties can deliver to national candidates, coddling of warlords has nurtured the rise of warlordism, not only in Mindanao but in other parts of the Philippines, Rasul said. “People power has been replaced by warlord power,” she said. “Checks and balances in governments have been replaced by political dynasties.”

Because of the “heinousness” of the crime, do they approve of the reimposition of capital punishment as some have proposed?

Their answer: “Yes. That is a part of Islamic justice.”

By Neal Cruz

P.S.

* From Philippine Daily Inquirer. First Posted 22:44:00 11/29/2009.

Footnotes

[1] See [Philippines: RP family dynasties proliferating like mushrooms](#)