

COMMUNITY NARRATIVES OF SOCIAL TRAUMA – A Case Study of a Sitio in Mindanao

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The article addresses social trauma in a conflict-affected community in Pikit, North Cotabato, Mindanao, in the Philippines. Through an analysis of narratives and community practices the study intends to answer the following question: How did armed conflict (organized violence) and internal displacement impact on the community and how did the community respond? The analysis of the interviews from the study shows that three themes were frequently used to describe and explain the state of the social fabric, i.e. how well it was functioning or how disrupted it was; namely, significant events in the community's history; responses to harassment; and actors and coping. It is shown that organized violence, war and recurrent forced displacement of communities produce responses that form a complex pattern of suffering (social trauma) and resilience (positive transformation). The interviews give a fuller understanding of how social trauma is constructed and sustained in communities impacted by organized violence. The study of peoples' narratives provides us with knowledge on how trauma is experienced and understood by the impacted community. The study shows that responses to organised violence may foster locally based adaptive processes that help the community to recover and responses that may be detrimental to the community's social support system. To understand these processes, not as dualistic but as interwoven as social tissue, it is necessary to study how local narratives present problems and hope of a better future.

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1. Introduction

The present study addresses social trauma in a conflict-affected community in Mindanao. In operational terms it holds to the following research question: *How do armed conflict (organized violence) and internal displacement impact the community and how does the community respond to this?*

Social trauma is studied from the perspective of the community by examining how situations of violence or armed conflicts are presented in the narratives given by community members. The data consist of interviews with a sample of people living in Satanay-Gantong, a sitio¹ of 671 people² in Mindanao, Philippines. This article should be read together with Anasarias & Berliner (2008) that describes the impressive peace-building process the population in this sitio – together with other sitios in the *Space for Peace* – successfully has launched.

2. Background

The present study focuses on a community composed of Muslims and Christians, and is part of a wider study of seven communities. It intends to describe context specific effects and responses to organized violence and human rights violations as part of the different understandings and practices of the »tri-people³« in Mindanao. The different indigenous peoples are

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- 1 A *sitio* is the smallest political-administrative unit (cluster of households often defined by kinship) in the Philippines and a number of them form a *barangay*. A *barangay* is the next level in the political-administrative system. It normally consists of no less than 300 families and is led by an elected council headed by a *Punong Barangay* with representatives from the *sitios*. *Barangay* is the native Filipino term for a village. A number of *barangays* forms municipalities and cities. The term *barangay* and its structure in the modern context were conceived during the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos, replacing the old term »barrios«. The word *barangay* is derived from an ancient Malay boat called a *balangay* since it is commonly believed that in pre-colonial Philippines, each original coastal »*barangay*« is formed as a result of settlers who arrived by boat from other places in Southeast Asia.
 - 2 2004 *Partnership Community Survey of Balay Rehabilitation Center and the Nalapaan Barangay Council*.
 - 3 *Tri-people* refers to the three broad segments of the population of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago, namely the Lumad (a term that collectively refers to at least 18 groups of non-Islamized indigenous peoples), the Moro communities (consisting of the 13 ethno-linguistic groups in southern Philippines who converted to Islam), and the generally Christian migrant settlers belonging to around 64 ethnic groups. The term was said to have originated within the national democratic movement in the 1980s. Some academics, historians, and groups in civil society have accepted the *tri-people* concept to highlight the fact that Mindanao has now become a shared territory of people with different faiths and culture. Others, however, regard the

referred to as Lumads, the Muslims are also referred to as the Moros and include diverse groups of indigenous people, who have converted to Islam. The Christians are often referred to as settlers as they were the latest group to settle in Mindanao.

Mindanao – the second biggest island in the southern Philippines – has for decades been subjected to recurrent internal armed conflict between national military forces and the locally based MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front)⁴ and the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front)⁵, which strive for a higher degree of independence in the area. The intensity of the conflict was at its highest in the 1970s and during the military campaigns in 2000 and 2003. Fragile peace-talks and cease-fires have been established in the periods between the wars and a new cease-fire was agreed upon in 2003. Peace-keeping forces from the South-East Asia region have been deployed to monitor the cease-fire upon the request of the Philippino government and the MILF. The recurrent wars and the organized violence by the fighting parties have led to widespread suffering, deprivation and a continuous violation of basic human rights in the affected communities.

term as »divisive« saying that it tends to categorize the inhabitants of Mindanao along ethnic and religious lines. Other historians prefer using the term *Mindanawon* to promote an inclusive description of the population in an attempt to explore how Muslim, Christian, and Lumad groups can work together in Mindanao with mutual respect and acceptance among themselves.

- 4 The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) launched the so called *Bangsamoro* war for self-determination through a series of daring attacks on military targets in late 1972. Its founding leaders were believed to have undergone military training in Malaysia in 1968-69. In its earlier manifesto, it declared as its goal the establishment of a separate *Bangsamoro Republic* to cover the entire island of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan – spanning across approximately 37 percent of the Philippino territory where, before the organized arrival of Christian settlers in the 1900s, the Muslims were the majority. Armed struggles have ceased with the signing of a final peace agreement with the Philippine government in September 1996. It was agreed, among other things, that some of its fighters would be integrated into the Philippine Armed Forces (AFP) and its leaders would be allowed to exercise governance in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).
- 5 The formal announcement of the establishment of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) was made in 1984. Sheikh Salamat Hashim was its founding chairperson and used to be the vice-chairperson of the MNLF. He left his former group in 1977 reportedly due to political differences. The MILF did not intervene in the peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the MNLF, or engage itself in active military operations during the period. However, it did proclaim the resumption of an armed struggle for independence following the MNLF signing of the peace agreement. The military response to the MILF armed challenge led to the displacement of more than a million civilians in Mindanao up to 2003 when it agreed on a ceasefire and to pursue peace talks with the government.

Saranay-Gantong is part of Barangay Takepan, a barangay in the municipality of Pikit, in the province of North Cotabato. Located in central Mindanao, the land of North Cotabato is fertile due to the tributaries of the Pulangi River (Rio Grande de Mindanao River). Pikit was the site of five out of eight agricultural colonies in Cotabato initiated by the US colonial government in 1913 through what was then known as the Osmeña Colony Act.⁶ The colonies were established to increase food production, notably rice, and to attract non-Muslim land tillers from other parts of the country to come and settle in Mindanao. Occupied by a mixed group, non-Christian farmers were allotted eight hectares of land each, while the Christian settlers were given 16 hectares.

With the influx of Christian settlers from Cebu and Luzon, Cotabato became the centre of commerce in the region. But the Christian settlers were not immediately welcomed with open arms. According to interviews with local community members, the first Catholic Church built in Cotabato City was burned down by angry Muslims fearing conversion. Yet the Christians outnumbered the Muslims in terms of population. Today, 71% of the population of Cotabato comes from Luzon or the Visayas. Only 18% of the population consists of the original inhabitants of the land who are the Maguindanaons, Manobos and the Iranons⁷.

In Pikit, many of the Christian settlers started off in the Barangay of Dalegaoen⁸ and then proceeded to settle in the lands of the surrounding barangays, including the sitio of Saranay-Gantong in Barangay Takepan. These settlers claimed the land by clearing and tilling it. In some cases, land was given to them by the local inhabitants. By the 1960's when the

6 Segio Osemena Sr, a member of the Philippine Assembly, sponsored the law in 1912, which was subsequently named after him. The first batch of 100 migrant farmers that were enticed to settle in Pikit were from Cebu, one of the islands in the central Philippines generally referred to as the Visayas. Most of them were either single or newlyweds. According to records, they arrived in Pikit on June 17, 1913. Known as *Colonos* among the locals, they received governmental support in the form of weekly food rations, clothing, cash (the amount depended on the size of the family), work animals and farm implements so they were able to start production. In return they were to pay the government by installment 30 percent of their yearly harvest. Not long after, news of the »good life« in Mindanao spread to other places. Encouraged by subsequent government policies, waves of Christian migrants arrived at the land inhabited by the Moros.

7 According to the Municipal historical records, the original inhabitants of Pikit are the Maguindanaons, Manobos, and the Iranons. The Maguindanaons lived in the lowlands and along the Rio Grande de Mindanao. The Manobos used to live in the highlands and the Iranons inhabited the north of Pikit.

8 Barangay Dalengaoen is one of the 42 barangays of the Municipality of Pikit in the province of North Cotabato. It is adjacent to Barangay Takepan and was one of the most affected communities during the 2000 conflict between the GRP and the MILF. It is also a part of the GINAPALADTAKA Communities in Pikit which in 2004 declared themselves *Space for Peace Areas*.

wealth disparity between the different groups became distinct, a rebel group advocating Muslim autonomy and eventually Islamic separatism emerged. In the 1970's, Pikit – among other municipalities – became the site of intense fighting.

Selection of the community

This study of one particular community is part of a larger study of seven communities in the Central Mindanao Region and the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. A set of criteria was adopted to choose the communities to be the areas of study. The criteria were that each community holds a displaced population, is conflict-affected, represents an ethnic composition common to Mindanao and has been or is a partner community of Balay. This would make it possible to discern distinct important characteristics to achieve a contextual understanding of social trauma.

Sitio Saranay-Gantong is chosen as one of the areas because it represents a community with Muslims and Christians. It is suitable for the study not only because it experienced internal displacement several times due to the armed conflict but it is also a partner community of Balay.

While Muslim and Christian community members share different memories of the initial wars in the 1970's, an important aspect guiding the selection of Saranay Gantong for this study is its unique history of a long-standing relationship between its Muslim and Christian residents. Saranay-Gantong is based in the barangay of Takepan where 61% of the population is Christian and 39% is Muslim. Saranay Gantong, however, is historically a Muslim community that experienced the integration of Christians in the early 1900s. In fact, according to a recent survey 78% of the population in the community still practices the religion of Islam, while the remaining 22% consists of other Christian religions, mainly Roman Catholic and Iglesia ni Cristo.

Saranay-Gantong is also a community that has gained a reputation as a model community in many respects. It was one of the communities selected by the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Social Welfare Development in the 1960's to be a model agricultural community, community members have vivid memories of grand celebrations accompanying the harvesting of crops. Homes were also selected and awarded prizes on the basis of their appearance and productivity. By the 1990's Saranay-Gantong was identified by the NGO communities, including the Immaculate Conception Parish as a pilot community for their Culture of Peace Seminar and dialogue sessions.

Sitio Saranay-Gantong was one of the hardest hit communities during the 2003 war, not because of confrontations between the governmental warring parties and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), but because of an incident of harassment and violence which deeply affected the community. One late afternoon in April, while armed confrontations between the GRP

and the MILF were going on in other parts of Central Mindanao, a group of unidentified armed men came to Sitio Saranay, threatened the people and asked for their money and other belongings. The Christian families in particular lost their cattle and carabaos⁹. That very afternoon after the armed men left, the harassed families in Sitio Saranay-Gantong evacuated. The Muslims stayed in the Batulawan Evacuation Centre while the Christian families stayed at the Takepan Elementary School.

3. Theoretical Perspectives

Research on the impact of war and atrocities on people has been reported on from particular perspectives. In the 1980's and 1990's a psychiatric perspective was somewhat dominant (Pupavac, 2001). A number of inventories have been constructed to measure the level of traumatization at the individual level. These tools were originally developed for clinical use, but have also proved useful in epidemiological research of entire populations. Research by Silove (2005) concludes:

With the restoration of safety, stability and material supplies, most individuals and their social structures are capable of making their own adaptations to the post-conflict situation without excessive external involvement. Programs that are clearly 'social' in their functions, in that they restore the fundamentals of communal life, may have greater legitimacy than those that attempt to have a direct psychological impact on a mass level, especially because many of those targeted will adapt naturally over time. (Silove, 2005:40).

If the living conditions continue to be uprooted without proper livelihood and social support, a high number of people will develop more permanent mental problems. However, on the other hand, if the living conditions are normalized, only a limited number of people will present mental problems in the long run.

A challenge to the diagnostic approach is that it categorizes the presented problems in previously fixed terms. It may ask for the amount of nightmares, but not about the particular content of the nightmare. People's suffering is presented in narrative forms, meaning that they tell stories about the

9 Carabao or kalabaw in Philippino is a domesticated type of water buffalo. Carabaos are highly associated with farmers in the Philippines, being the farm animal of choice for pulling the plow in the fields and the cart used to haul farm produce to the market. Because of its great contribution to agriculture the carabao is considered to be a national symbol of the Philippines.

suffering embedded in daily life with its activities, contacts and goals. These stories give another angle to the lived experience of suffering and survival than the generic knowledge.

It is of great value to study the conditions for and the development of civil war through a critical, historical analysis, but still this should include a description of the narratives presented by the impacted people. These narratives convey the values and intentions of the narrators as members of the community. By collecting and analysing the narratives it is possible to describe how suffering and survival is locally understood, weaved into the understanding of the past, present and future.

4. Method

The collection of narrative data is always part of a relationship between the narrator (individual or group) and the researchers. In fact, the researcher is part of the storytelling *subject* as he also partakes in the dialogue. Furthermore, the research is embedded in other social activities and even made possible by them.

In 2003, immediately after the bilateral ceasefire was proclaimed by the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Sitio Saranay-Gantong started its partnership with the Balay Rehabilitation Centre. A dialogical assessment was conducted to produce a comprehensive profile of the sitio's resources and needs. Among the major projects that the community and Balay decided to conduct together are counselling sessions for adults and children, livelihood assistance programs, relief distribution and supplementary feeding. The researchers came to the community as part of Balay. Thus, they interacted with the community as involved investigators, participants, and transformative agents in the peace process.

The data was collected during a three-month stay in the sitio by two researchers.¹⁰ A quota sample (including Muslims and Christians of different age groups) was interviewed in its natural setting in order to collect narratives on the understanding of the impact of the organized violence on the community. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted in a very open manner to be able to gain access to the community member's view of his or her own social world (Carter and Henderson, 2005).

It was found that people were interested in telling stories, called *pakikipagkwentuhan* – in line with the cultural sensitive methodological recommendations offered by Orteza (1997). Storytelling is an old and valued practice of the community. The teller addresses what he or she finds

10 Radics and Pulmano did the data collection. The analysis was carried out by Radics, Pulmano, Anasarias and Berliner with inputs from Kjaerulf. The text was written by Radics, Pulmano, Anasarias & Berliner.

important for the others to know. Following the story, one can ask questions, labelled as *pagtatanong-tanong* (Pe-Pua, 1985). The conversation in itself contributes to building mutual respect, called *pakikipagkapwatao* (described by Salazar-Clemina, 1991). To be part of the storytelling in the community one must participate in *pakikipanuluyan* (living in the people's homes), or *pagdalaw-dalaw* (making short but frequent visits), and *napadaan lang po* (greeting people) (Enriquez, 1994).

In this process 12 people were interviewed in 3 or 4 sessions for each person to address individual life stories while another 12 people were interviewed as additional key informants to expand the understanding of the life stories. The interviews took place in people's homes. The stories were tape recorded and transcribed and were presented to the interviewed people to secure the quality of the data through consensus – as part of the social practice described above.

Data analysis

Data analysis focused on themes and relationships emerging from the narratives. This approach may be seen as a process of shared *construction* because it was conducted in the dialogue practice with the participating community members as mentioned above. In this respect the method was influenced by the narrative approach to qualitative research as storytelling is seen to function as a social performance, involving the storyteller as well as the listeners being addressed by the story. With respect to the culturally informed conduct of the interviews, the interviews were organized into repeated sessions following the iterative approach to qualitative research (Donovan & Sanders, 2005).

Thus, the quality of the study was secured by repeated meetings between researchers and participants. In these sessions the analysis themes were presented to the participants, not to serve as »*member validation*«, but rather to make the research process transparent to the community members. This was a way of avoiding the »*objectification*« of the community members. This is an ethical imperative in the aftermath of dehumanizing events such as organized violence. In addition, it was informed by the participatory action research approach since the research was part of the peace-building process in the sitio. The conflict-promoting or peace-building consequences of the different narratives were reflected upon by the community including the researchers – in line with the idea that quality (validity) in qualitative research can be measured by its usefulness in the real life context: *Evidence for the validity of an interpretation is obtained by the extent that the participants benefit from their experience in the research* (Heppner, Kivlighan and Wampold, 1999:250). The quality of the research's results was discussed with the practitioners of Balay and the community members in terms of how much they felt that it was useful in the practice of sustaining a peace culture in the sitio.

A researcher triangulation was added by the presentation of the data and the analysis at a seminar at Balay. In the text presented to the community, the names of the informants were given openly. In this version, the names relating to citations or recent events have been replaced by two letters to secure the privacy of the informants.

5. Findings

The findings are organized into two sections. The first section contains a detailed description of the history of the sitio and the conflict, as told by the community members. The second section presents a thematic analysis of the narratives.

SECTION 1

The past

Saranay-Gantong has a unique history of a longstanding relationship between its Muslim and Christian residents. Four influential Muslim families originally inhabited the then forested and swampy land of Saranay-Gantong. The families of the Pigcaulans and the Edslas occupy the eastern part of the land while the Sabdullahs settle on the western part and the Kumlang, which is the biggest of the four families, is a sultanate family that occupies the central portion of the land near a creek.

Over the years, the Kumlang sons left the area one by one and decided to look for land elsewhere and start their own families. Only the last son, Maliganan Kumlang, stayed and tended the land and eventually started his family in the area. Because of the Muslim tradition of taking the father's first name as surname of the children, Maliganan Kumlang's children became the first generation of the Maliganan family that eventually became as respected and influential as their Kumlang forefathers. Although much of their land has changed hands, their importance is still evident. In fact, because of the fact that the Maliganan name is very famous and well-respected, despite being very uncommon, the female members of the family decided to keep their Maliganan name even after they got married and even their children carried over their Maliganan surname. With this, the Maliganan family became bigger and more influential.

In the early 1900s, during the time of the *agricultural colonos*, among the families that moved into Pikit were the Bautistas, Orejodos, and the Licudans who are all Ilocanos from Luzon. The Licudans from Bacnotan, La Union are the first Christians who settled in the community. Dalmacio Licudan, the patriarch of the family went to Mindanao in 1936 with his wife, Benita Vergaño-Licudan and their then four children to look for rich land to till and settle on. They first stayed on the land of the Sorianos, rela-

tives from Luzon, in the nearby barangay of Dalengoen. After scouting for available lands near Dalengaoen, Dalmacio Licudan bought land in Sitio Saranay from the Muslims and settled there with his wife and kids. They were the first Christian family to live in Sitio Saranay-Gantong together with the original Muslim families.

It was not difficult for the Licudans to be accepted by the Muslims in the sitio, especially by the Maliganans who are their nearest neighbours. Maliganan Kumlang, the Maliganan patriarch, and Dalmacio Licudan frequently helped each other, which was why it was not difficult for Dalmacio and Maliganan to arrange the marriage of Dalmacio and Juanita, the Maliganans' adopted daughter, after Dalmacio's wife, Benita, died from a pregnancy complication with their sixth child. This marriage thus forged the first Muslim-Christian bond to the local landscape that went beyond the previous simple coexistence. Dalmacio carried over the five children from his first marriage into the new relationship in which he had another five children. Upon marriage into the Maliganan family, the Christian settler brought forth the first batch of children related to the local Maliganan. The children of the second wife, Juanita Maliganan, played, studied and lived with the children of the first wife. This marriage helped to form more than half a century of Muslim-Christian relationships, relationships that are difficult to break as they were now sealed by blood.

Since the Licudans already had a good relationship with the original Muslim families in Saranay-Gantong, it was not difficult for their relatives, the Orejudos, also from Bacnotan, La Union, to blend in when they came to Mindanao and they too decided to settle in the sitio. The Bautistas from Luna, La Union were also able to move in and be accepted easily in the community even though they were not relatives of the Licudans and Orejudos. In fact, many of the men in the Bautista family, at different times, held positions in the Barangay and the sitio.

However, while the Muslims and Christians became integrated parts of the community, relationships were becoming more complicated. The Maliganans once owned up to 16 hectares of land, yet much of it was lost due to the sordid affairs of the male family members. In order to compensate the women that the men had violated, land was given instead of money. However, instead of giving the land to the women whom the Maliganan men had violated, the land was given to a Datu, a person who mediates the conflict, who, on one occasion, sold some of the land to the Christians (the Licudans).

Throughout the years, intermarriages among these Muslim and Christian families strengthened the relationships in the community. A Maliganan marrying a Licudan, a Licudan marrying a Bautista, an Edsla marrying a Maliganan, a Maliganan marrying a Pigcaulan, a Pigcaulan marrying an Edsla and more recently, a relative of the Sabdullahs marrying a Licudan, were effective instruments in fastening the link between these families.

The Maliganans, Edslas, Pigcaulans, Sabdullahs, Licudans, Orejodos, and the Bautistas families had lived together in Sitio Saranay-Gantong for several decades now. While the men and women helped each other in the farms, the children played and studied together. Like good neighbours, they shared most of their harvest and food as well as looked out for each other's welfare.

The settlement of the Christian Ilocano families in sitio Saranay-Gantong somehow paved the way for the area to be more productive and made the lives of the people living there better. With the Ilocanos buying and clearing the lands, most parts of the sitio were turned into either rice fields or fruit orchards. This attracted other Christian families from Cebu and Iloilo to settle in the sitio making the area more populated and livelier.

Because of the harmonious relationship between the families living in the community, Sitio Saranay became one of the most dynamic and active sitios in the whole of Barangay Takepan. According to the residents in the sitio, they commonly held feasts together to celebrate special occasions both Muslim and Christian. During a Muslim holiday or a Muslim occasion, the Christians were invited into the Muslims' home and vice versa with the Muslims during a Christian occasion.

1940s and 50s

During the Japanese occupation in the 1940s, though displaced, Sitio Saranay-Gantong was spared from bad experiences. Interestingly, residents who lived during this time shared the opinion that the Japanese period was relatively peaceful, even though Japanese troops set up barracks near the Bautistas' land and most of the families evacuated to forested areas for several months to escape the war. Fortunately, civilians in Saranay-Gantong were not harmed.

Escolastica Licudan-Bautista, the daughter of Dalmacio Licudan, and Dinidao Dalandas, a niece of the Maliganans, who were both small children during the Japanese time, shared memories of going to school at the newly-built two-room Takepan Elementary school in the 1940s. Escolastica and Dinidao fondly recalled that they used to write on banana leaves with bamboo sticks because there was no paper or pencils available. They recounted that the teacher in first grade gave the children clothes to wear if they came to school without proper clothes.

1960s

In the 1960s, during the time of Nicholas Bautista as the President of Sitio Saranay-Gantong, *Thanksgiving feasts* were held during December to give thanks for the year's harvest. According to 70 year-old Eutropia Bautista, a daughter of Nicholas Bautista, Christian and Muslim families in the sitio would contribute money for the food that was prepared for the feast. Residents of Saranay-Gantong would cook food and roast a cow together. Many

would also catch fish from the creek and bring them to the feast. During this time, residents of Sitio Saranay-Gantong would invite friends from as far as Cotabato to join them in their celebration.

Lola Eutropia recalled that during these times the creek in Sitio Saranay-Gantong was deep and flourishing with fish. People would go and fetch water from the creek to water their vegetable gardens and to bathe their animals. Trees and other plants grew around it making it serene and cool. Lola Eutropia explains: »*Naging sikat ang Saranay-Gantong sa mga nag-pipicnic. Marami lagi kaming bisita dito sa sitio.*« [Sitio Saranay-Gantong became popular for those people who always go out for picnics. We had lots of visitors here in the sitio then].

1970s

The late 60s and early 70s are considered low times in the history of Sitio Saranay-Gantong. In 1969, the conflict between the *Ilagas*, a group of Christian armed men and the Black Shirts, a group of Muslim armed men, escalated in the whole of Cotabato. Even though there are many debates about who formed these groups and what their objectives were, the two groups caused great pain in different communities. The *Ilagas* would kill or harass Muslim people while the Black Shirts harassed or even killed Christians. In 1970, when the conflict was at its worst, all the Muslim people in Sitio Saranay-Gantong left the community to flee from the threats of the *Ilagas* and sought refuge in Dungguan, a Muslim community in the Municipality of Pagalungan. They brought with them as many belongings as possible, and asked their Ilocano neighbours in the sitio to look after their houses and properties.

Babu Meriam Maliganan, then newly married, recounted how she escaped and went with the whole Maliganan Family to Dungguan and stayed there for five months. Her husband did not know how to fish – and fishing in the river was the only source of income since there was no land to till – so they decided to leave the community and moved to Sitio Palao, a steep hilly area in Barangay Dalengaoen. They were able to plant corn in the community but because of an extreme drought, their plants did not grow and the whole family starved. The men of the family could not leave the community to look for work because the *Ilagas* were waiting for them in the lowlands. Babu Merriam described how she and her older sister Umbai Maliganan decided to go back to Saranay-Gantong to get something to eat. When they reached Sarabay-Gantong, their Ilocano neighbors accommodated them and gave them rice, fruits and coffee to bring back to Palao. From then on, the Ilocanos in Saranay-Gantong, especially the Licudans, would meet with the Maliganans in the market to give them supplies of rice from their lands in Saranay-Gantong. In 1975, Muslims families who had left Sitio Saranay-Gantong started to come back and reestablish their homes.

1980s

The 80s was a more relaxed decade for Saranay-Gantong. Aside from the El Niño phenomenon that hit the region for five months, prompting some of the residents in the community to temporarily stay near the Linguasan marsh to plant corn in order to live, the rest of the decade was better than previous decades. Residents of the community discovered other livelihood opportunities like charcoal making, planting of kangkong and the kalakat-making¹¹. During this period, many Ilongos and Cebuanos from different parts of the Visayas region came and settled in the community.

Adults today – who were children during this decade – recall a Saranay-Gantong that was lively and bustling with people and activities. Although the popular creek in the sitio dried up because a dam was build in a nearby barangay, children would still go to the area to play. Best friends Johnny Maliganan and Rolly Licudan, the grandsons of Maliganan Kumlang and Dalmacio Licudan, currently in their mid twenties, describe these days as dynamic and lots of fun. They specifically mentioned that most people hung out at the sitio centre, which had many *sari-sari*¹² stores. In the afternoon children and young people played basketball at the court in the centre. The games were well-watched by the residents, who by then had finished their work in the farms. Watching these games was popular since there was neither electricity nor television in the area at that time.

1990s

A very significant event was the killing of Kagawad Ting Edsla in 1994 and a member of the Pigcaulan-Asim family was blamed for the killing. In the afternoon of the very same day, the brother of Kagawad Ting Edsla killed the brother of the Pigcaulan suspected to have killed Kagawad Ting Edsla. This started the ongoing family feud or *rido*¹³ between the families of the Pigcaulans-Asims and the Edslas.

11 *Kalakat* is a local term referring to a woven, flattened bamboo or grass strip that is commonly used as walling for a native Filipino Bahay-kubo or hut.

12 *Sari-sari* store is a typical community retail store in the Philippines selling different basic commodities for daily consumption.

13 *Rido* is a Maranao term used to refer to clan wars or family feuds. More pronounced in Moro society than in other parts of the Philippines, it is said to be related to the people's deep sense of personal pride and honor which is called *maratabat* in Maranao. Dr. Moctar I. Matuan of the Mindanao State University in Marawi City referred to it as an extreme form of conflict that can lead to loss of life of any of the conflicting parties in his Inventory Study of Existing Rido in Lanao del Sur (1994-2004). Prof. Jamail Kamlian from the same university explained in a lecture that if the sense of honor was violated, the aggrieved party could go to the extent of killing someone to alleviate such psychological hurt, regardless of the legal implications. This attack can also invite retribution and the cycle of vengeful violence is carried out.

Since some members of the Pigcaulan and Asim family belong to the Moro National Liberation Front and some Edslas belong to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the two families got support from each group and an encounter between these two groups caused a number of families to seek refuge in the evacuation centres.

2000s

The start of the new millennium saw the all-out-war policy of the Estrada Administration against the MILF. This armed conflict, which lasted for many months, again displaced the people of Saranay-Gantong. After the war, support from non-governmental organizations and governmental agencies started pouring into the community to assist them in their rebuilding after the conflict. However, in 2003, another armed conflict took place and an incident of harassment and cattle rustling took place in the community of Saranay-Gantong.

During the 2003 government military campaign against the MILF in the municipality of Pikit, Saranay Gantong was not directly affected. The hilly terrain across the highway in the barangays north of Takepan provided rebel forces with ample coverage as they attempted to pass across to the southern side of the Davao-Cotabato Highway where much of the fighting between the MILF and the government forces took place. By the 21st of February Saranay-Gantong was evacuated. Most of the Muslims at this time took refuge in Batulawan, while the Christians remained in the Takepan Elementary School, which had achieved the status of an official evacuation site (Sitio Saranay Report).¹⁴

By April 2003, some of the residents had returned to their homes in spite of the ongoing violence. However, within the first week of April, the violence returned to the Sitio. In the afternoon of April 9th around four or five o'clock in the afternoon, around 50 armed men entered the community and demanded that the community members surrender any CAFGUs¹⁵

14 When residents were queried as to why the Muslim and Christian evacuees had gone to separate places, they had responded that it was due to dietary habits and familiarity of language. Those who were Muslim went to one shelter, while those who were Christian went to another.

15 CAFGU (Citizens' Armed Forces – Geographical Unit) is a paramilitary unit which was established in 1987 in accordance with the notion of a citizens' armed force expressed in the Philippine Constitution of 1987. CAFGU are under military command. Their members are subject to military law and regulations and training.

and cell phones. Speaking in Tagalog with a noticeable Cebuano¹⁶ accent, the armed men were wearing army dress and had placed black oil on their faces so that people could not identify who they were. In fact, according to a community member, she had originally identified them as soldiers and addressed them with respect. When the armed men had pointed their gun at her and made their demands, surprised she immediately dropped what she was holding and grabbed hold of her child. Another Christian community member collapsed at the site, because a gun was being pointed at her and her child.

Ultimately, nine carabaos were stolen from the community. In a report filed by the barangay officials to the police, the total cost of these nine carabaos was close to \$2,454 USD. According to PC, a community member who experienced the harassment first hand, the armed men took four cleaned chickens that were to be used the next day for their daughters' graduation celebration. Although the armed men asked for cash and cell phones, EL responded that she had nothing to give them. The men left shortly thereafter with the food and the farm animals.

This event left a deep mark. Although nobody was killed during the harassment and the only gunshots that were fired were in the air, the community immediately made their way to the elementary school where they had previously evacuated – in spite of the fact that the evacuation centre was closed. Carrying only blankets and pillows, the community members of Saranay-Gantong waited at the school until it opened at 7 o'clock the next morning.

When they were in the evacuation centre, the reactions were varied. Amongst the female community members, PC was almost unable to eat for nearly two months, severely losing weight. Her daughter, CC reported not being able to walk down the highway leading to their home immediately after the incident and for the next few months. Another community member, MM collapsed in the community centre, and her sister, Umbai Maliganan, gave her medicine to ameliorate her grief. AB turned to alcohol to resolve his grief over the incident. Failing to return to their farm and turning alcohol into a daily habit, A and his wife eventually split up, allegedly due to the incident. SB on the other hand decided to tear his home down and relocate permanently to the land directly behind the school. Many of the Muslim residents returned to their homes, but many of the Christian community members relocated to the land immediately behind the school, in the sitio named »Upper Saranay.«

16 Cebuano or *Sugbuanon* is a major language spoken in the Philippines by more than 18 million people. It is widely spoken in the Central Visayas and northern and western Mindanao. The name comes from the Philippino island of Cebu, with the Spanish suffix **-ano** meaning native, of a place, added at the end.

The April 2003 incident left a deep challenge for the people of Sitio Saranay-Gantong. The relationship between the Christian and Muslim families was broken in a snap. The incident pressurised the Christian families to move out and they refused to go back. Most of them tore down their houses in Saranay-Gantong and built new houses just behind the Takepan Elementary School. The Muslim families on the other hand moved to Gantong¹⁷. For a year, the previously lively and bustling community became deserted and quiet.

It took months for the Christians to revisit their lands in the sitio. Equally, it was only in early 2005 when some Maliganan families moved back to their homes in Saranay-Gantong.

The relationship between the Muslims and the Christians became strained after the harassment incident. Christian families who left the sitio did not want to go back and yet felt a sense of loss leaving their neighbors and the land where they grew up. The Muslims, on the other hand, felt abandoned and felt sorry for what had happened to their Christian neighbours. Even still, the former residents of Saranay-Gantong talk about their good memories of the sitio and their neighbours with a sense of longing and regret. Santos Bautista explains that the Muslims and Christians have a good relationship, but yet he does not want to go back to Saranay-Gantong.

MT expresses how Saranay-Gantong is totally different now as the Christians have left. She specifically recalled how families used to share with other families in need. According to her, farming was not very difficult before because you always had somebody to help you when you needed extra hands in the fields.

For the Christians, the incident was painful because carabaos were taken. BL expressed disappointment about the Muslims because she expected them to defend the Christians from the Muslim armed men. She told us that the Christian families took care of the Muslim families when they were in need during the Ilaga time in the 70s:

I am so angry. I cannot help but cry whenever I remember what happened. I lost weight. I wish they could have taken other things, not our carabao. Our carabaos are important to us. But then, I saw my (Muslim) neighbours with the armed men. They (Muslim families) have carabaos, too, but those were not taken. Why didn't the armed men take them, too? I told them, when the soldiers harassed you, I took you to my home. If it were not for me, you would be dead by now.

¹⁷ *Gantong* is a piece of land located on the southern part of Sitio Saranay. It is land surrounded by marshland thus, the maguindanaon term »gantong«, which literally means floating, was derived.

The Muslims, on the contrary, felt like they were being blamed for an incident which they could not have anticipated or stopped. While the Christians felt betrayed, the Muslims felt misinterpreted by their Christian neighbours. They have all lost the confidence and trust in the strong bonds of the social fabric.

SECTION 2

In the narrative analysis it soon became apparent that the theme of the loss of confidence was differently marked by old, middle aged, and young people. This was further explored in the iterative interviews.

The perspective of different age groups

It appears from the interviews that each succeeding generation or age group tells a different story of the past, present and future.

The elderly tell a story of being forcefully removed from the farmland that was discovered and cultivated through their personal effort. Their interlinking of the community through intermarriage and cooperation made their understanding of social trauma to be expressed as a destruction of past efforts.

The middle aged community members know about the positive narratives of the past, but have more memories of the disruption of the community. Their narratives emphasize how the pleasant community events were destroyed and replaced by conflict. Whereas the community once saw itself as a community that could emerge from its trials maintaining a positive and close relationship between its members of different faiths or cultures, ultimately, the harassment disrupted this by destroying the image of a unified community and causing a barrier between the positive past and potentially positive future.

This is even more prevalent in the youth's conception of insiders and outsiders. As the community continues to grow in two geographically different locations, the potential for the youth to enjoy the same type of sharing of significant events that their parents had, or the same type of local ownership and deep relationship that their grandparents had, becomes inhibited.

The Elderly

The elderly in Saranay-Gantong tell a story of actively building a multi-ethnic community. An elderly Christian lady speaks about this period:

The Muslims were nice before...we were friends up until now. People used to say that we were different from them and that perhaps I didn't realize this, but it's not true. Whatever they ate, I ate. They used to say that I was the only Ilocano that ate their food...People used to ask me

why I ate with them because some said that they were dirty, but I didn't like that. (BL, October 5, 2005).

For the Christian Ilocanos, the Muslims were seen as different. The first generation Christian settlers overcame the stereotypes to bridge the gap between the neighbours and themselves. Muslims initially also saw the Christians as people who were different from them, – people, who wanted to take their land. According to MU:

When the Christians first came, my parents were scared of them because they spoke different languages and had different customs. (MU, October 7, 2005).

However, the two groups came to accept each other. MU described the integration in the following manner:

Those who are not educated don't understand. My husband told me not to study since he was afraid I would become a Christian.

Of course there are also uneducated Christians as well as educated. However, if they were educated they would understand and they wouldn't fight. (MU, October 7, 2005).

According to one of our informants, MB, during World War II, when the Maliganan family had to seek coverage from the Christian militants that were harassing the Muslim families in the area, it was the Licudans, a Christian family that provided them with food and supplies while they were evacuated. Furthermore, Christians remember being helped by the Muslims such as when an old Christian man got lost, and it was the Muslims that found him. These shared narratives made the recent incidents even more wounding. BL noted:

They did not take their carabaos. The Maliganans had carabaos. But why didn't they take theirs? That's what hurts. If they had taken their carabao, we would have been the same, equal. But just us Ilocanos... before, how many days did we fight? BT used to come to my house and call me Auntie! Auntie! I told her that she has no auntie here. That's when we started to argue. When they were harassed by the military, who was the one who helped them? If it weren't for me they would have died. (BL, October 5, 2005).

Thus, what affected BL most was that they had been considered to be so close and a part of the family and that they had shared positive memories. This narrative triggered a notion of betrayal. The fact that these two families

considered themselves to be on the same level and yet only one had been offended really created a deep wound in the relationship. In response to the harassment, one of the members of the Licudans embraced UB, a Maliganan, in tears, seeking solace. Upon seeing this, one of the Christians had cried out, »Don't hug them! They come from the same blood as the thieves do.« In response, UB said,

It hurt me! I was mad! I told him, 'You are new to our family, don't say that.' It is because of those who are new to the community that we didn't become very close, and those coming from the outside were the ones making us fight...Some of the Christians were mad at us before but then they realized that we were not part of the plan...But you can tell by the different face they showed when they were mad at us. You could really tell. It was like they didn't want to talk to us anymore. (UB, October 27, 2005).

Due to the inter-marriage of families, and cooperation and trust, the elderly once overcame the stereotypes of their parents and built a community without inter-ethnic violence. Therefore, the social trauma was described or construed as disloyalty.

The Middle Aged

The social trauma that the middle aged community members see springs from an experience of not being able to go back to the positive past they once had. They suffered from leaving behind the positive memories of the Sitio when they relocated in another location.

The middle aged told us about the lost good times of the past. According to the couple A and CP living in Saranay-Gantong it was a wonderful experience. They explained that during the 1980s, Saranay-Gantong had large celebrations during Christmas and other holidays. Many of the families never had to worry about food since the farms were plentiful and since all till the same land, they could always lend each another knowing that the neighbour could easily repay them when their crops came to bear. Moreover, the creek that ran through the community provided the community with an abundance of fish. According to MU, Saranay Gantong had plethora. She said that during the 1980s the most difficult part was making sure that people didn't steal the expensive things such as cars, farm equipment and animals.

BS also shares positive memories. In the 1960s, periods of abundance were also seen. It was during this time that the community created a feast to be held every December. Thanksgiving Day meant to share and celebrate the successful harvesting of the crops every year. In pictures, SB and his mother reconstructed the events to describe a happy past in which the community worked together and shared their wealth.

However, this tale of the community changed by the harassment. Immediately after the harassment, BS decided to destroy his home in the middle of the sitio and to relocate it permanently behind the school in »Upper Saranay«. When asked how he felt about relocating, he said:

We did not plan to move here. But after the harassment, I had to make the decision as to whether or not to move here. But I thought that if I didn't move, our house might be robbed or burned, so I decided to move here. Even if my children did not want to move here, I had to. It was very difficult for me...A lot happened to us. I lost everything. I sold my land. (BS, October 14, 2005).

The Muslim interviewees stated that when the Christians moved away, they felt as if they were being blamed for the problems. They imparted that they were upset by the idea that the Christians allegedly saw them as collaborating with the armed men who stole the carabaos:

For us Muslims, there is no problem, but with them I don't know if they still feel something towards us. There were times when if the Christian families lost something, they would blame it on the Muslims...There were many times that Christian families lost things and came to me to tell me that things were lost. I would tell them that you should take your things with you so that they will not be lost since we cannot look after all your things. Even the missing fruits on the trees they would blame us for. (TA, October 11, 2005).

SB expresses intense sadness of tearing down his home. He lost land and home – and happy memories. TA expresses sadness of being labelled as someone attached to the previous crimes. Whilst the elderly speak about the sorrow of being betrayed, the middle aged people tell a story of an intense sadness of loss.

The Youth

The youth did not experience the family bonding that existed between people before. They only have an indirect knowledge of the positive collective memories of the past. The youth grew up in the 1990s with family feuds, wars and evacuation centres. The youth does not express any wish to go back to the community. They do not speak about any links back to Saranay-Gantong and see no reason to attempt to rebuild or patch up the past.

After 2003 many families of other barangays were displaced from their homes and some of these families settled in Saranay-Gantong. In fact, Saranay was the original name of the sitio until new families began to settle in the marshlands to the east of the main road of Saranay. Many of these families that moved in were Muslim, and they first settled in the area of the

Sabdullahs, an old Muslim family of Saranay. Later they started to settle south of the Sabdullahs into the lands of the Sorianos. They told us that they decided to name the new place »Gantong,« or *floating*, since the marsh gave the appearance that things on the other side were floating. Thus, the community became known as Saranay-Gantong.

When EG, a Muslim youth and the former president of *Magil* (the Maguindanao and Ilocano Youth Organization), talked about some of the projects that *Magil* had engaged in, he discussed why some of their projects failed. In particular he spoke about one of the reasons for the failure which was that people from Saranay and Gantong were forced to work together on some projects even though some of the youth thought that they should be separated. He said that due to the distance between the communities it was difficult to collaborate and have meetings. He added that the two communities had developed differently and that they were no longer the same.

For us, because we are kind of far from them and we are kind of far from our neighbours...not far in terms of relationship because many of the people there are my third cousins and there are a lot of Ilocanos that have married Muslims...but for instance, if they have a project in Saranay and we have a project in Gantong, it's better if we can focus on the projects separately. (EG, October 14, 2005).

According to parents A and CP, it took months before their teenage daughter was willing to go back to Saranay. She was so scared at times that she refused to run the errands that her mother had requested, if they included going to Saranay. In fact, she only went back to Saranay twice in the whole year after the harassment.

The youth describes that Saranay and Gantong are split. The young people express only a weak believe in that the community can reunite. Even highly involved youth do not believe in the possibility of maintaining and preserving the history of a united Saranay-Gantong. This position could be labelled as social trauma in the form of separatism.

Themes developed from the narratives

The interview analysis showed that three themes were frequently used to describe and explain the state of the social fabric, i.e. how well it was functioning or how disrupted it was. The three themes are: 1) significant events in the community's history; 2) responses to harassment; and 3) actors and coping.

Significant events in the community's history

In the narratives, the robbery of the water buffalos was more crucial than the fighting between the armed groups. The robbery led to descriptions of how the community's integrated groups were different. It led to a change

in the social interaction between the groups and an imbalance in the social organization of property, as the community members described how they used to work together and help each other harvesting the farmland. The *carabaos* were owned by the families, but they were used in the system of mutual helping. The robbery caused a challenge to this system of private ownership but mutual help. This link between the discursive actions (the altered description of the groups), the social activities (the changed interaction between the groups), and the economic activities (the problems retaining a helping relationship of equal material and technical terms) was richly presented in the narratives.

This was explained by the particular impact of the *harassment*. The overall war between the military and the rebels did impact the community because of the danger, but in the narratives of the interviewed people, the impact of this was not as profound as that of the harassment, because it was local, unanticipated and personal. It dismantled the social network from within, as it led to narratives of betrayal and loss of confidence. The inclusive tales and social interactions of the people in the *sitio* were replaced by a narrative of betrayal – which conveyed a relocation of people and a change in the organization of labour (working together). It even led to a change in the political organization as told by the members of the youth organizations. The robbery was described as devastating to the social fabric because it caused a breakage of personal and familial bonds. Because of this rupture of the actively built and sustained social system of kinship as a protection against violence within the community, religious faith took over as the most important classification of people within the community. The religious perspective became a difference marker replacing the perspective of kinship (and community) which prevailed before.

Response to the harassment

The event caused a loss of confidence in the peaceful co-existence, but this loss was distinct for different age groups. The elderly people report that the former value of loyalty between the community members was replaced by disloyalty and betrayal. One side felt accused for not helping the primary victims and the other side felt deceived by the passive bystanders. The middle-aged tell of a sense of loss, because the economic and social system was ruptured by the robbery. The young people express a loss of confidence in the idea that the two religions could peacefully live together in the same *sitio*. In general, the narratives showed how the value of integration was replaced by a lack of hope and thus by separatism caused by this lack of trust and shared activities and a fear of the other party.

This way of organizing the discourse and the social activities may be labelled as social trauma as it leads to a distortion of the former social support system and replaces this with fear, aggression, blaming, suspiciousness, and separatism.

In this situation people still express a longing for a better state of the community, but, as we learned from the narratives, it seems that a number of the middle aged people have given up and moved away from the original *sitio*, and that the young people almost have lost the hope for a better cooperation in the community.

Actors and coping

The narratives emphasize distinct positions in the development of trouble – and in finding solutions to the problems. The elderly people say that the community managed to live relatively peacefully before, but now there is a growing tension between the two religious groups. To them, this means that the endeavours were in vain and the community failed. The middle-aged abide to this state and move away to areas where their trade will not be disturbed by the conflict. The young try to avoid contact between the groups and convey a quite negative impression of the other part. They have given up on the idea of re-establishing the sharing of the same *sitio*. Therefore, they do not describe themselves as able to impact on the current state of affairs.

Emergent in the narratives is the notion of the actor, i.e. the agent of change related to the community, family or group perspective. The narratives position a collective subject as the *agent*. In the storytelling about the old times, the *community* is positioned as the agent without being split into different parts. The over-arching subject is this community that develops through integration with the ubiquitous activities of entrepreneurship, friendship, marriage and multiplication. *We did that* – because we were one *community*. The subjectivity was collective at that time in terms of the whole community and the challenge was to integrate newcomers into this understanding and social practice.

The positioning of subjectivity is altered after the *harassment* as it is now described as being split into two separate groups. The subjectivity is still an asset of a group, but now we hear about two groups with diverse perspectives and *locus of control*.

At least in the narratives of the elderly, however, a shared hope can be found – a hope of returning to the days when the community as a whole held this position of *subjectivity*, instead of being split into separate groups. This means that these narratives present a shared value system in this longing for the lost process of organizing the community in a unanimous way. This is reflected upon in the interviews as a longing for the past where the community lived as one *group*. In the interviews the saying *our past is our future* was heard several times. This was explained as a means of a possible peace process in which the community applies the values of the old generation to construct a shared narrative (memory) and to make it operational in social practices such as participation in inclusive activities, intermarriage, and helping each other.

6. Conclusion

The interviews gave a fuller understanding of how social trauma is constructed and sustained in communities impacted by organized violence. This understanding includes how the community sees a possible peace process as intrinsically related to addressing the particular and contextual problems emergent in the local narratives. This is an important alternating perspective to the diagnostic approach – because the study of peoples’ narratives provides us with knowledge on how trauma is experienced and understood by the impacted community.

7. Perspectives

Responses to organised violence may foster locally based adaptive processes that help the community to recover, or negative responses that may be detrimental to the community’s social support system (the social fabric). Adaptive coping resources strengthen the social fabric by providing examples of successful attempts to recover from traumatic incidents. These examples reinforce the social fabric further by strengthening community solidarity at different levels, i.e. the discursive, the social organisation, and the material organisation of the community. On the other hand, organised violence may have negative effects on a community’s social fabric by breaking bonds that had previously been impervious. Organised violence can destroy a community’s social fabric by destroying an inclusive discourse, integrated social interactions, and an intentional solidarity within the distribution of wealth.

To understand these processes not as dualistic but as interwoven as a *social tissue* it is necessary to study how local narratives present the problems and the hope for a better future. This is exactly where a peace process starts – in the narratives and social practices of the *sitio* (see Anasarias & Berliner, 2008). The peace process in the *sitio* was promoted by the community members by using the narratives to state that *our past is our future*, meaning that they could use the narratives of the peaceful coexistence in the past a guideline for how to see each other and how to rebuild mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence now and in the future.

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