

SPECIAL ISSUE on **WOMEN**
and the **MINDANAO**
CONFLICT



tambara

ATENEO DE DAVAO UNIVERSITY JOURNAL



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Foreword to this Special Edition

This volume celebrates the 39th year of the Social Research Training and Development Office (SRTDO), the research arm of the Division of Social Sciences and Education of the Ateneo de Davao University. Founded in 1972 to advance the development of a research culture in the University, the SRTDO has since then gone on to undertake important studies that dealt with issues of development, such as wages, quality of health care, reproductive health, family planning, street children, politics, and environment, among others.

In 1994, the SRTDO formed the Ateneo Task Force and Mindanao Working Group (ATF-MWG) on Reproductive Health, Gender and Sexuality project for a more focused and issue-based capability-building program for the University and the stakeholders of development on the island. The ATF is an interdisciplinary group of faculty members from Ateneo de Davao while the MWG is a voluntary group of individuals representing different disciplines, sectors, and organizations from the four regions of Mindanao. The goal of the ATF-MWG is to contribute to uplift the status of women by advancing the knowledge, understanding, and involvement of relevant audiences in the fundamental issues of reproductive health, gender, and sexuality.

In 2005, MWG saw the need to better understand how armed conflict affects the experience of grassroots women in the various conflict-affected areas of Mindanao for implications on addressing reproductive health and gender development. The MWG tapped participating universities and colleges on the island to conduct a series of community studies to help draw its advocacy agenda for grassroots gender empowerment, especially for the most neglected and underprivileged among Mindanao women — the Muslims, the Lumads, and those in rebel transit areas. We now feature these studies for their relevance in shaping the growing gender discourse in Mindanao academe.

Admittedly, the conduct of these exploratory research efforts had been limited by time constraints and the security situation in the respective study sites, as well as by lack of access to the major players

and pertinent documents on these local conflicts as they occurred in Cotabato, Agusan del Norte, and the Lanao provinces. As a result, they do not provide a comprehensive context to the arenas of battle that played out in the respondents' backyards, much in the same way that these communities continue to be denied the context why they have been and continue to be forced to play host to deadly encounters.

Also, academics might find the absence of a theoretical frame to be a serious flaw, but such caution had been deemed necessary to privilege opinions expressed by the respondents and avoid injecting researcher bias. Still and for all that, these cautions attempts to view war and its aftermath through the eyes of those who had been touched by it modestly capture the landscape of the conflict experience of those most affected by the recent wars in Mindanao. While the findings do not form the whole picture, this is a start. For this reason we find justifiable the limitations of these studies.

Collectively, these papers represent the shift in academic research agenda on the wars in Mindanao — from the traditional positivist inquiry to phenomenological investigation that acknowledge the validity of the respondents' experience of the subject under study. We offer our readers these MWG research reports, in part to hold true to the *Tambara's* mission to inform about Mindanao issues, but more importantly to showcase the efforts of the SRTDO to bring out the social costs of war on the least heard and most vulnerable of Mindanao constituents.

Gail Tan Ilagan
Editor

The Impact of Local Armed Conflict on the Family Life of Women in Three Agusan del Norte Villages

Alma A. Eleazar
Robert N. Aplacador
Mary Grace M. Brongcano

Introduction

For over forty years now, localized armed conflict has featured in some parts of the Philippines. In particular, the conflict between the communist guerillas of the New People's Army (NPA) and the government security forces continues to claim a number of lives in the countryside.

Conflict poses a multilayered challenge to those living in the areas affected by it. Basic services are interrupted as heightened security hampers mobility. Desiring safety, people opt to remain indoors until the threat has passed. Households suffer as it is deemed unsafe to go out to till farms or to fetch food, water, and other essential items. Schools shut down or become the site for local governance to gather evacuees fleeing from violence and crossfire. In particular, for women who are traditionally expected to keep the social fabric of family and community together, the unwelcome descent of conflict into their communities renders critical their role to attend to the care and nurturance of family and community members. Efforts to support women become more essential when they are caught in conflict situations.

Gender roles in family interactions have traditionally been defined by the division of productive and reproductive labor among family members. Beginning at a young age, girls are socialized for motherhood roles: to care for the young, the sick, and the elderly; to manage the home; to foster social relations, emotional growth, and psychological well-being of family members; to educate and nurse; and, when necessary, to earn from the home to augment family income.¹

Conflict and postconflict situations impose upon women to confront very specific concerns related to their performance of their family roles as daughters, wives, and mothers and their economic roles and obligations in the family in the context of the prevailing cultural notions of gender roles and relations. Localized armed conflict has the potential to break families apart. In times when violence visits the community, men may leave the family to fight. Sometimes, they get killed or they go away to hide when there is reason to fear for their personal safety. Whatever the cause, the absence and limited mobility of men lay the burden of securing the immediate family and putting food on the table squarely on the women who are left behind.

Recent trends in community reports of localized armed conflict alarmingly suggest that civilians are not spared from or are even targeted for violence. Gender-based violence, to include incidences of sexual violations, has been reported with enough frequency to suggest that it may even be used by certain quarters as a weapon of warfare. Because most of these incidences happen in isolated areas, these reports are seldom taken up by mainstream media, but are carried by word of mouth in these closely-knit hinterland communities. Local government officials and community health workers may hear of these concerns, but perhaps because they happen in places that are difficult to access, these cases seldom get documented, much less pursued. These threats to women in conflict situations underscore the need to incorporate gender analysis into early warning activities as the experiences of women present to be a valuable but overlooked indicator of conflict.

Traditionally, women in conflict and postconflict situations evoke the notion of war victims who are hostage to the oppressing onslaught of vicissitudes and have little control over their experience of hardship and suffering. However, a closer examination would reveal that far from embracing victimization, women are responsible for carrying out crucial acts that assure family survival during war and rebuilding communities in its aftermath. Rather than passively accepting the hardships and waiting for things to get better, they more often than not hold the community together through the painful process of reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

Moreover, women in conflict-affected communities have proven time and again to be active actors at all levels of postconflict reconstruction. Their experiences, however, have not been duly

recognized and dignified. They are as yet to be equitably represented in any major peace negotiations, even though they are the ones most affected by war when it happens. Despite their limitations in terms of access to resources, skills, and participation in social networks, community women demonstrate a capacity for social action to bring back normalcy at the soonest possible time in the wake of violence in their communities.

Not much is known about how women experience conflict and postconflict situations in the affected areas of Mindanao. The security situation in the countryside often cautions media and local government officials against travel to these parts until the state security sectors would have declared these areas safe. This prevents accurate information about the community from reaching decision makers and relief workers, especially at the height of conflict when the community most needs help. In this situation, the communities are rendered isolated, and the people there are left to their own devices.

This paper explores how women experience conflict and postconflict situations in three selected barangays in two Agusan del Norte municipalities. Barangay Guinabsan in Buenavista and Barangays Camagong and Jaguimitan in Nasipit were randomly chosen from among the six barangays in these two towns that had been touched by counterinsurgency operations from 2000 to 2005. Through systematic sampling of households in these three barangays, the women and mothers were surveyed. Secondary data sources and key informant interviews were also used to enrich the findings from the household survey. Among the seventeen key informants interviewed were the chieftain of the Higaoanon² tribe, barangay officials, barangay health workers (BHWs), para-teachers, and former NPA combatants who are now residing in Barangay Jaguimitan.

The Research Sites

The conduct of the study in all three barangays had been coordinated with the local government unit (LGU) and other pertinent agencies. Despite the active threat of violence, the researchers were able to stay long enough in the area to observe and gather data.



Barangay Guinabsan, Buenavista, Agusan del Norte

This conflict-affected rural barangay is a farming community located in the GUIMARIZ Agrarian Reform Community (ARC). During the five-year period in question, sporadic conflict had occurred in the neighboring sitios of Lomboyan and Balatacan. Sitio Lomboyan is about two-and-half hours' walk from the barangay hall of Guinabsan and is very difficult to access. Getting there requires travelers to cross the serpentine river sixteen times. A six-wheeler truck comes by every Monday to bring down the farmers' produce — mostly bananas, as well as coconut and corn in excess of those grown for family consumption. Even motorcycles rarely brave the trail to Lomboyan, leaving the residents there no recourse but to hike or to hitch on Monday's truck. Community electrification is powered by a few solar panels and a charged truck battery. Some houses do not have electricity.

At the time of the study in early 2006, an Army detachment manned by a few Army regulars and more paramilitary elements of the Citizen Auxiliary Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) — mainly men from Lomboyan and Balatacan — had been recently located about a hundred meters from the residential cluster in Lomboyan. The residents reported that while the detachment was still under construction, the Army regulars were housed by the locals, such that the soldiers have developed close interpersonal relations with the residents. Indeed, during the interviews, the residents expressed their appreciation for the location of the detachment in the area. They believe that the troops' presence protects the village from harassment by NPA bands in transit that used to divest them of corn and food stocks with impunity.

In running after the NPA rebels, the detachment soldiers figured in encounters at the outskirts of the sitios. These violent episodes wreaked havoc on the farmers' cultivated fields, as the combatants chased each other through the landscape. Some houses were burned down or were riddled by the bullets exchanged. It was unclear as to who exactly was responsible for trampling the farm lots and for burning and firing at the houses. What is generally accepted is that the damage to the residents' property was sustained due to the firefights between the government troops and the rebels.

Barangay Jaguimitan, Nasipit, Agusan del Norte

Located to the north of Barangay Culit and east of Barangay Camagong in Nasipit, Agusan del Norte, Barangay Jaguimitan has a total land area of 3,654,485 square meters. The barangay lies in the northwest mountain ranges of Agusan del Norte where the Alpha Company of the 29th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army confronts the Front 21 A and B forces of the NPA.

From 2000 to 2005, there have been reports of armed encounters between the government troops and the NPA, notably in Sitios Salaysayon and Tagbabacon, where heavy fighting required the deployment of helicopter gunships and truckloads of ground troop reinforcement. Bombs and boot tracks damaged the farmers' crops and there were many times when the residents had to flee as the firefights got intense.

Back in the 1970s, logging operations had extended to Barangay Jaguimitan, and some Cebuanos who were then part of the operations opted to settle there. Three decades after logging operations ceased

in the area, the logging roads have fallen into disrepair and much of these have been reclaimed by nature. While the barangay proper can be reached by motorcycle and the rare private four-wheeled vehicles that brave the rough road, its remote sitios seldom see any form of motorized transport.

The denuded forests have been turned into small farms where the barangay residents now plant banana, corn, and coconut. However, the difficult access to commercial centers and the sporadic outbreaks of violent confrontation between armed groups in the barangay adversely affect the income-earning activities of the residents. Houses remain fashioned from light materials, and most of these have no electrical connection.

Salaysayon and Tagbabacon are remote sitios in Barangay Jaguimitan that could only be reached on foot. The residents are mostly Higaoanons, although there are a few non-Lumad who have settled there. Sitio Tagbabacon sits on the western section of the barangay, about six kilometers from the barangay hall. It takes three hours of walking up and down the mountains to get there. It is noted that a community of former NPA combatants lives here.

Sitio Salaysayon, on the other hand, is about twenty-four kilometers from the Barangay Hall of Jaguimitan. It would take nine hours of hiking to get there. This is the farthest sitio from the barangay center, and the residents there are all Higaoanons.

At the time of the study, the residents reported that Sitio Salaysayon was still a “no-man’s-land”³ because of the active counterinsurgency operations being launched by the military. Many among the residents had evacuated and had sought refuge among family and friends, some as far as in Sitio Hinandayan in neighboring Barangay Camagong.

Barangay Camagong, Nasipit, Agusan del Norte

For some time, this farming community west of Barangay Jaguimitan had been known to be one of the conflict areas in the province. In December 2004, the armed clashes occurred almost every day in the barangay, especially in the most remote sitios of Mimbahandi and Hinandayan where the residents were mostly Higaoanons. The firefights took place very near the residential areas and were reported to inflict much damage to property. There were also reports that the NPA were actively recruiting among the Lumads here.

Military personnel and CAFGU elements were still temporarily encamped in Sitio Hinandayan when the researchers arrived there in

late 2005 to gather data. The residents appeared comfortable with the presence of the government troops in the community. Hinandayan was also hosting several refugees from nearby sitios who had fled because of the ongoing offensives launched against the NPA. Sitio Mimbahandi, on the other hand, had been put under a “red flag” condition,⁴ and a complement of the Army Scout Rangers had been deployed there.

Family Life in Three Conflict-Affected Barangays of Agusan del Norte

It was observed in all three barangays that there was very little inter-ethnic tension among the settlers and the indigenous Higaoanons. As neighbors, they were tolerant of each other’s ways and freely engaged in cordial interactions.

Most of the households surveyed for this study belonged to Christian settler families that commonly had nuclear family arrangements. The domiciles had enough living space to accommodate five people. Some of the larger houses had three bedrooms. In Sitio Lomboyán, most houses did not have doors. Flimsy curtains were dropped to cover the entrance or a slab of wood is placed there to bar dogs from coming in while the people retired for the night.

Their Higaoanon neighbors, on the other hand, had more extended family arrangements, with grandparents often coming to live with their married son or daughter. Higaoanons also have an extended sense of family and would welcome even distant relatives to stay for as long as they like or need.

The residents are united by a bond of close communal relations in a climate of trust and mutual assistance. They share what little they have with each other and are familiar with the details of each other’s daily lives and family concerns. It was observed that neighbors seemed to feel relatively free to come and go or sleep over in each other’s homes as night falls. They were not particular about where to sleep — on the floor, on benches, or resting against the door. When dropping by, neighbors freely join in whatever activity the family is doing — sharing their food at mealtime or lending a hand in housework.

Empathy and sensitivity to the feelings of others were interpersonal skills that parents sought to enhance in their children. While discipline of the young was recognized to be the sole authority of parents, the

socialization of children to communal life was a responsibility that the rest of the community shared. Neighbors informed parents about the children's public behavior. Parents sometimes spanked or told off their children in the presence of others.⁵ Such actions demonstrated their adherence to the shared normative prescriptions of the community.

The shared parental responsibility for the upkeep of the family is delineated by gender. Fathers plow the farm and harvest the produce. Mothers tend the vegetable gardens in their backyard and help their men in the fields at harvest time. Fathers go out to fish and turn over their catch for the women to cook, share, or barter with neighbors for household needs. After school hours, fathers teach boys to do the work of men, and mothers teach girls to do the work of women. While the men and boys are out tending the farms, women and girls clean the house or do the laundry along the riverbank where they keep company with neighbors who go there to fetch water, bathe, play, wash clothes, or just listen to the conversation. Young children often follow their mothers or older siblings around and may be directed to gather firewood, help carry stuff, put the goat out to graze, or feed the chicken.

Fixing the house and managing the farm are primarily the husband's concern, and therefore men have control and access to carpentry tools and farm implements. But even though these tasks are believed to be strictly for men, women are not hindered to do such tasks if they feel like it or if the men are absent. In contrast, sewing is considered to be strictly for women, and the men who do know how to stitch would not do so where others could see. There is a general sentiment that a man who sews is either henpecked or gay.

For settler families, the household budget is controlled by the wives.⁶ Men seem to have little need for pocket money, and most of them do not have vices, such as drinking or smoking that would require them daily expenses to maintain. *Tuba* — wine fermented from coconut — is not for sale but in the community, but is shared among neighbors on social occasions. Drinking tuba usually takes place while there's light because the people sleep early. Drinking is for men, but a married woman could also do this in company when her husband is present and does not voice his objection.

A number of women who had are trained as community-based BHWs who are deployed from the barangay health station (BHS) in Lomboyan. The BHWs respond to the basic healthcare needs of the

residents and liaise with the health officials stationed in the BHS. Most of the women — even those who are not BHWs — know basic applications of herbal treatment and first aid, unlike the men who aver that such knowledge is only for women. However, some men expressed that they gather the needed plants for herbal concoctions when such are needed by women and could not be found nearby.

The rural folk place a huge premium on their children's schooling. Either or both parents may show up for PTA conferences, recognition ceremonies, and school programs or inquire from school authorities about their children's performance. However, there are aspects to this shared responsibility for the education of the young that are divided across gender. Women purchase school supplies and help tutor the young to do their assignments and projects for sewing and cooking classes while men secure the finances for school needs and help in projects involving carpentry and farming.

Among the Higaoanons, especially those who are in the insular sitios of Barangay Camagong, there is a general belief that men should be more educated than women. This sometimes translates to tension about allowing the schooling of girl children beyond that grade which boys in the family are able to complete.

Generally, the land that residents own or work on consists of small parcels, over which family members have shared control and access. Some of these lots had already been covered by a Certificate of Land Ownership (CLOA) issued by the Department of Agriculture (DAR) in the name of the husband. In this regard, husbands have control over the family land and may sell or loan against the land without need of the wife's agreement.

The residents grow enough corn for consumption and chicken feed. For household income, bananas are harvested weekly, while coconuts are harvested every month. The activities of gathering and bringing these cash crops to the trading area — the basketball court in Lombuyan or the barangay center — involve many family members in order to make the job faster.

Vegetables grown in the farm are for family consumption. Because there are no refrigerators, the household members have to go out several times a day in order to pick vegetables for meals. The frequency with which someone in the family passes by the banana fields in order to pick vegetables allows them to keep an eye out for anything that needs attending in their farms.

The household also tends to livestock, such as chicken, goats, hog, and carabao. Care and use of the carabao is mainly the responsibility of the husband. Hogs are bred with the fiesta in mind or are raised to be sold.

The Impact of Conflict Elements on the Family Life of Women in Barangay Guinabsan

In Barangay Guinabsan, the NPA bands that came to frequent the area were seen as unwelcome outsiders. Mostly, the residents resented how the rebels would extort money and merchandise from their neighbors who owned stores. Aside from this, however, the rebels did not aggress against the community people. NPA presence in the area did not significantly hamper the movements of the men as they felt relatively safe to go about their daily activities.

It was another story for the women though. Some men would not allow their wives and daughters out of the home while the NPA rebels were in the vicinity. The adults use the conduct of the NPA rebels in the community as an example of disrespectful behavior that they warn their children against following. Their distrust and resentment of the rebels make the community folk unlikely candidates for recruitment. As one community member expressed,

“Nganong mu-uban mi sa ila nga dili man gani mayo ang ilang pagtagad sa uban namo? (Why should we join them when they do not treat some of us well?)”

While bothered by the presence of the NPA rebels and fearful to be caught in crossfire should government troops come, the men continued to tend their farms because

“Kun dili mi mulihok, unsa naman ang among kan-on? (If we don’t work, what will we eat?)”

Still, the presence of armed outsiders presents for the residents a foreboding threat to their physical security. It reminds them to keep the children — especially the teenage boys — in or around the homes where the mothers could see them. When the rebels are around, the limited mobility of women and children means that men have little help tending the farms, bringing in food, and fetching water from the river. With no help to share the load, it takes them longer to transport their farm produce to the trading area. Meanwhile, women at home contend with having the children constantly underfoot, as there are

just so many household chores that could be assigned to keep the young busy and out of each other's hair. Livestock are also kept close to the home for fear that the outsiders would take them. While tending the animals is normally a shared responsibility, in conflict situations this becomes the responsibility of the womenfolk as the livestock are gathered nearer the family domicile and men have their hands full.

The women dread the time when the combatants catch up with each other in their community. They fear that the flimsy walls of their homes would not keep them safe from stray bullets. They know when combatants come upon each other because this is unmistakably signaled by the sound of gunfire:

“Makadungog man mi ug buto-buto. Grabe gyud and kabalaka kay hadlok mi kaayo (We could hear gunfire. We worry greatly for fear of our safety).”

They also know of at least one woman in the neighborhood who experienced some temporary psychological disturbance, which they attribute to her exposure up close to an exchange of fire between the government troops and the rebels. The women shared that their exposure to violent encounters when these happened rendered them distracted, absent-minded, and indecisive. According to one of them,

“Dili mi kahuna-huna kung unsay buhaton. Wala man gani mi kabantay nga wala pa mi nilung-ag kay mura na-busy naman ang mga tao pamantay sa pagbuto (We can't think about what to do. We do not notice that we have yet to cook because everybody is busy watching out for something to explode).”

The explosions tell them whether the fighting is drawing nearer their homes. When an exchange of gunfire happens within earshot, all household activities cease. Women become extremely stressed and cannot concentrate, but at the same time have to be more vigilant in making sure that every member of the family is accounted for.

The outbreak of conflict in the vicinity also puts a temporary halt to the harvesting and trading activities for cash crops that are the source of household income for daily needs. Those who need money at the time when trade in the sitios had been suspended have to brave the road to the barangay center. When operating in the vicinity, the military personnel do not restrict the movement of the residents, however, their very presence causes the villagers anxiety. They know that bullets could fly any time while the farmers are on the road.

In Sitio Balatacan, both the military and the rebels are known to maneuver on the same road from the sitio to the barangay proper. Civilians who carry large baskets could sometimes be mistaken for combatants trying to disguise themselves. There had been times when community men had been beaten up on the road allegedly because they had been thought to be so disguised. The residents report that they do not really know which side was responsible for the beating; they only that the men who did so were armed with rifles. These incidences have caused women to fear for the safety of their men who go to the barangay center to trade when military operations are going on.

As soon as it is announced by the soldiers that their area had been cleared, the community folk would hasten to check their farms and secure whatever they could salvage that had not been damaged by the fighting and transit of the combatants. Trading would resume even as people inventoried their losses.

As the combatants pulled out, social workers come in to distribute relief and medical supplies. Women are often the ones who make representation for the family to avail of the limited postconflict support from government agencies.

Agriculture is the main source of income for the residents and what little money they hold mostly comes from trading the cash crops they grow. In Barangay Guinabsan, the amount of produce that they trade is limited to how much they can harvest and haul by hand in time for the truck that comes on Mondays. Most of the residents therefore only earn enough until the next trading day and not much cash is in circulation in these sitios. It is more the norm for people to buy things on credit from the neighborhood stores and pay when they are able to sell their produce. Living in a closely-knit community, neighbors have a general idea of each other's ability to pay. They know when others come into money and could then afford to pay off their loans.

Women are generally accepting of their life condition and only worry about being short of cash when children have school needs that require paying or buying. Money becomes a source of marital discord when the family finances are disrupted because of avoidable circumstances. When men drink, for example, it affects their productivity at tending the fields or preparing the harvest for trading. When men gamble at numbers or card games, they might lose money that wives expect to use for the needs of the family.

To stretch as much resource as they could, the residents maintain subsistence farming to put food on the table. For family consumption,

women maintain vegetable gardens in the backyard while men grow small plots of edible roots alongside the main crops they cultivate for trading. Also, their knowledge of herbal remedies allows them to save on medical consultations and the purchase of prescription medicines.

The limited finances on hand become a big problem for women during a conflict situation when a little more cash could open up more alternatives to keep the family together and safe. The financial difficulties are compounded when the weekly trading is suspended because this not only means a depletion of family resources, but also the suspension of its replenishment. Conflict situations require belt tightening and much creativity on the part of the women to meet the dietary and other daily needs of the family members, especially as in addition to cash shortage, they also have to contend with limited mobility.

Sickness in the family had a way of energizing social support. When mothers get sick, for example, their children readily pull together to accomplish the daily household chores, such as cooking, housecleaning, and washing clothes. As these are considered womanly tasks, these are often done by girls. However, in cases when there is no other female in the household, the sons are expected to deal with what needs to be done.

When children get sick, the women in the community are quick to share their homegrown remedies in the hope of effecting recovery at the soonest possible time. Grapevine network gets the message quickly to the BHWs who would readily respond to any and all medical concerns of their neighbors.

In conflict situations, however, sickness in the family is an added burden for women. Because the support network for health-related concern consists mainly of other women also, the limited mobility of the BHWs and other community women during these times puts the responsibility solely on the poor mother.

But while there is close personal relationship among residents and social support for families in crisis, these do not translate to a shared regard for undertaking democratic processes necessary for community development. Community meetings that are intended for active social participation in assessing needs and identifying shared resources are more often than not ignored. Residents often choose to work their farms rather than walk a long way to where the meeting is to be held. Some who have at one time or another attended community meetings discontinue attendance because the meetings, in their experience, took too long to start or were postponed for

lack of quorum. The gatherings that are most attended are those that are called to discuss livelihood projects where people have an expectation to be given direction on how their immediate families could benefit. It is observed that community meetings are more attended by women than men.

Public meetings to discuss communal strategies and to influence the players to the conflict in the locality have never been called. When asked about it, the women replied that they can only pray and support each other emotionally through the violent times. They believe that the only actions they could do would be to try and ensure the safety and survival of the family. They do not seem to believe that they have control or influence over the military or the rebels, such that any attempt to talk or negotiate with the combatants on their part would require them to overcome their fear of antagonizing either or both.

The Impact of Conflict Elements on the Family Life of Women in Barangay Jaguimitan

In the predominantly Higaoanon households in Barangay Jaguimitan, conflict situations had a more drastic effect on community women. The elderly often live with the family of their married son or daughter⁷ and their care is the responsibility of the wife. Aside from the needs of the children, women must also address the particular needs of the elderly. Because the older persons often suffer physical debilitation and other geriatric ailments, they may have special requirements to be considered, especially during those times when there is a need to evacuate the homes.

Higaoanon society is patriarchal, with much authority vested on the husbands and the male elders. Like their Christian neighbors, the Higaoanon women also follow the division of labor along gender lines. All chores for family upkeep — laundry, gathering of firewood and foodstuff, cooking, childcare, and tending vegetable plots, and caring for fowl — are considered womanly undertakings. As in neighboring Barangay Guinabsan, carpentry is for males while sewing is for females. Men in Barangay Jaguimitan are averse to learning how to sew, but it is allowed for a woman to learn carpentry. The women also contribute to agricultural labor at all phases from land preparation to harvest. They say that,

“Ang bae kung kinahanglan ang tabang sa uma kinahanglan naa pud sila kay ikaon man pud na namo tanan (If females are needed in the farm, they have to be there also because it feeds us all.)”

Higaoanon women prioritize the needs of everyone else in the family. While they recognize their location in the gender divide, they do not hold the boundaries to be rigid:

“Ang tarbaho sa mga bae sa balay gyud. Pero dili pasabot pasagdan ra na sila. Ang mga bana angay pud mutabang sa balay pag way trabahuon (Women’s work is really in the home. But that doesn’t mean that they should be left to it. Husbands should also help out when they don’t have work to attend to).”

Men decide on the disposition of family resources that include the parcel of lot that they farm and the livestock that they raise. Women are only consulted about selling the family land when such was brought into the marriage from her side of the family. Men also have the final say on health care, use of tools owned by the family, shelter requirements, and disbursement of income. Men decide what to plant and women seldom argue about their husbands’ choice. While wives help out in the farm, they say that

“Pagkahuman sa pag-ani uban mi sa among mga bana sa pagbaligya sa mga mais. Usahay diha ra sa barangay kuhaon. Ang kita niini ang bana gyud ang magkapot (After the harvest, we accompany our husbands to sell the corn. Sometimes, it is sold in the barangay.⁸ Husbands hold the money).”

A woman only holds money if the husband gives it to her to purchase foodstuff, medicine, or other household needs. Mostly, Higaoanons have little need for cash as they live off the land. Women seldom speak out against their husband’s decisions, trusting that whatever their husbands choose would be for the good of everybody. Women only attempt to persuade when it is about deciding on what vegetables to plant for family consumption.

They also weigh in on where to locate the family domicile, although more often than not they usually end up building it near the house of the husband’s parents. The consideration often involves safety and proximity to help in case of need. The size depends on the material to be had on the land — bamboo, straw, rattan, and logs. Men build while women arrange the interior. The decision to construct or to leave the house is a conjugal decision. On the possibility of evacuation from fighting, a respondent said,

“Puede man mi maghimo utro ug balay kon mamakwit mi. Dali ra man mi makahimo ug balay kon mamakwit man gani (We can always build another house if we were to evacuate. It is easy to build a new one.)”

Women look after the schooling and health requirements of the children. They make sure that children go to the schoolhouse in Sitio Salaysayon when the teacher is there. They are the ones who actively seek help when someone in the family is ailing. The traditional healer or *hilot* is oftentimes the one they approach to counsel and assist in these cases as the midwife assigned in the health center nearby seldom reports to her post.

In times of conflict, however, those affected flee to the school house where the social workers from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) would base relief operations. The teacher often stays away until the community has been declared safe, and so classes are suspended while the teacher is out and the schoolhouse is being used as an evacuation center. The residents, however, opine that they prefer to live among relatives than to stay in the school house. This living arrangement poses a difficulty in accessing relief services as the government workers would only serve those displaced who have sheltered in the schoolhouse.

When conflict came to Jaguimitan, the women report that it was a strain on their part to keep everyone safe. Curious children often looked out the window when the firing erupted and had to be reminded always to get down and keep safe. Worse, the government troops entered the sitio on high alert, seemingly holding everyone suspect. Some women reported that they were even lined up to have their legs inspected for evidence of bullet wounds and scratches that would tell the soldiers whether they took part in the recent offensives, most likely against the troops.⁹

This suspicion may have been because some residents in Sitio Tagbabacon are former NPA combatants who had since availed of the government's amnesty program and have returned to the folds of the law. When conflict in the vicinity erupts, however, their true sympathies are rendered suspect by both the military and the NPA. Some among the rebel returnees have chosen to go back to the hills. Some who have remained in the sitio are reportedly still being wooed by their former comrades to rejoin the rebel movement. Some of them also have since joined the CAFGU.

When the soldiers came to Tagbabacon, they purportedly detained and questioned some of the locals. Like wildfire, it was rumored in the neighborhood that arrests were being made. Those who feared that they too would be suspected of being rebels left their families to hide out somewhere before the soldiers could hold them for questioning.

They endorsed the family money to their wives before going away. As one respondent recounted,

“Ang uban nidagan pagkahibalo nga nay dakop sa mga laki nga suspetsahan nga rebelde. Igo nalang gyud nagtugon sa mga asawa nga magtago sila para dili maapil ug dakop (Some of the men bolted when they heard others were being arrested on suspicion of being a rebel. They just told their wives that they needed to hide so as not to be included in the arrests).”

In the months after the start of the fighting in Barangay Jaguimitan, some of the men returned when they judged that the government troops did not hold their loyalty suspect after all. However, the women continued to experience difficulties in living amidst the conflict. Some of their neighbors had fled community, and there were times when those who were left behind were rendered isolated.¹⁰

Some Higaoanon households in Salaysayon evacuated and sought shelter among their relatives in Sitio Mimbahandi in neighboring Barangay Camagong. The Christian settlers, on the other hand, fled to the covered court in the barangay center or to the school house in Sitio Salaysayon where the DSWD personnel provided relief assistance.

Food in the conflict-affected sitios was scarce as the farms got damaged, and people found their mobility hampered by the security situation. While there were sardines, rice, and noodles that were rationed by the DSWD personnel, those who were not staying in the Salaysayon Elementary School and in the Jaguimitan covered court were not qualified to avail of these. Those who received tried to share what they could with those who opted to stay in their homes.

Travel between sitios required the residents to secure a note from the commanding officer of the soldiers who were in the area. Even going to their farms was also difficult as the military personnel had marked off some areas there where the rebels were still reportedly hiding. Security was so tight for some weeks that even the barangay captain had to secure the authorization of the military to go from place to place and check on the residents.

Because of lack of social participation on their part, the residents have little practice at arriving at collective decisionmaking on matters affecting them and their area. Traditionally, residents only gather when someone in the neighborhood dies.¹¹ Also, for community meetings that are called for parenting and health seminars, religious activities, and community clean up, it is usually the women who show up. Public meetings are seldom utilized for community decisionmaking.

Conflict happening in the community therefore challenges the ability of the people to generate the political will and consensus to influence events. Mostly, they look to the barangay captain for direction. A nongovernment organization (NGO) tried to help the women get organized for better social participation, but the residents were wary because coming to meetings meant time away from their daily tasks. Also, some of them were afraid to participate lest they be identified to have “leftist” sentiments.

So while community work falls within the purview of these rural women, they have limited capacity to organize and be organized. Their social involvement and participation can only be such were if permitted by their husbands and when they are free of their domestic obligations. Still, it was the women who showed up for a community meeting with the mayor of Nasipit, the community leaders, *datus*, and Army commanders that was called some weeks after the community got caught up in the military operations.

The Impact of Conflict Elements on the Family Life of Women in Barangay Camagong

The Higaoanons in Sitios Mimbahandi and Hinandayan were more insular than those in Barangays Jaguimitan and Guinabsan who lived in mixed communities with the settlers. Living in seeming isolation in these sitios, the people were not engaged in agriculture for trade. Instead, they only farmed for subsistence.

Agricultural practices were labor-intensive, and most families were of necessity large enough to have more hands to work the field. Perhaps for the same reason, the household arrangement was often extended. So was the Higaoanon’s sense of family. With so many relatives in the neighborhood, children felt free to frequent other households to eat and sleep over.

The Higaoanon women keep alive and propagate the traditions of the tribe. Questions about marriage and where the newlyweds would live are decided by the elders, with the foremost consideration being how the couple could still help out in the productivity of the bigger family of origin. Oftentimes, this would mean that the bride would live with her in-laws. Marrying outside the tribe is frowned upon as settler women are seen as rebellious to tribal ways.

Women’s tasks in the household extend beyond the confines of their immediate household. Though their husbands are the ones to

harvest the fields, the wives ensure that the yield is shared among the members of the extended family. Women are always on call for when men need assistance to harvest the fields and bring in the yield from the farm to the house. They also help their neighbors and relatives at harvest time.

The women are expected to take care of the children and of the other family members. They are to do all the household chores, often with the help of their daughters, nieces, and young boys in the family. When the boys are old enough, they are freed from domestic chores and are expected to work in the fields with their fathers.

The extended family is an advantage especially during conflict situations. The men are expected to protect the family against external threats. When families need to flee the fighting in their communities, they have to go together. Nobody is allowed to stay behind. This means more hands to carry the household possessions and the comfort of number while on the road.

It is the culture of the Higaoanons that except for the *bae* or the wife of the datu, women are not allowed to take part in any political meetings in the community. They may listen in, but at no time are they allowed to speak. During conflict situations, these community meetings decide whether the residents would evacuate or not.

The conflict episode in late 2004 to early 2005 did not require any of the families to evacuate even as much of their cultivated fields sustained war damage. Instead, the sitios became the sanctuary for many of their relatives in nearby areas who had to leave their homes as the violent confrontation drew nearer. The burden of more mouths to feed required more work for the women, especially since it was actually safer for the women than the men to go out of the house to secure food. Armed groups were more permissive of women moving about, and so it fell upon women to take up the farming activities, such as land preparation, that were usually done by the men. Men, however, continued to exercise their right to make decisions for the family. For example, while it was the women who lined up for the relief goods being rationed by the DSWD to the conflict-affected residents, it was the men who decided how and when these family resources would be used.

Higaoanons who had experienced several conflict episodes in the past have already adjusted themselves to the need to move out just as soon as the datu says so. These isolated sitios are a transit area for the rebels and ever so often, the military set up a patrol base here. When this happens, security is tight in the community. Recently, however,

some local men in Sitio Hinandayan were conscripted into the ranks of the CAFGU, and this had somehow warmed the reception of the community folk for the government troops. In Mimbahandi, however, the people remain ambivalent to members of either armed group whom they see to have turned their area of residence into a battle zone.

The presence of the military or armed groups in the local community has devastating effects on the lives of women. Women in these sitios expressed that they are afraid of strangers who carry guns. They have similarly come to fear the sounds of war — helicopter flying, bombs going off, and volleys of gunfire. They also resent both the soldier and the rebel for putting them and their community in the crossfire. As much as possible, the residents do not talk to outsiders who bear guns — be they soldier or rebel — for fear that they might be suspected of sympathizing with either.

How Community Women Adjust to Conflict Situations

Conflict episodes in the community push the family members closer together as the experience provides them the opportunity to openly succor and comfort each other through the hardships and deprivation. It also requires them to work as a team, anticipate each other's needs, and be physically present for each other.

Local conflict, however, poses adjustment on the family roles that women and men play. In places where neither of the contending armed groups suspects the men to be loyal to the other side, the men are the ones who negotiate whatever needs the family has that have to be sourced from outside. Women are confined to the home to care for the children and to look out for their safety.

In NPA-influenced Sitio Tagbabacon, however, men are wary of evoking doubt as to their political sentiments. The perception of being suspect could disrupt family life and men and husbands choose not to draw further unwelcome attention to themselves. The suspicion on their men has repercussions on the women also as they have to put up with the physical inspections and domicile searches until the troops are satisfied that the residents are not aiding or spying for the enemy.

Among the Higaoanons in Barangay Camagong, the mobility of men is hampered when local conflict comes into the community. Women bear the brunt of the work needed for the upkeep of the family as they take on the role of food procurers and social services providers for relatives who come seeking safety. Moreover, they have

to defer to their husbands on decisions about the allocation of family resources and work in what the men allow when trying to manage what needs to be done.

It was also observed that while Christian settlers in these Agusan del Norte villages were more inclined to access the support provided by government agencies, the Higaoanons on the other hand much preferred staying with relatives. This has an implication on the accuracy of official data generated about the internally displaced as records often reflect only those who have been documented to stay in the designated base of the relief workers, such as the elementary school, covered court, or other public installation that have been turned into evacuation centers. Those who seek refuge among relatives are not likely to be listed as internally displaced and may not therefore be qualified to access whatever meager government support there is.

In conflict and postconflict situations when these villages could be temporarily rendered isolated, women only have each other to run to. Mercifully, community relations and gender role prescriptions encourage this form of social support for the women. On the other hand, local conflict limits the mobility of women, thus hindering them sometimes from seeking aid or giving it to other women. In Barangay Camagong, the relative safety of women to move around means that they would be more at risk of being caught in crossfire in cases of violent encounters between armed groups.

This study also found that rural women lack the voice to be part of the communal decisionmaking or to generate the kind of influence that would allow for immediate and positive changes to their difficult circumstances. Also, while women report some stresses, trauma, and emotional disturbances, there has yet to be any attempt made by pertinent government agencies and civil society groups to understand and address the psychological needs of women in conflict and postconflict situations.

There is therefore the need to examine more fully the experiences of women in conflict and postconflict situations to better support them in accomplishing their family roles. Women's voices have to be brought out in the discourse that argues for more peaceable resolution of the armed conflict that often puts their families and communities in the middle of violent confrontations.

Notes

1 The motherhood role, however, is not the only role women and girls have in the family structure. Women are also wives, sisters, daughters, or grandmothers. Each of these roles carries with it very well-defined role expectations that, when dutifully met by the bearers, sustain family cohesion and allow the basic unit of society to fulfill its fundamental functions.

2 The Higaoanon is a Lumad (indigenous peoples of Mindanao) tribe in the Agusan area.

3 “No-man’s-land” as a term is a legacy of the martial law declared by former President Ferdinand E. Marcos on 21 September 1972. It meant that all the noncombatants had been evacuated out of the area and that any person left behind was likely to be an enemy of the state. The term is not used by the AFP any more to describe any of its current combat operations.

4 (Editor’s note: The term is not in current AFP usage either. This probably refers to a state of heightened community security when troops ascertain the identity of civilians in an attempt to identify and verify those who really are residents of the community where they have established a temporary patrol base.)

5 It is believed that hitting the head would adversely affect the child’s intelligence.

6 For the Higaoanons, however, all money matters are controlled by men.

7 The Higaoanons show great respect and obedience to their elders. They also have an extended sense of family. In theory, polygamy is allowed, although nobody among the Higaoanons in Salaysayon and Tagbabacon has been practicing this since the 1980s.

8 Meaning the main poblacion or center which is some distance from the sitio.

9 The women explained that soldiers inspected their legs to see if these were lighter than their arms. Such could indicate that they habitually wore pants, a garb identified to be used by female NPA members. The women in these communities commonly wear skirts.

10 Isolation also had a political component. Sitio Salaysayon was a Higaoanon community while Tagbabacon was a community of former rebel returnees. Local government priorities often neglect the delivery of basic services to Lumad communities and those identified to have active security threats.

11 The rural folk have a tradition that disallows immediate family members to cook or sweep the floor while the dead is still lying in state in the home. Thus, the community women volunteer by showing up and taking charge of the wake and preparations for the funeral rites. This expression of communal support is called *dayong* in these communities.

The War and Postwar Experience of Selected Maranao Women in Lanao del Sur

Alma E. Berowa

Norania M. Acmad

The Muslim communities in what is now the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)¹ experienced at least two major conflict episodes where secessionist rebels and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) troops were the major players — during the 1972-1981 Martial Law of the Marcos regime (1965 to 1986) and the 2000 All-Out War under the Estrada administration (1998 to 2001). But aside from the military-rebel encounters during these times, Ninal (1999) reports that there were also sporadic violent outbreaks of local conflict episodes between feuding families and between the respective members of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the breakaway Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). All these violent confrontations often caused the displacement of families as people scrambled to get out of the line of fire.

Williams (2001) concludes that displacement has a dramatic effect on individuals in terms of their performance of social roles and responsibilities. Residents of conflict-affected communities face considerable difficulties as violence results in lost lives and livelihood resources. Houses are damaged, abandoned, ransacked, or totally burned down. During times of war and immediately following periods of armed conflict, the noncombatants — women, children, and the elderly — suffer as much or sometimes more than the warriors themselves. In communities where their men are drawn to go to war, women are left to fend not only for themselves but for the children and elderly as well. And while such may be regarded as an empowering opportunity for the women concerned, it is especially trying for those who were not trained for livelihood skills (Williams, 2001).

The role of women as primary caregivers in the household impacts on the health status of the entire household and of the greater

community in general. In grassroots Maranao² communities that experienced the 2000 All-Out War, it is especially important for agencies engaged in postconflict rehabilitation efforts to understand the experiences of the women there for the formulation of appropriate policies to attain human security given this cultural-religious milieu.

This research explores the Maranao women's experience of the 2000 All-Out War and its immediate aftermath.³ Borrowing from indigenous methods of data gathering (Enriquez et al., 1994), the community narratives were drawn through a gradual process of rapport- and confidence-building, familiarization, and negotiation on the conditions under which the respondents would be willing to answer questions. Data gathering was constrained by the researchers' lack of facility in the Maranao language, with most exchanges done through interpreters or in Tagalog. This report is also limited by the dearth of authenticated records of war events, losses, damages, and casualties that could have better contextualized the views of war victims. The obtained narratives are admittedly subject to the memory and recall of the respondents and key informants of events they experienced during the 2000 All-Out War five years earlier, and only on matters that they were willing to disclose. The right of the respondents to refuse answering questions was respected at all times.

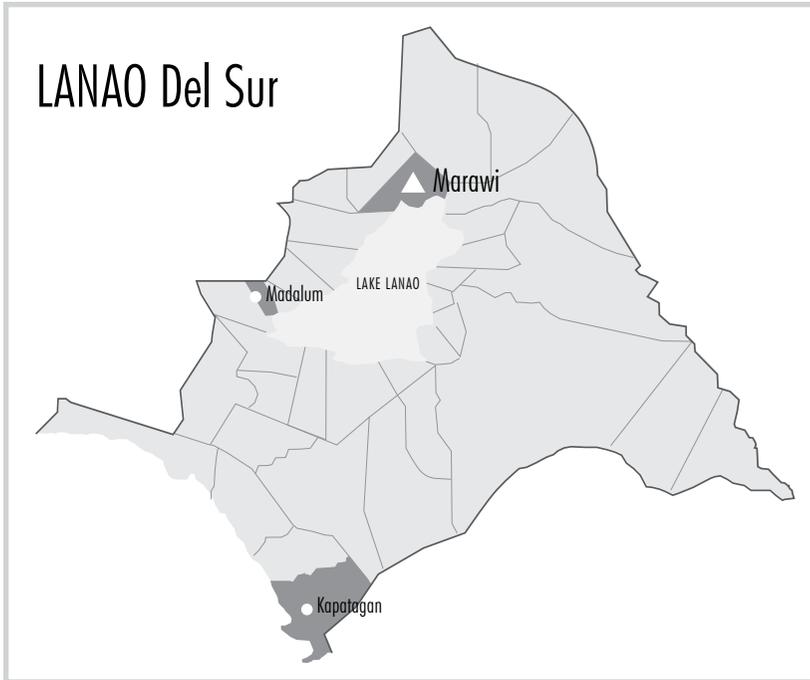
The Research Sites

This study was conducted in Marawi City and the contiguous province of Lanao del Sur. Three barangays were selected as the research sites: Barangay Moncado Kadingilan in Marawi City, Barangay Sugod in Madalum, and Barangay Inudaran in Kapatagan.

Marawi City

When the bigger Lanao province was divided into Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte in 1959, Marawi was made the capital of Lanao del Sur. On 5 April 1980, Marawi City was renamed Islamic City of Marawi under a City Council Resolution No. 19-A (Marawi City Executive and Legislative Agenda, 2005-2007). Today, it is the only chartered city in the country with a predominantly Muslim population.

The Islamic City of Marawi is located on the northern shore of Lake Lanao, some 679 meters above sea level. It is bounded on the



Source: Redrawn from wikimedia commons

north by the town of Kapai, on the east by the towns of Bubong and Ditsaan Ramain, and the municipalities of Marantao and Saguiaran on the west. Marawi is accessible from the north coming from Iligan City through a 36-kilometer highway. Lumbia Airport in Cagayan de Oro is about 137 kilometers away. Awang Airport in Cotabato City is some 110 kilometers away through the Malabang route.

Before 2001, the reported land area of Marawi City was placed at only twenty-two square kilometers. After Mayor Omar Solitario Ali assumed office in 1998, its land area was officially rectified to 87.05 square kilometers, a figure that is disputed to be erroneous.⁴ Because of its elevation, the city and adjacent areas have a cool and pleasant climate, averaging fourteen to nineteen degrees Celsius throughout the year. Backdropped by the placid Lanao Lake, Marawi's rolling hills and verdant valley lie outside the typhoon belt, protected by mountain ranges. It is host to two energy facilities operated by the National Power Corporation — the Agus River Control Dam and the Agus 1 Hydroelectric Plant.

As of 2002, total population in the city stood at 131,090, of which only 29.73 percent had education beyond high school (Marawi City

Executive and Legislative Agenda, 2005-2007). The only government hospital in the area, Amai Pakpak District Hospital, serves both the city and provincial constituents. However, a recent fire had greatly affected its operations. While there are a few private health care facilities and dental clinics in the city, the tertiary health needs of the people are more commonly referred to the public hospitals in Iligan City.

In Barangay Moncado Kadingilan where this study was conducted, the largely unfinished Fatima Gym had been converted into an evacuation center in the wake of the 2000 All-Out War, thereby halting its construction. At the height of the evacuations, about a hundred families from outside Marawi City had been temporarily housed there. In 2005, most of these had left already for their hometowns or had moved in with their relatives, leaving only some thirty families still occupying the main building. There were some also who built shanties near the gymnasium.

While staying at the gym, each family occupied a designated area, wide enough to lay a mat or mattress on the cold cement floor. Plastic sacks were hung to divide each family space. The internally displaced persons (IDP) shared a common cooking area. They bought water for drinking and cooking from a nearby faucet using plastic gallon jugs that were provided by aid agencies. As of the data-gathering period, the interrupted construction of the gym had yet to resume because the place was still serving as an evacuation center.

Madalum, Lanao del Sur

In 1947, Madalum became a municipality by virtue of Republic Act 1515. In 1998, Soraida Mindalano-Sarangani was elected mayor, succeeding her husband. She was subsequently reelected in 2001 and again in 2004.

Madalum is bounded on the north by the municipality of Munai and on the east by the towns of Piagapo, Tugaya, and Bacolod-Kalawi. On the south lies Lake Lanao and on the west is the town of Madamba. Madalum has 37 barangays with a total land area of 49,810 hectares and a population of 18,405 (NSO, 2000). This largely agricultural town grows rice, corn, coconut, and fruit trees such as *durian*, *marang*, and mango. Lakeside barangays rely on fishing.

Barangay Sugod, the selected research site, is about an hour away from Marawi City. It has an estimated land area of 550 hectares. There

are 111 registered households in 85 houses. The 671 people counted as barangay residents include some IDPs from Munai, Lanao del Norte.

Kapatagan, Lanao del Sur

Parliamentary Bill No. 1087 created the Municipality of Kapatagan as approved by the Interim Batasang Pambansa on 10 December 1981.⁵ Kapatagan is located at the southeastern part of Lanao del Sur, about two hours' drive from Marawi City. Comprising of 28,813 hectares, there are eleven barangays distributed through a forested area and four barangays that are located along the coast. Narciso Ramos Highway cuts through the main barangay of Daguang. In 2002, total population stood at 15,635. Like Madalum, the town mayor was also a woman, Raida Bansil Maglangit.

About seventy percent of Kapatagan's total land area is agricultural. While farming and fishing are the main livelihood activities, there are also residents engaged in small enterprises or employed in civil service.

During the 2000 All-Out War, Barangay Inudaran in Kapatagan was one of the safe havens for Maranao evacuees from the north.

Methodology

The objective of this study was to report on how the conflict-affected Maranao women tell about the effects of the 2000 All-Out War on them and on their families and how they managed to cope. Research was conducted in the last half of 2005, beginning with a variety of pre-field activities: site visits; on-site planning; tasking; courtesy calls to various offices and agencies and local government unit (LGU) officials; securing necessary permission from local traditional and religious leaders; rapport-building with the community; and instrumentation. A variety of data-gathering methods were employed: village mapping, community data, participant-observation, *patanong-tanong* (Enriquez et al., 1994), focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs).

The Respondents

The primary sources of data for this research were 120 Maranao women⁶ of reproductive age (eighteen to forty-five) from an evacuation center in Marawi City and two selected conflict-affected communities

in Lanao del Sur. Most of them were housewives, farmers, peasants, petty producers, or service providers in the informal economy. Only a handful of them finished high school, and most had no source of regular income. About a quarter had attended *madrrasah*⁷ and had received some Arabic education.

The Internally Displaced Women in Fatima Gym, Marawi City

Five years after the armed violence of the 2000 All-Out War displaced communities in Lanao del Sur, the Fatima Gym in Marawi City was still hosting about thirty internally displaced families that had sought refuge there. The women remember that when they fled their homes, they ran to safety through the forest on a journey that would take several days. For some, the arduous trek took a week. Most of them were weighed down by the heavy burden of their hastily gathered belongings. Some of them said they were menstruating, pregnant, in labor, or lactating, which made traveling more difficult and uncomfortable.

During the interviews and the FGD session, several respondents mentioned the story of a woman who had to give birth in the forest. The woman and the baby reportedly died and were buried in a shallow grave as there was no time to accord them a decent burial in accordance with Islamic rites. There was no time to grieve either for their companions who had to leave in haste as the firefight drew near, or so the story went.⁸

At Fatima Gym where the IDPs were staying, they report that they have to endure physical hardships and that they are *inaapi* (being taken advantage of). They described themselves as *bakwit*⁹ and seemed to believe that this was the reason why people did not treat them with dignity. In particular, they referred to the non-IDPs, presumably the cityfolk with whom they negotiated for purchase of water and the use of comfort room and electricity, as taking undue advantage of their need.

In the evacuation center, lack of privacy and crowding made family life very difficult and hampered normal interactions between couples. There was little by way of income opportunities in the city and disagreements over money or lack of it often had spouses heatedly exchanging words. Sometimes, they even threw things at each other in frustration, but they would eventually settle down, realizing that such behavior would not solve their problems. Some husbands reportedly had extramarital affairs or even took another wife.

Lack of privacy also affected relations with fellow IDPs and caused problems of disciplining the young. There was no school for the children, and with nothing to do they sometimes ended up squabbling with each other.

Emergency relief in the form of food rations and medical supplies had been forthcoming in the early days of their stay at the Fatima Gym. However, as their stay stretched out year after year, the assistance dwindled away to nothingness and soon they were left to fend for themselves. There was no medical assistance provided for pregnant and elderly women, much less reproductive health education for adolescent girls. Lack of regular water supply exacerbated problems with sanitation and increased the risk of skin infections and water-borne diseases.

Due to lack of money, many among them could not avail of medicine when they fell ill. Instead, they drew on traditional health practices, mainly using herbs and herbal concoctions upon the direction of the elderly women among them. It was observed that the health of IDPs is at risk with the lack of proper solid waste disposal and generally squalid living conditions at the evacuation center.

A respondent who was pregnant and coughing blood at the time of the interview reported that she experienced several miscarriages and stillbirths before. She was not sure if that was the seventh or



IDPs cooking at an evacuation center in Iligan. Photo by Bobby Timonera

ninth time that she got pregnant. She shared that she had seen the doctor who gave her a prescription that she could only partially fill. She kept these vitamin capsules in her pocket, saving them for the moment when she would be about to deliver. She thought these would give her extra strength during labor, without seeming to realize that she and her unborn baby actually needed those vitamins while she was pregnant.

The older women among them reportedly experienced bouts of dizziness, weakness, and cold-and-hot flushes, but just bore their physical discomfort without complaint. They mostly wrapped themselves in their *malong*¹⁰ and were observed to pass the day sitting silently on wooden benches in the corners of the gymnasium. They disclosed that they did not take regular baths due to the scarcity of water in the evacuation center and because of the cold Marawi air. Some of them commented that *miyada su kapanabanga* (there is no more help coming).

Many among the respondents admitted to resort to *kapamangni* (begging), which they euphemistically referred to as “being a student” to justify their loitering the streets of Marawi City. The enterprising among them expressed that they lacked capital and had to make do with what little they earned from retail selling of convenience items to fellow evacuees. Mostly, they felt hopeless about their capacity to find work as there were no farms in the city and they perceived themselves as lacking in employable skills. There were others who made money from making bead jewelry, sewing, and scavenging for scrap iron and used plastic. A few reported that their husbands had been able to rent tricycles to ferry passengers, but it did not bring in enough to allow them to eat regular meals, much less have something left over for *kandori* (thanksgiving).

Despite these difficulties, however, the women at Fatima Gym said they would rather stay at the evacuation center than go home. They did not believe that war was actually over and did not relish the prospect of going home only to have to evacuate again. Their harrowing experience of having to flee for their very lives five years earlier was something that they vowed never to have to go through again if they could help it.

They also expressed a need to hold on to what meager family possessions they had acquired at the evacuation center, such as the few plates and pots, a mattress for family bed, and plastic water containers that had been provided to them by various aid agencies.

These represented for them the only material possessions of value that they had left. They worried that should there be another war, they would again lose everything and would have to start all over again.

The women could not describe their future clearly or tell of definite plans. In the various data-gathering activities, none of them expressed concern for other people or for the community where they are in, suggesting that they were too absorbed in their own trials and tribulations and could think of very little else. They shared that this was the first time that they sat down together as a group to talk about their experience of war and its consequences on their lives.

The Madalum Women in Barangay Sugod

When the 2000 All-Out War broke out, Barangay Sugod in Madalum became host to IDPs coming from as far as Munai in Lanao del Norte. Sugod residents metaphorically refer to these upland places as the “second floor,” from which evacuees fled past the forest to get to Madalum and to safety. The Sugod respondents remember that the sudden descent of evacuees into their community caused them much concern: How could they help and accommodate these people and how many more of them would be coming? Seeing the need of the distraught people, some of whom were their relatives and friends, they could not just close their doors in the face of human suffering crying out for succor.

It was for some days that the desperate IDPs milled around or set up camp outside the houses in Madalum. Local government officials scrambled to arrange for help. Before the government could act to address this humanitarian crisis, Barangay Sugod bore the strain of hosting the flood of people who assembled in their community. This situation caused the community women much worry, anxiety, nervousness, and sleeplessness. In the resulting panic and confusion, some of them sustained damage to land and property. Some lost their chicken and farm produce. Eventually, the IDPs were accommodated at the elementary school, thereby disrupting the class schedule of the Sugod children. The community adjusted by holding some of the classes in the local residences. War relief sent to Sugod came in terms of food aid for the IDPs. At no time, however, was there provision of medical attention or health services.

The former IDPs who had remained in Sugod told the research team that they had crossed the forest to go down Madalum.¹¹ Some had brought pack animals during the long trek, but mostly, the people

carried with them what they could. They recalled that the decision to leave had been very sudden because of the approaching war. Initially, they had nursed hopes that their community would be spared; families debated whether to leave or stay, until the bombings intensified and forced the last holdouts to depart in haste. On the road, they had no clear plans about where to go. It was hard for them to stay together as they were all hurrying away from danger on unfamiliar trails, which they traveled with just a very vague idea of what was ahead. Some of them were only able to reunite with their families in Sugod.

Five years after the 2000 All-Out War, community life in Barangay Sugod appears to be normal. Among those interviewed were women who had sought refuge there and had opted to stay. By all indications, they seemed to have integrated into the community. Most of them had availed of core shelters set up by the government in the area and had also arranged for the use of land to till in order to earn income for their families. There were some who started small businesses, mostly retail stores. One former refugee reported that she had taken into her care four children whose father had died and whose mother had gone away to remarry. One of the former IDPs confided that she still suffered from “abnormal” responses, which she attributed to her traumatic exposure to war episodes.

The postwar community adjustment in Sugod was strongly aided by the able leadership of the barangay captain. The women saw that he was able to engage the various players in matters of peace, security, and harmony in the barangay and felt he deserved their support. During the June 2005 community consultation with members of the MILF, for example, the women pitched in to cook repast for the guests and arrange the stage where the men were to hold their public discussion.

As community life normalized, the women took part in social activities that propagated the Maranao cultural traditions, most notably in arranging marriage for the young. Some even consented to *kandowadaway*, allowing their husbands to take a second wife. They actively practiced their role in religious rituals — preparing kandori and taking part in communal worship and prayer. In all these, they felt they could call on their husbands and other community women for support.

They also had occasion to participate in ritual negotiations that preserve harmonious social relations among neighbors. They helped arrange the meeting of parties in dispute to amicably settle *rido* or family feuds in the area, spending their own money, time and resources when necessary. It was however especially on matters of marital

dispute when other women felt most called upon to mediate and restore family harmony at the soonest possible time. This sometimes involved having to temporarily meet the needs of the young children when their parents were unable to do so, engaged as they would be in their personal crisis.

The Kapatagan Women in Barangay Inudaran

At the time of fieldwork in Inudaran, there was an influential female among them. She was an *ustadja* who taught at the madrasah. She also volunteered as a barangay health worker (BHW) and manufactured from home herbal soap and *lagundi*¹² medicine for cough. The other respondents were housewives who augmented family income from handicraft, farming, and other home-based enterprises.

Some of the women who were interviewed admitted that they were not originally from the barangay and had only gotten there because of the 2000 All-Out War. Since getting there, most of them had not ever gone back to their original homes. For many of them, the evacuation experience left its indelible mark in their psyche. It was, in their words, *miyadiyahaman* (difficult) and *daa miyzamaniyan* (difficult beyond compare).

One of them narrated that as they were evacuated, they had unknowingly rested on top of a *koba* or burial ground before setting off again and eventually finding their way to Inudaran. They remembered literally running for their lives through the forest with barely anything to keep body and soul together. They reported feeling confused and terrified all the time. Still, it was also a time of drawing from internal resources, such as in the case of one respondent who shared that, without matches in the forest, she was able to get a fire going so she could cook. Another disclosed that she had begged for rice from people she did not know. She cooked it with lots of water so that there would be enough porridge to share with others. When asked how they coped through the trying times, they said *kazarakan* (leaving one's fate up to Allah's will), *paratiyaya* (faith in Allah), and *kazabar* (patience).

During the data gathering sessions, the women in Barangay Inudaran could not help but compare their lives before and after the 2000 All-Out War. Most of them remember a time of relative peace of mind before war came and took that away. Reminiscing about it five years later, they revealed that they felt as if they were just starting from nothing, with the debts they incurred in trying to repair the damage

wrought by war on their houses and farms. For one of them, the plastic plates the family was then using only served as a painful reminder of the more expensive Duralex dinnerware set they had before. Most of them complained that the war had destroyed their house, or that they had to abandon it, and that it got looted.

It was observed that the community was generally welcoming of researchers and civil society interventions. The community crisis in Inudaran had drawn humanitarian aid and relatively longer term community interventions by nongovernment organizations (NGOs), such as the Tabang Mindanaw and the Bangsa Moro Youth/Ranao Center for Peace and Development (BMY-RCPD). The residents appreciate the various literacy and livelihood training courses delivered by these NGOs because of the skills they learned that they could put to use in order to earn.

Despite these efforts, however, a lingering mix of fear, uncertainty, nervousness, and anxiety was reported by the women, along with complaints of physical ailments, such as respiratory diseases, headaches, and skin irritation. The incidence of tuberculosis (TB) is relatively prevalent. Mostly, the women attribute the current health conditions of the residents to the earlier bombardment that they lived through during the war.

Stories of Loss, Grief, and Continuing Difficulties

Without intending to, data gathering for this paper seemed to serve as a venue for the women to relive their experience of fear and deprivation among those who had gone through a similar episode. In Fatima Gym, the discussants revealed that it was the first time for them to articulate to others how the evacuation had affected them and their families. In all the study sites, these memories remained to be intensely emotional for many of them.¹³

From the women's narratives of their evacuation experience, it is quite possible to tease out their priorities when it came down to a life-and-death situation. Survival was about having the presence of mind to run for cover. It was about keeping the family together. About to flee to parts unknown, they all grabbed their malong and took along what they could of food items and kitchen implements — water containers, kettles, pots and pans. They brought sacks and pack animals when they could. They reckoned direction in terms of safety and the possibility of finding refuge among relatives and friends.

Five years later, they had consigned as lost the material possessions they had left behind. They, however, continue to feel the loss of their houses, gold jewelry, appliances, and even antiques. In their daily lives, they miss having their farm implements, carpentry tools, and their kitchen utensils. They remember their farms and how they had to leave their crops unattended. At certain times, they remember these losses for the difference these could have made in their present lives.

It is important to emphasize that while evacuating, some of them were menstruating, pregnant (*maogat*), in labor (*balilet*), or lactating. A woman claimed to have delivered under the trees. While the baby survived, she was eventually observed to manifest abnormalities in behavior and development. She was called *sambida* (different) in the community. Neighbors believed her to be a *kiasambian* (changeling). The mother attributes her state to the stressful conditions of her birth.

It was also shared during one of the FGDs that a woman lost her husband during the evacuation. When this was mentioned, the discussants turned hushed and sober. The woman shared that she



Displaced woman makes do with the crowded conditions in a Maigo schoolhouse in 2003. Photo by Bobby Timonera

and her ten children had gone ahead and only heard later about the dire fate befalling the man of the house. They were not able to see his body and confirm for themselves the reality of his death. They were told by his companions at that time that they had to bury him in a shallow grave. As with the story about an unidentified woman who died while giving birth in the forest, this narrative about the unexpected death of the husband evoked much empathy for the family that had been barred by circumstances beyond their control from affording their loved one the dignity of a decent Islamic burial that every Muslim deserves.

The telling of these emotionally charged stories appeared to be a way for the women to have their terror, loss, and grief owned up and acknowledged in public. It may serve to purge themselves of sadness and despair, of hate and anger, and the tears that never failed to accompany such stories could hopefully have some cathartic effect. On hindsight, this exercise could have been better aided with the help of a trained mental health professional, social worker, or critical incident stress debriefers.

The bitter experience of internal displacement due to war has far-reaching consequences on the lives of grassroots women. In this study, it is indicated that all of them continue to suffer in the aftermath of war five years after their lives were drastically interrupted by conflict and violence. During conflict episodes and immediately after, community women in these affected areas were rendered vulnerable to suffering and difficult circumstances due to deprivation of access to their land and other livelihood resource, unavailability of medical personnel and health services in their communities, and lack of adequate resources at evacuation centers. This condition of need puts them at risk of exploitation and abuse as women and children are commonly the source of cheap labor.

Postconflict adjustments seemed to be harder for the women who took refuge in the city, as there was little opportunity for them to participate and integrate into community life. Their lives revolved within Fatima Gym, unlike in Madalum and Kapatagan where the internally displaced were observed to be picking up the pieces of their disrupted lives, participating in communal events, and establishing personal and economic relations in their neighborhood.

Because Madalum and Kapatagan were also agricultural communities, life in these villages did not require much adjustment for the refugees. In Madalum, some of them have found work in the

farms. In Kapatagan, IDPs have accessed a loan facility to help them acquire some fields for planting. For the Marawi respondents, on the other hand, being in the city was a lot harder to negotiate. Because there were no farms where they could find work, their day-to-day survival required them to learn new behaviors, such as receiving dole-out material aid, begging in the streets, and buying water.

In all the three study sites, it was evident that government response to the manmade disaster as it happened was neither timely nor adequate. During evacuation, the families were not provided transportation, medical assistance, food provision, or direction on the safe routes to take. The humanitarian response, when it came, was generally about emergency food rations and the provision of temporary shelter using installations under the control of the local government or the Department of Education. The weight of the disaster response and post-crisis rehabilitation was more heavily thrust on the victims themselves and on their host communities, especially in terms of food for the long term, medical requirements, livelihood opportunities, and even more permanent shelter requirements.

The year after the 2000 All-Out War offensives, the government provided some core shelters in Madalum and Kapatagan as replacement for houses damaged during the war. In Marawi, the IDPs remained in the unfinished gymnasium. Some of those who chose to move out stayed nearby, in shanties they put together themselves.

Even five years after the 2000 All-Out War, the Kapatagan IDPs continue to enjoy livelihood training opportunities provided by war relief NGOs. These efforts, however, mostly address livelihood capacitation and do little to address gender dimensions to war and postwar experiences. No concrete measures have been put in place in any of these research sites to specifically address the reproductive and psychological health needs of women or support their full potential for social participation and community management. Even as community processes were initiated to normalize the lives of war victims, such as the local dialogue with the MILF and the Inudaran barangay officials in 2005, women remained in the periphery of negotiations, consigned to listening to men discuss arrangements and seeing to the men's physical comfort and convenience. Machel (2000) proposes that increased participation of women can have positive peaceful effects for conflict prevention, conflict mediation, postconflict reconstruction, and peacebuilding, but this study finds that the increased participation of women has

yet to be a reality for the respondents. This is perhaps an ideal starting point for rethinking resource allocation for development work in conflict-affected communities.

Some Recommendations

This exploratory study seemed to have merely scratched the surface of the grassroots Muslim women's bitter experience of the 2000 All-Out War and its continuing havoc on their family life. That the women continue to struggle for balance five years after indicates that the problem is bigger than what they and their support system had been able to cope with. Their situation calls out to the bigger community to help find solutions. Multisectoral groups, to include all the stakeholders to peace and development in the ARMM, are challenged to work together to address the plight of the displaced.

More importantly, there is a need to open up space for the participation of women in decisions affecting their communities — be it in the peace negotiations, postconflict rehabilitation, resource allocation, and inventory of war damage. Special assistance must be provided to address women's reproductive and psychological health needs.

The 2000 All-Out War had appealed to many foreign donors who had readily parted with development assistance for relief and postconflict rehabilitation.¹⁴ And yet the continuing account of struggle among these community women and their report of the aid that had gotten to them glaringly reflect gaps in the distribution process. There is the need to audit and account for these funds.

There is also a need to design a more responsive institutional structure that would be more efficient in delivering timely and adequate emergency response should similar situations occur in the future. This specific recommendation would be a redeeming act of both the government and NGOs to dignify a basic essential feature of Islamic teaching: To take care of children, especially orphans, and widows.

Notes

1 Republic Act 6734 signed by President Corazon C. Aquino on 6 November 1990 created the ARMM. The region's territory includes the two mainland provinces of Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao, and the three island provinces of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Basilan. Marawi City is the lone city in the ARMM.

2 The Maranaos are the dominant Filipino Muslim tribe in the Lanao area.

3 Busran-Lao and and Morada (cited in HDN, 2005) also examined aspects of the Maranao diaspora due to conflict in Lanao del Sur.

4 Land area is one important basis in the computation of the city's share in the Internal Revenue Allocation (IRA) and may explain the inflated land area.

5 The late Governor Dimaporo, Sultan sa Maguindanao Pangadapun Benito, and retired Brig. Gen. Mamarinta Lao helped pursue the separation of Kapatagan from Balabagan.

6 The respondents all belong to the subordinate class in the Maranao hierarchy and occupy a disadvantaged position in the system of resource distribution. As a class, they command very little political or economic influence.

7 Arabic school.

8 This story of the unnamed, ill-fated woman was obviously very painful for these IDPs because Muslim tradition requires for the dead to be buried six feet below the ground before the sun goes down.

9 *Bakwit* is a corruption of the English word 'evacuate'. The term is used to refer to evacuees or IDPs.

10 A traditional tube-like Muslim garment.

11 It seems ironic that while IDPs from Munai were going down to Madalum to safety, the Madalum residents were also moving out their valuables to other places like Marawi City and nearby municipalities. Others moved to other places and just visited Madalum to check on their farms.

12 *Vitex negundo*.

13 The need for trauma healing was not anticipated at the inception of this research, inasmuch as it had been five years since the war experience of the

respondents. It was revealed in the conduct of this study, however, that the IDPs had never received any form of psychosocial intervention.

14 Although extensive overseas development assistance (ODA), in terms of grants and loans, has reportedly been funneled to the ARMM, the region has ironically slid to the pits in terms of poverty incidence, ranking last among the sixteen regions in the country (HDN, 2005).

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Children in the Aftermath of Local Conflict in Lanao del Norte

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Introduction

Countries with ongoing conflict or those which experienced a long drawn out war are beset with social problems and economic slowdown. Armed conflict disrupts family life and governance. Local conflict adversely affects the provision of health services, schooling, and public utilities in the immediate vicinity. Relationships among residents are fractured, and existing power structure loses or diminishes its authority.

Several studies worldwide have documented the effects of armed conflict on the communities where they occur. It seems, however, that the direct consequences of war in terms of deaths, injuries, and damage to physical infrastructures prove to be much easier to measure than the long-term impact of exposure to violence on people's mental health. The prevalence of mental health problems can rise significantly after natural disasters and conflict (Whiteford, 2005).

Marcelino, et al. (2000) recorded that since 1986, poverty, human rights violations, evacuations, and terrorism, among others, affected mostly children eight years old and below. A body of literature on children and war documented the travails the young suffer — the trauma and physical violence they experienced. In particular, it is indicated that conflict implicates their ability to learn in school and threatens their chances for long-term psychosocial stability (Machel, 1996).

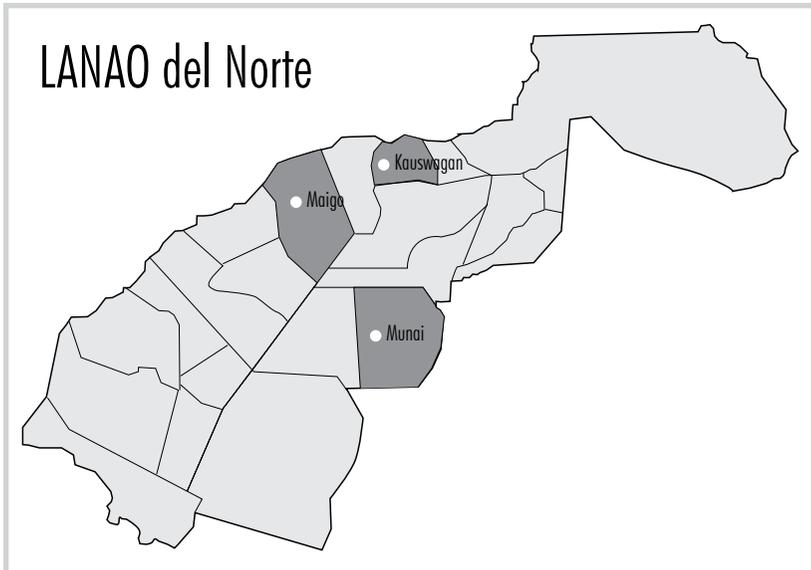
The impact of conflict on children's mental health, however, has yet to be fully explored. The way parents, stakeholders, and government respond to conflict situation varies. In like manner, children's response, coping, and vulnerability to sustain long-term psychological debilitation as a result of exposure to violence also vary as a function of their age and emotional dependence on adults.

Republic Act 7610 stipulates statutory provisions that protect children during situations of armed conflict. Since 2000, however, the sporadic outbreaks of armed encounters in Lanao del Norte did not spare the children who made up most of the internally displaced persons (IDPs). The conflict episodes stretched over a period of time, such that a particular community could be periodically displaced when the tide of battle shifted near. At the height of the community crisis, parents may remain unaware of the extent of the adverse impact of such an experience on the psychosocial well-being of children. Conflict-related stress symptoms take longer to manifest and require proper diagnosis by mental health experts. They vary across children population and may range from fear, aggression, loss of self-esteem, and mental ill health. Once the mental health condition of the children is impaired, their social and economic potentials are also adversely affected (Balita, 2005).

This paper examines the impact of conflict on the mental health condition of Lanao del Norte children who experienced the 2000 All-Out War. This study was done five years after to document what the children remember of their experiences during and immediately after that event and examine signs and symptoms of physical, cognitive, psychological, and social disturbance among children before and shortly after their home communities were embroiled in armed conflict.

Research Setting

From among three towns in Lanao del Norte that had been heavily affected by the 2000 All-Out War, a barangay each was randomly chosen. These are the barangays of Poblacion in Kauswagan, Poblacion in Maigo, and Matampay in Munai.



Source: Redrawn from wikimedia commons

Barangay Poblacion, Kauswagan

On 17 March 2000, more than 300 civilian residents including children were held hostage by Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) elements at the Kauswagan town hall but were safely rescued by the military on the same day. Four days later, President Joseph Estrada came down to Kauswagan and declared an All-Out War in Lanao del Norte, sending government troops in pursuit of the Muslim rebels. The massive firefights that ensued between the military and the MILF elements dragged on for more than a month.

Kauswagan residents remember that the MILF invasion of the Poblacion area left civilian and military casualties, as well as unaccounted deaths among the attackers. The locals evacuated in haste using the sea routes as MILF roadblocks sprung up in the eastern and western boundaries of the Poblacion. Some fleeing civilians experienced being shot at or pursued by MILF elements. Only a few people were left in town a day after the incident. Vital community functions were temporarily suspended during the attack but resumed operations soon after the Philippine Marines secured the area.

Barangay Poblacion, Maigo

Historically, there had been recurring incidents of local conflict in Maigo going back to the skirmishes in the 1950s between Christian settlers and the *Moros*¹ the former alleged to be cattle rustlers. In the 1970s, the fighting between the *Blackshirts*² and the *Ilaga*³ would sometimes cause the evacuation of the predominantly Maranao residents. In the 1980s, the New People's Army (NPA) emerged to be a growing security threat in the area until the bombing of its camp in Barangay Maliwanang ended the capability of the communist rebels to mount major offensives in Maigo and its environs.

It is believed in Maigo that the concerted MILF attack on the eastern, western, and southern boundaries of its main barangay, Poblacion, on 24 April 2003 was in retaliation for the local government's refusal to pay the MILF protection money.⁴ At early dawn, about 300 MILF guerilla troops invaded Barongison Bridge to the east and strafed a Super 5 commuter bus, killing three of its passengers and wounding others. At around the same time, another MILF band entered Barangay Kulasihan, Kolambogan, the eastern boundary of Maigo, and killed around ten passengers on board a fish carrier. More MILF invading troops came through Purok 2 and Purok 4.

When the marauding MILF came, the civilians fled to the shorelines to the north. However, only a few were able to get across by pumpboat to Ozamiz City that day. By nightfall, the stranded populace was directed to the schoolhouses that the Department of Health (DOH) and the Municipal Planning and Development Office (MPDO) had turned into evacuation centers. Responding troops sent in by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) engaged the raiding party in firefights to drive them out. While the MILF withdrew the very same day, the people feared that these forces could come back any time. Many stayed for some time in the evacuation centers and only visited their homes during the day in order to feed their livestock.

Barangay Matampay, Munai

Matampay was an MILF-influenced barangay that, until the 2000 All-Out War, was perceived even by neighboring barangays to rely on the MILF elements for social control and protection. In fact, people in Lanao had the impression that Matampay residents were MILF members also.

Matampay was hit by conflict in the summer of 2000 and again in 2003, but it was the former that caused more damage and displacement

because of its length and intensity. The 2000 All-Out War brought the fleeing MILF bands and the pursuing government troops into the area. Days later, government troops mounted operations to capture the 102nd Base Command camp of the Northern Mindanao Front, Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (NMF, BIAF) in Barangay Inudaran.⁵ The eventual fall of this camp would send scattered bands of MILF troops scampering all over Munai and to the adjoining towns, with the soldiers still in hot pursuit.

Even before the combatants caught up with each other in the area, many among the local residents had started to evacuate. As the firefights and bombings escalated, the rest fled to the forest and the interior areas of Munai, with some eventually finding refuge in Lanao del Sur and Marawi City, until no civilian was left in Matampay. Running to safety, the residents could hear the explosions and gunfire. They saw helicopter gunships and some fighter planes dropping bombs at MILF targets who had also hidden in the forests.

It was almost a year before the residents started to trickle back to Matampay. War had ravaged their homes, and some of them chose to let the ruins stand. Government postconflict rehabilitation efforts provided for core shelters that the returnees could use as they slowly tried to rebuild their community life. In 2003, however, the town again got caught in renewed armed conflict between the MILF and the government troops, causing the destruction this time of the school building and the water system, among others. The people had to evacuate yet again.

In late 2005 when this study was initiated, the Matampay population stood at thirty percent of the pre-2000 census figures. A company of the Philippine Marines secured the area and various nongovernment organizations (NGOs) were providing development assistance such as postharvest facilities, a community water system, and a *Madrasah* school to help the barangay get back on its feet.

The Children

Household interviews in the three barangays were necessary to establish how many among the children there had experienced the 2000 All-Out War. Those who qualified were screened as to their capacity to recall the events during the height of the conflict. The older ones were invited to take part in focus group discussions (FGDs) while the younger ones were individually interviewed.⁶ The FGDs



This photo of young children at an evacuation center was taken in 2000 by the late Gene Boyd Lumawag. Photo courtesy of Bobby Timonera

and interviews in Kauswagan and Maigo were done in Cebuano while Tagalog was used with the Maranao⁷ children in Munai.

Thirty-seven children were the data sources for this study. Sixteen were individually interviewed⁸ while twenty-one took part in the three FGDs⁹ that were respectively conducted in each study site. Their mean age at ten indicated that they experienced the armed conflict in these communities when they were around five years old.¹⁰ Those who came from Munai were all Maranao, while the Kauswagan and Maigo respondents were all Christians.

Close to sixty percent were still in the primary grades. There were four among them who were in high school while the rest were in the elementary grades. All of them had suffered interruption in their schooling.¹¹

More than half of the children were either born first or second¹² in a brood of three or four in an extended family that had an average household size of 6.4.¹³ Farming is averred to be the main source of family income. The Kauswagan and Maigo children disclosed that their parents had gone to college. The Munai respondents, on the other hand, could not give information on the educational experience of their parents.¹⁴

Children's Memory of Experiences before Conflict

In order to establish whether there were significant changes in the behavior of the children after the conflict, there was a need to determine certain benchmark information of their mental status before the conflict. Four indicators were used: physical, cognitive, social, and psychological experiences or conditions.

Prior to armed conflict, the children report some physical disturbances. Weight loss due to undernourishment was reported by three. Another three reported enuresis.¹⁵ Other physical disturbances reported were shakiness or tremors, shortness of breath, and occasional headache or lightheadedness, which could be attributed to the body's response to environmental changes, work or play, and nutritional deficiency. The manifestations of physical stress that surfaced were indicated to stem from malnutrition, developmental stages, and social activities such as play that required strenuous physical movement.

Two children reported to have short attention span. One admitted having had learning difficulties. No other observations about difficulties in cognitive functioning could be recalled.

In terms of social functioning, five children disclosed some discipline and relational issues. Four said they got in trouble at home for refusing to do household chores or to go to school. Another allegedly got into playground fights with some frequency.

The most prevalent psychological reactions reported by the children include a dislike of war toys and fear of strangers. There were occasional cases of nightmares, bouts of irritability, and transitory sadness.

When asked about their perception of the soldiers before the 2000 conflict, the Christian children had varied answers. Some had feared the soldiers, others saw them as protectors, while others had not known soldiers prior to the conflict. The Maranao children, on the other hand, either had no prior knowledge of the soldier or saw him as a threat to the family or the community.

Mahadlok ko ug sundalo basin patyon – abi nako mamatay ug tao. (I was afraid of soldiers because I thought they kill people).

- Christian male, 10

Sa pagkakita nako nahadlok ko kay nagbuto-buto man ilang mga pusil. (When I saw them, I was scared because their guns made a loud noise).

- Christian female, 11

Sa una sab wala man ko nakakita sa armadong tawo. (I had never seen an armed man before).

- Christian male, 9

Adto na pagkagiyera ayha ko nakakita nag marcha sa dalan, daghan kayo. (It was only when the conflict broke out that I saw many of them marching down the streets).

- Christian male, 12

Motabang sa atoa ug motabang sa mga tawo. (They help us and others, too).

- Christian female, 10

Wala lang, maglakaw-lakaw ra mi, dili ko mahadlok kay dili man manghilabot. (We did not mind them. We roamed around without fear because they did not touch us).

- Christian female, 9

Wala akong nakikita na sundalo. MI ra ang palaging nakikita. (I had not seen a soldier but I frequently saw the MILF).

- Muslim male, 11

Hindi pa ako nakakita ng sundalo, pero nakadungog nako nga nay sundalo... (I had not seen a soldier, but I heard about them).

- Muslim female, 10

Natatakot baka barilin. Kasi si Papa ko kasama niya si Bravo. (I was afraid they would shoot. Because my father is with Bravo).

- Muslim male, 13

Kasi masasama silang mga tao, ang mga sundalo. (Because the soldiers are bad people).

- Muslim female, 14



The evacuees inside a schoolhouse in Maigo that was turned into an evacuation center in 2003. Photo by Bobby Timonera

Because it was normal for them to see the MILF elements in their neighborhood, the Munai children did not fear the MILF, unlike the children from Kauswagan and Maigo who disclosed some stereotypes they held about the MILF, as below:

Hindi ako matakot sa MI kasi pareha kami Muslim kahit may baril dala nila (I am not afraid of the MILF because they are Muslims like us even though they carry guns).

- Muslim male, 10

MI makahadlok kay mahadlok man ta mamatay, mamatay na ug bata. Usahay daw mangita ug tigulang, ilang kan-on, ingon akong uncle. (I was afraid of the MILF because I fear being killed. They kill children. My uncle said they sometimes catch old people and eat them).

- Christian male, 11

When they were asked to complete a sentence about their life prior to the conflict, all of them said that they had been happy (*malipayon*). Most of them claimed that their days were spent playing with friends, doing domestic chores, and studying. Across the study sites, the trend for remembering positive experiences of their joys, family obligations and socialization with peer groups and family members showed up.

The Lanao children learned to do household chores early in life as family members had taught them to clean house, cook, wash clothes and dishes, and care for their younger siblings. A respondent described his morning routine thus,

Pagmata sa buntag, maligo ug magkabo dayon (Upon waking in the morning, I took a bath and immediately fetched water).

- Christian male, 11

Children also devoted time to their studies in and out of the classroom, making space for class-related reviewing at home or at play. According to them, *magtuon mi* (we studied) and *praktis ug basa, dula ra talagsa* (practiced reading, sometimes played).

In the coastal areas where there was electricity, the respondents watched television during free time. In the hinterlands that had yet to have electricity, the younger children played house or hide-and-seek, Chinese garter or marbles, or watched older children play ballgames. Younger children had more time to play because they were not given many domestic responsibilities. They also liked strolling around the neighborhood with their friends. However, there were also children who reported to have been restricted by parents even before conflict came to the community.



Children prepare corn for cooking at an evacuation center in Maigo. Photo by Bobby Timonera

Ako mas gusto maglaro pero ayaw ni Mama. (I would like to play but Mother would not allow it).

- Christian male, 9

Children's Memory of Experiences during Conflict Episodes

Conflict touched the two Christian barangays in 2000 while Barangay Matampay was visited by fierce fighting twice — in 2000 and 2003. In Kauswagan, children remember the panic, confusion, uncertainty, fear, and hardships that accompanied the invasion of their barangay by what they initially believed to be combat-ready government soldiers:

Adto bang paggubot namakwit unta mi, ingon man sila nga sundalo daw na nag-hike sa kalsada. Ana sila sundalo daw kay nagsuot man ang uban ug Army nga sinina. Ang uban pag-agi sa kalsada miingon man nga 'hala, mga MI na!' Lumba mi panagan. Ang uban nangambak na lang sa pangpang. Dinaganay na mi ato (When conflict came, we were set to evacuate, but someone said those were actually soldiers there on the streets. They said they must be soldiers because some were in Army garb. Then others who saw them said they were MILF. We ran for our lives then. Others jumped off the cliff. We raced each other to get away.)

- Christian female, 10

The children rushed with their families to the Kauswagan shoreline as it provided the only way to evade the MILF. Some hid where they could along the beach while others went down into the water.

Baybay mi gipaingon. Naay buto-buto, nanago mi sa baybay. Daghang mga tawo. (We went to the shore. There were explosions, and we hid. There were many people).

- Christian female, 11

Dinhi ra sa ilalom sa silong nanago mi... (We hid under our house).

- Christian male, 10

Palutaw-lutaw ra man mi sa dagat (We just floated in the sea).

- Christian male, 9

They remember that their elders made frantic attempts to secure sea transport to bring the families to safety across the water. Those who were successful had to put up with the discomfort and haste.

Nibalik mi sab sa pantalan naghulat mi naay modunggo nga lantsa
(We went back to the wharf to wait for a boat.)

- Christian male, 12

Akong manghod hapit mahulog kay giitsa sa barko para makasakay.
Gidala mi sa Iligan. (My younger sibling almost fell into the water when they threw her onboard. The boat brought us to Iligan.)

- Christian female, 11

Some respondents narrated their experience of being captured by the MILF:

Nangadto mi sa baybay kay nakit-an man mi sa MI, di gi-hostage mi, tulo mi, kauban nako akong ig-agaw, ug igsoon. Naa pod akong uncle... gidala mi sa auditorium (We were heading to the shore when the MILF saw us. There were three of us — my sister and my cousin. My uncle was also there. They brought us to the auditorium).

- Christian male, 12

...Nitawag man sila ug pump boat, duha ka buok. Dayon wa kaabot unya naa may nagsumbong sa MI nga naa ra mi didto, miapas ang MI didto mao tong nadakpan mi. Gi-hostage mi duha ka oras. Wala mi gibuhian. Nangabot na man dayon ang mga Marines. Naggubutay na dayon sa kilid sa auditorium. (We were waiting there for two pumpboats that did not come. Someone tipped off the MILF that we were there. They came to take us and held us hostage for two hours.¹⁶ They would not let us go. The Marines arrived and engaged them in a firefight beside the auditorium).

- Christian female, 10

In Puroks 2 and 4, which one group of the attacking MILF elements breached to get to Poblacion, the children could still vividly recall the early morning events of 24 April 2003. Two respondents remember that they were preparing breakfast when the armed men came.

Gubot kaayo sa nga tanan ang nangabot ang MI. 'Dagan, diri ang mga MI.' Una tong nanagan mi. Diri tong naglung-ag ko, nagpalit ko

ug bugas, pagkahuman, nagbuto-buto man to, nanagan mi paingon sa dagat... (It was most confusing when the MI came. 'Run, the MILF are here.' I ran back here for what we were cooking. I had bought rice and was cooking. Then the explosions. We ran to down to the beach...)

- Christian male, 12

Primerong nagbuto-buto, pag-abre ni Mama sa bintana nakita namo ang mga armado nga tawo. Dayon nanagan mi ug gidala luto ra gisolod sa kaldero, nanagan dayon ilang Benitez among silingan. Dayon, nanagan sa baybay (First, there were explosions. When my Mother opened the window, we saw armed men. We ran over to our neighbor Benitez with our pot of rice. We then ran towards the shore).

- Christian male, 9

Puroks 2 and 4 are about a kilometer from the main streets of Poblacion. The arrival of the MILF caught the people by surprise. While some immediately scampered, others hid indoors hoping that the armed men were only passing by. However, many who stayed home finally decided hours later to follow their neighbors to safety.

Nanagan mi sa sulod, nanghapa mi ug nagtago. (We rushed home and stayed down on the floor).

- Christian male, 1

Nagtabon sa akong habol ug nag pray ko sa God para wala na gubot (I hid under the blanket and prayed to God to stop the violence).

-Christian female, 8

"Nanago mi kay naigo na ang balay pag-ayo. Maayo gani semento (We hid because our house was heavily strafed. Good thing it was made of cement)."

- Christian male, 10

"Nanagan ang mga tawo ug nanago dayon mi sa silingan" (People were running and we hid at the neighbors').

- Christian male, 9

In the rush to get out of harm's way, the children report that
"Napiangan akong duha ka uncle kay niambak sa bintana (My two uncles were injured because they jumped out of the window)."

- Christian male, 10

"Walay naigo, nasamad ra akong Lolo kay naipit sa alambre (Nobody got hit, but Grandfather tangled with a mesh of wires)."

- Christian female, 9

Fear was a constant companion as the families fled their homes.

"...Nagkurog ko sa kahadlok sa buto-buto. Sa una, dili ko gakurog-kurog. Ang mga kuya, nagkurog-kurog sab ug nanagan. Ako naghilak. (I trembled in fear of the explosions. I never did that before. My elder brothers trembled and ran. I cried)."

- Christian female, 10

Nahadlok ko. Walay among pamahaw, mangape unta mi adto. Nabiyaan namo. Wala ra pod nabantayan kung gigutom ko kay nahadlok ko. (I was afraid. We hadn't eaten. We were about to have coffee when we had to go. I forgot about being hungry since I was so afraid).

- Christian male, 11

It was while waiting to be evacuated from the shorelines that people thought of the need to eat. Some collected shellfish (*nanginhas mi didto*) or hastily prepared whatever there was (*nagkaon ug luto si Mamang*). A child remembers that

"...Namatay akong igsoon ug na shock ko kay wala man koy kaon (...My brother died and I was in shock because of hunger).

- Christian female, 10

The people who were not able to find a boat to take them to safety finally walked along the coastline to get to the schoolhouse where relief agencies hastily set up operations as government troops chased the MILF raiders out of the barangay. The children recalled that their families stayed in the evacuation center for some time. During the day, they retraced the beach trail back to their homes to take care of livestock.

"Walo ka adlaw sa eskwelahan sa kinder gauli mi ug buntag kay manlawog sa baboy pagkahuman mamalik dayon mi sa eskwelahan"

sa baybay. (We stayed eight days at the kindergarten school. We only went home to feed the pigs then we hurried back to the school)."

- Christian male, 12

For the Matampay children, on the other hand, the path to safety was a long trek through the forest with their families as the violent clashes drew nearer their barangay. They witnessed how their parents trembled in fear as they hurriedly packed and moved out. The children were frightened.

"Sumama ako nagbakwit, naglakad tatlong araw (I joined the evacuation, walking for three days)."

- Muslim male, 11

"...Natakot si mama, nagkurog. Nahadlok din si papa. Natakot silang lahat (Mother trembled in fear. Father was also afraid. They were all afraid)."

- Muslim female, 11

"Natatakot ako baka babarilin kami (I was afraid they would shoot us)."

- Muslim male, 10

"...Bakwit sa Marawi, naglalakad...natakot, napagod (We walked to Marawi,¹⁷ frightened and tired)."

- Muslim male, 12

The Matampay evacuees had time to hastily put things together and set out before the fighting came to their neighborhood. They left with bundles of clothes, some utensils, live animals, and food provisions. While most of them walked, some were able to find transport. The children provide snatches of what they remember of the experience:

"Sumakay kami ng truck dito. Marami kaming nagbakwit at nahirapan akong sumakay kasi masyadong maraming tao. (We rode a truck. It was too crowded and uncomfortable)."

- Muslim female, 10

"Nagbakwit mi alas-siete ng gabi (We moved out at seven in the evening)."

- Muslim male, 10

Those who walked through the forest remember that

“*Malamig doon, nagkasakit mga kapatid ko* (It was cold. My siblings got sick).”

- Muslim male, 10

“*May nakita kaming bahay, doon kami natulog* (We came upon a house. We slept there)”.

- Muslim female, 10

In the three barangays, the children recall that in the frantic haste of setting out, *nabasa ang sinina namo* (our clothes got wet) and that *mga bata nangalopitan ug napiang tungod sa pagdinaganay sa tawo* (some children were crushed and hurt in the stampede). Asked about what they were thinking as they left their homes, some of them said,

Nahadlok ko ug pusilon... Namatyan ko ug duha ka uncle nag Marines... Nahadlok ko nga wala pa mi kasakay unyag masapnan mi sa MI. (I was afraid to be shot. Two of my uncles in the Marines had died... I was afraid the MILF would come before we could ride out).

- Christian male, 12

Nahadlok ko sa pusil (I feared the guns).

- Christian female, 10

Nahadlok, nidagan, nakulbaan kay girakrakan (I was frightened, I ran, terrified because we were fired upon).

- Christian male, 11

People featured in the memories of the children of the conflict in the community, most notably in the frantic rush to safety. Some of them reported to have witnessed neighbors and combatants getting killed or wounded and seeing a family member succumb to overwhelming panic. They also saw others suffer hunger or succumbing to physical injury or sickness. When asked what they remember of children their age, they described children who were frightened, hungry, alone, and crying. They also told about children who had to stay floating in the water for hours or who were separated from their friends during the evacuation, as well as children who died.

Asked what they found hard to forget about their conflict experience, they referred to the hardships and deprivations suffered during evacuation, exposure to violence and destructive force of weapons, and being at the mercy of combatants.

Ilang oras kaming naglakad, yong pagkain sa kalsada (We walked long hours. We ate on the road).

- Muslim male, 10

Ang gubot, nay gi-hostage, naay gipangdakop sa mga MI nga mga tawo (The war, hostaging, the ones who were taken by the MILF).

- Christian male, 11

Katong hapit mi maigo gitirahan sa MI (When we were shot and almost hit by the MILF).

- Christian male, 9

Nanagan mi, naggubot dayon, nag-ulan ug bala (We ran, war began, and the bullets rained).

- Christian male, 10

Kadtong gibombahan ang tulay sa Barongison, ang helicopter morag nangiti, naa didto among paryente, naguol ko basin namatyan sila (When the helicopter bombed the Barongison bridge, it looked like a bird dropping waste matter in flight. We feared for our relatives living near the place as they might be killed).

- Christian female, 9

Ang dili nako malimtan kay kadtong buto-buto, mahadlok ko hangtud karon kon makabati ko ug buto-buto magkulba-kulba (I could not forget the explosions. Until now, when something explodes I get nervous).

- Christian male, 10

Mga MI ug mga sundalo ug tanke (The MILF and soldiers and the tanks).

- Christian female, 8

Yung bomba inihulog ng helicopter (The bomb was dropped from the helicopter).

- Muslim male, 10

Children's Memory of Experiences Immediately after Conflict

In Kauswagan where the sudden and intense armed encounters caught everyone by surprise with helicopters dropping bombs, the combatants shooting each other in the streets, and some civilians getting caught in the crossfire, some families felt it safe to return home the day after the attackers were chased out. Their neighbors slowly trickled back in the days after. Still, it was evident that normalcy took a long time coming, and the children noticed that they continued to suffer from postconflict reactions. One of them reported that his tremors recurred on and off for about a week. In addition, he and his siblings developed boils that would remain for two months despite antibiotics.

Awake or asleep, the continuing high security situation in Kauswagan was registered by the other respondents also. Some of them reported that there were times when they were roused at night by the paramilitary elements and told to evacuate again because of impending MILF attacks.



A mother feeds her toddler during the 2000 evacuation in Kauswagan. Photo by Bobby Timonera

Dili na kaayo ko laagan. Maniid ko sa buto (I did not venture out much. I kept my ears open for the sound of gunfire).

- Christian female, 10

Mahadlok ko mobalik ang rebelde (I feared the rebels might come back).

- Christian male, 8

Ate gadamgo ug dautan, gipatay ang papa, pukawon gayawyaw. (My elder sister dreamt that our father was killed. When roused she would still be mumbling).

- Christian male, 11

On the other hand, the children in Maigo and Matampay reported to have experienced less postconflict disturbance than the Kauswagan respondents. They expressed that they were *nalipay pagkahuman sa kagubot* (happy when the war had ended) because *wala nay buto* (there were no more explosions).

It is noted that the pursuit operations in Maigo and Munai featured less intense firefights than what was experienced in Kauswagan. Most of the Maigo locals were not there any more when the combatants came and clashed in their barangays. In Munai, the residents actually had time to assemble the things they needed to take with them. They mostly remember what they saw and heard from afar and seeing the damage to their homes only upon their return weeks or months later.

Some reported changes in the physical, psychological, cognitive, and social experiences of the children in the period immediately following the conflict were gotten. Overall, the children respondents reported an increased incidence of physical disturbances occurring after the conflict. Most common symptoms noted include weight loss/loss of appetite, shakiness/tremors, fatigue/exhaustion, spontaneous crying, headache/lightheadedness, nausea, and vomiting. This physical observation was reportedly most pronounced in Kauswagan where armed violence was more intense and Munai where families suffered longer periods of displacement during the conflict. The children attributed their loss of appetite to lack of food and the lingering fear they could not shake off. Half of the children reported to have lost weight in the week after the violence in their respective communities. They claim that their appetite was adversely affected by their apprehension and fear of gunfire and explosions. Those in the evacuation centers remember that the food rations were unappetizing and repetitive.

Wala may gana, dili ko gagutman kay sige man kulbaan (I wasn't hungry because I always felt nervous).

- Christian male, 8

Human sa pagbuto-buto ginagmay ang pagkaon tungod kay nahadlok, ug naniwang (After the explosions, I barely ate because I felt tense, and I lost weight).

- Muslim female, 10

Dili ko ganahan kay nabusog na — sa kahadlok (I had no appetite because I was already full — of fear).

- Christian female, 9

Memory Associations of War Experience

As a sort of conflict-related psychological and emotional inventory, the children were shown pictures of objects or persons to prime their memory of their exposure to similar experiences and provide a glimpse into both their resolved and unresolved conflict-related stress. It was theorized that their responses would be reflective of the status of their psychological and emotional health. In particular, pictures containing military bomber plane/helicopter, armored car, and armed soldiers were presented to the children respondents. Their responses are discussed below.

The majority of children articulated fear of the helicopter. Most had logical attributions for their apprehensions, to include the possibility of their homes being hit by bombs (*morag bombahan among balay*) or burned down (*masunog ang mga balay ug mabungkag*). The children also associated the helicopter with the presence of the MILF nearby (*basin naay mobalik nga MI*) and the possibility of violent encounters where they might get caught in the crossfire (*basin maggira ba, ma crossfire*). Irrational fears characteristic of the young mind were also evoked, such as the fear of being made cannon fodder (*mahadlok ko basin ibala ko ana*).

Some respondents associated the helicopter with war casualties among government troops (*daghang namatay nga sundalo panahon sa gubot*) that had to be transported (*maghakot sa patay nga sundalo*). Helicopters also brought to mind soldiers and war (*naay sundalo, naay gubot*) and assistance to evacuees.

The Christian respondents viewed the armored vehicle in an ambivalent manner. There were those who associated it with the Marines who rescued them from the MILF hostage takers during the conflict. Some children said the tank was a harbinger of war, while others said that its coming signaled the restoration of peace.

Those who associated the armored car with fear pointed to its presence during critical security conditions (*mahadlok basta naa ana delikado na*). It was a reminder that war may yet break out (*akong bation morag naa pa gihapoy gubot*), which inspired anxiety (*kahadlok*).

Among the Christian respondents, the picture of the armed soldiers was associated with fear due to possible violent confrontation between Muslims and Christians. However, the children were more afraid of the MILF troops than the soldiers (*dili ko mahadlok sa sundalo, MI mahadlok ko*). This is understandable since the children had identified the former as the attacking party in the 2000 conflict in the area. They saw soldiers as saviors (*sundalo tigluwas sa atoa*) who would kill the MILF (*sundalo patyon ang mga MI*).

The Muslim children identified the picture to be of a government soldier, not an MILF warrior. The picture evoked apprehensions of future violence (*baka magulo na naman*), fear of being shot at (*baka barilin*), or being killed (*basin patyon*). Three children, however, said it was only a picture (*piktyur lang iyan*).

There is a discernible difference in the manner these children view the warring armed groups. To most Muslim children, the presence of soldiers in their community evokes fear, especially of the soldiers' *timbang* (firearms). The Muslim respondents were generally apathetic to the government troops and sympathetic to the MILF. On the other hand, the Christian respondents generally had a positive attitude towards the military and a negative view of the MILF.

Of the three towns, it was only in Kauswagan where sleep disturbance among the respondents was noted immediately after conflict, especially among those who had been hostaged by the attackers. Sleep, when it came, was interrupted by nightmares.

Taparon mi sa akong Mama tanan. Sa una dili. Usahay, gadamgo ko sa akong amiga nga naputlan ug ulo, mokalit ug mata (Mother stayed beside us as we slept. She did not do that before. Sometimes, I dreamt that my friend was beheaded. I would wake up suddenly).

Sixteen percent of the respondents revealed that they were lethargic immediately after their evacuation experience. Aside from fatigue, normal activity was also hampered by the crowding in the evacuation centers. With the cement floors taken up for sleeping, the children did not have much room to move. Lack of food may have contributed also to the feeling of general malaise.

Natulog ra ko adto kay wala koy kaon (I slept because I had not eaten).

- Christian female, 10

Dili na kaayo ganahan modula. Dili nako malingaw ug luya ang lawas (I did not feel like playing. It wasn't fun and my body felt weak).

- Christian male, 9

Twenty-one percent reported they felt alone.¹⁸ The separation from the peer group coupled with disruption of schooling may have exacerbated these children's loneliness.

Mingaw wala na kaayo'y mga bata (It was lonely with only few children around).

- Christian female, 11

Wala akong naramdaman na lungkot sa Marantao. Sa Ganasi, malungkot ako kasi wala akong kaibigan (I had not felt sad in Marantao. In Ganasi, I felt sad because I had no friend).

- Muslim female, 10

About eleven percent of the respondents mentioned being sad after the conflict and missing the company of their friends. There was little to eat and play time was curtailed. One child recalled being anxious that they might need to evacuate yet again any time. The rest of the children, on the other hand, reported having felt relieved that the crisis has ended.

Twenty-four percent of the Christian children respondents in Kauswagan and Maigo reported feeling apprehensive and fearful that the MILF attackers might stage another attack. In contrast, a Muslim child in Munai expressed fear that the soldiers might return to burn down their houses again.

For the Christian-dominated barangays, classes resumed one to two weeks after the violent clashes. Understandably, no child reported any significant changes in their studies. For the Muslim children, the Department of Education has yet to replace the schoolbuilding that was destroyed in 2003.¹⁹

Eleven percent of the Christian children disclosed that their recreational activities were adversely affected since the parents did not permit them to go out in case the MILF attacked again. For the Muslim respondents, on the other hand, it can be remembered that they did not immediately return to Matampay after they arrived in Marawi or Lanao del Sur. They report that away from home in the aftermath of conflict, they had time to play and enjoyed it very much.

Table 1 below summarizes the reported changes in the physical, psychological, cognitive, and social functioning of the children who had been exposed to violence and armed encounters in their communities of residence.

Data above seem to suggest that the children from communities who were exposed to intense, sudden, and longer duration of armed conflict tend to exhibit more physical stress. This is evident in the children of Poblacion, Kauswagan, who reported the most counts of physical symptoms. This is followed by Muslim children in Matampay, Munai, where massive destruction of their community coupled with postconflict occupation of the Marines in the area caused delay in their return to their homes. Comparatively, there was less incidence of physical stress among the children of Maigo whose exposure to armed conflict was shorter and less intense and where normal life commenced again almost immediately with their return to home and school.

Of their conflict experience, most of the Christian respondents maintained that there were several bad things that happened: many deaths (*daghan namatay*); mothers had difficulty in bringing sick children for treatment (*bata nga nagsakit dili madala sa Mama sa tambalan*); illness (*nagsakit*); evacuation (*managan*); unpeace (*nawala ang kalinaw*); economic difficulty (*nagkalisod*); crying; (*nanghilak*); and fear (*nangahadlok*).

Table 1. Children's experiences before and after conflict.

EXPERIENCES	KAUSWAGAN		MAIGO		MUNAI		Total	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
<i>a) Physical</i>								
Spontaneous crying		1		2		3		6
Bedwetting	1				2	3	3	6
Shakiness/tremors		6	1	2	1	2	2	10
Shortness of breath	1	1	1			1	2	4
Lightheadedness/ headache	2	2		1		2	2	5
Profuse sweating	1	1		1	1		2	4
Nausea/vomiting	1	1		2		1	1	4
No specific pain	1	1	1	2			2	4
Fatigue/ exhaustion		3		3	1	4	1	10
Indigestion	1	1		1	1		2	4
Hyperventilation	1	1			1	2	1	3
Weight loss/ loss of appetite	3	6		1	2	4	5	11
Total	12	24	3	15	9	22	23	62
<i>b) Cognitive</i>								
Learning difficulties		3	1	1		1	1	5
Short attention span		1	1	3	1	1	2	5

The children clearly remember the evacuation rush that was characterized by much confusion and panic, the series of explosions/gunfire, the harrowing encounter with the armed elements especially the MILF that had even held hostage some of the Kauswagan respondents. These children told of their painful experiences of economic difficulties, food scarcity, deaths, displacement, confusion, and fear. For their part, the Muslim children expressed awareness that the war resulted in the destruction of their lives and livelihood (*nasira ang buhay/pangkabuhayan dito*), the feeling of pervasive fear among many of the respondents, of loneliness, and of the evacuation.

Adaptive strategies employed by children respondents under these stressful conditions were demonstrated to have been limited. Some of them implored divine intervention through prayer. Most of them coped by doing exactly as their parents told them — run, hide, and evacuate. Most of the families' initial response to armed conflict was to extricate the terrified children from the conflict situation. However, at those particular times when conflict visited the children's respective communities, the parents themselves were apparently ill-equipped to address the threat. They evidently lacked disaster preparedness and were not trained to assess and assist themselves and their children in order to cope more effectively. Still, the parents provided their children with their physical proximity as much as possible by holding them close and even sleeping beside them in the period immediately after the conflict episode. Fathers also gave instructions on what children should do the next time the community would be attacked. In recognition of the fragile postconflict security condition, some children in the Christian communities were forbidden to play outside the home.

Based on the counts gotten for postconflict mental health status indicators of the children, these children who reported changes in behavior may have needed intervention from experts immediately after their fateful exposure to community violence. While their families had evidently exerted effort to provide them emotional security, the adults were similarly challenged by the experience and did not have the expertise to diagnose and appropriately intervene to mitigate the children's difficulty. The children themselves were too young and too unknowing to recognize and act upon the threat to their mental health.

Five years after their exposure to armed conflict playing out in their areas of residence, some of the children had obviously recovered

from the physical, psychological, cognitive, and social effects of the experience. This may be because of their own inherent resilience, the adequate social support provided by family, or the young age at which they experienced it.

Notes

- 1 An epithet for Filipino Muslims.
- 2 An armed group of Muslim vigilantes who formed themselves in defense of Muslim territory. They were identified by their black shirts.
- 3 A Christian vigilante group formed to defend Ilonggo settler communities. ILAGA is purportedly an acronym for Ilonggo Landgrabbers Association.
- 4 Residents had registered the massing of MILF troops in the periphery of the poblacion a week before the attack.
- 5 The 102nd Base Command was then as now under Abdullah Macapaar, better known as Commander Bravo.
- 6 Extracting information from very young respondents demand strict adherence to ethical principles on informed consent done in the language they understand (Schenk and Williamson, 2005). Assurance of confidentiality and respect for privacy and voluntary disclosure were observed. Every FGD session and in-depth interview conducted for this study was done with parental permission and in the presence of a social worker or barangay official.
- 7 The Maranao is the predominant Filipino Muslim tribe in Lanao.
- 8 Ten out of sixteen of those interviewed were female.
- 9 Sixteen of the twenty-one who took part in the FGDs were male.
- 10 Even after long delays, Fivush and Shukat (cited in Sattler, 1995) aver that children between the ages of three and six years would be able to give coherent, detailed accounts of past events.
- 11 They stopped schooling when their families evacuated. War further damaged many of the schoolbuildings, and repairs had to be done before classes could resume. Some public high schools had to close down because of decreased enrolment as many of those who evacuated failed to come back. In Munai, the public school was not rebuilt after it was bombed in 2003.
- 12 The ordinal sibling position is deemed significant in family crisis situation, implying responsibility put to bear on those born earlier to fend for themselves as there is no one older to take care of them.
- 13 The National Demographic and Health Survey 2003 placed the national average of household size at 4.8.

14 A follow-up inquiry revealed low educational attainment by most residents in the latter area. There is no public school in Matampay. However, a Madrasah school was built by the Special Zone for Peace and Development Fund (SZOPAD Fund) in 2002.

15 Bedwetting.

16 This girl was blindfolded and gagged upon capture.

17 Using the forest route, the evacuees would have covered about thirty kilometers to get to Marawi City.

18 People went their separate ways during evacuation.

19 The only classes held in Barangay Matampay were for Islamic instruction at the Madrasah school built by the SZOPAD Fund in 2002.

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Reproductive Health Concerns among the Internally Displaced Persons in Pikit, North Cotabato

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Introduction

In Asia and the Middle East, the most prevailing issue for many decades has been the internal displacements of populations due to armed conflicts and wars. The plight of the hapless victims of displacements is deplorable. In the Philippines, mainly in the southern Mindanao regions, internal displacements due to acts of violence and armed conflicts between the military forces and Moro¹ Front groups have been the most predominant.

In times of local armed conflicts and the ensuing internal displacements, women and children account for the biggest casualties and are the most vulnerable to risks of health, social dislocation, and loss of property or even life. Accounts of women and children affected by armed conflicts and war indicate that they suffer mainly due to displacement and its consequence of poor access to food, safe drinking water, privacy, reproductive health (RH) care, and psychological support (NSO, 2002).

Fr. Eliseo Mercado, OMI (in NDURC, 2004) contends that internal displacement is one of the five urgent issues confronting Mindanao. In Central Mindanao, in particular, the armed conflict between the Philippine military and the Moro Fronts since the early 1960s has caused displacements in many communities. The affected families usually live as internally displaced persons (IDPs) for extended periods away from their homes and sources of livelihood. Separated from kin and community support systems, they are rendered most vulnerable to health risks and hazards.

Every time war erupts and civilians have to evacuate, media reports document the number of people affected, cost of damaged

property and infrastructures, and figures for morbidity and mortality. There are scarce data, however, on the quality of life and the difficulties encountered by the victims of conflict, particularly on their health issues.

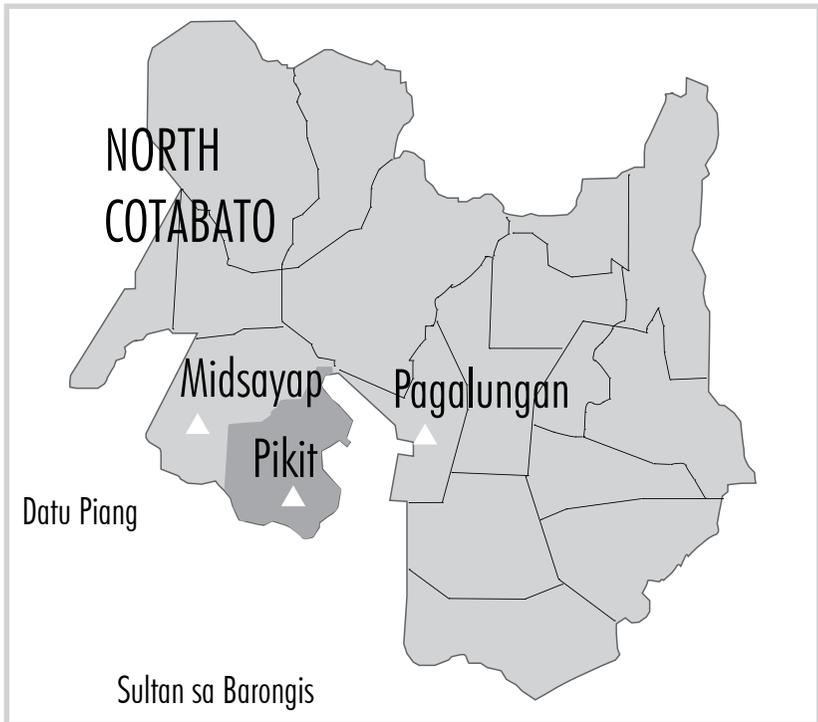
This study examines the reproductive health concerns of women who had experienced life in Pikit evacuation centers in 2000 and 2003. It also explores how they coped with reproductive health concerns in order to hopefully provide information for policy makers and other stakeholders on the impact of war and displacements on the lives of women caught in conflict situations.

The Research Sites

This study was undertaken in the municipality of Pikit in the province of North Cotabato, Central Mindanao.

Central Mindanao or Region XII has a population of 3,222,169 (NSO, 2000, cited in NDURC, 2001). Created in 1996 through Executive Order No. 36, the region has a total land area of 20,566.26 square kilometers covering the provinces of North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, and South Cotabato and the cities of Cotabato, Kidapawan, Koronadal, General Santos, and Tacurong. The Lumad,² such as the Tbolis, Blaans, Kalagans, Terurays, Manobos, Iranons, Ubos, and Tagakaolos inhabit the mountainous and hilly parts of the region. The Moro, such as the Maguindanaons, Maranaos, and Iranons share space in the municipalities along with the settler Christians, mostly composed of Ilonggos, Cebuanos, and Ilocanos.

North Cotabato, with its 6,657 square kilometers, sits on about forty-five percent of the land area in Central Mindanao. Its seventeen towns host 544 barangays within which reside 658,643 Ilonggos, Cebuanos, Ilocanos, Maguindanaons, and Manobos (Cotabato Province Annual Report, 2003). The province is bounded on the north by the provinces of Lanao del Sur and Bukidnon, on the east by Davao City, on the south by Davao del Sur Province, on the west by Maguindanao Province, and on the southwest by Sultan Kudarat Province.



Source: Redrawn from wikimedia commons

The highly conflicted town of Pikit in North Cotabato has a total land area of 604.61 square kilometers. Within its jurisdiction are forty-two barangays, in which reside Maguindanaons (69 percent), Cebuanos (18 percent), and Ilocanos (9 percent). Pikit is bounded on the north by Aleosan, on the east by Pagalungan, on the south by Sultan sa Barongis, and on the west by Midsayap. Datu Piang lies on the southwest.

Since the late 1990s, Pikit has been the site of armed struggles between government forces and the Moro liberation groups. Among the communities most adversely affected by firefights are the largely agricultural barangays of Takepan, Inug-ug, and Rajahmuda, which are the study sites.

Barangay Takepan

Situated on the south-central part of Pikit, Barangay Takepan has seven sitios inhabited by 457 households with a total population of 2,749. Predominantly Christian in composition, Takepan has two sitios with a Christian–Muslim mix and one that is mainly Maguindanaon. About seven kilometers away from the Pikit *poblacion*,³ Takepan has been tagged a “Space for Peace,” along with six other barangays (Canuday, 2004).

Barangay Inug-ug

Located along the National Highway, Barangay Inug-ug has three sitios and 200 households. About sixty percent of these households are Maguindanaon. This barangay suffered losses during the conflict episodes in 1997, 2000, and 2003, with a number of houses damaged or destroyed.

Barangay Rajahmuda

Barangay Rajahmuda is an all-Maguindanaon community about five kilometers from the National Highway. The barangay is bounded by the Pulangi River and the municipality of Pagalungan on the east. In 2000 and 2003, armed conflict forced all families in its five sitios to evacuate to the poblacion of Pikit. More than fifty families opted not to return to Rajahmuda after the 2003 conflict. As of 2005, Rajahmuda was home to around 528 families.

Data Sources

In-depth interviews were conducted to surface women IDPs’ experiences in conflict situations, the living conditions they found in evacuation centers, and the coping strategies they applied. Key informant interviews of barangay leaders, local health workers, school officials, and representatives of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and people’s organizations (POs) provide data on institutional responses to the needs of women in conflict situations, as well as the provision of support mechanisms for IDPs.

Information on armed conflicts and displacements and on health and related issues were also retrieved from reports of the municipal offices of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Health (DOH), and the Mayor’s Office, among others.

The Context of the Armed Conflicts in Central Mindanao

Despite the signing of the Peace Accord between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1996, trouble still hounds Central Mindanao and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), where for over thirty years now different Islamized ethnic groups struggle for either autonomy or independence.

The Moro struggle of independence was initiated with the organization of the Muslim Independent Movement (later known as the Mindanao Independence Movement or MIM) by Cotabato Governor Udtog Matalam in 1968. At this time, some members of the MIM were undergoing guerrilla training in Sabah. Sometime in 1972, the year when Martial Law was declared by President Ferdinand Marcos, the Muslim movement took an armed revolutionary approach to the struggle.

The movement for secession was a response to the Jabidah massacre, landgrabbing, and the Moro disappointment with the government's inadequacy in dealing with the socioeconomic problems of the Muslim communities. Although the Islam religion was the common bond for membership in the Moro Front movement, its members came from varied backgrounds. There were members who may have been disgruntled politicians who saw involvement in the movement as a means to forward their own political ambitions. There were also displaced farmers, victims of military abuse or police brutality, religious leaders who would like to construct an Islamic theoretic state, idealistic intellectuals and students moved by a sense of social duty, adventurous young men who would like to test their fighting prowess, and still others who joined because they had friends and relatives in the movement.

The demand for an independent Bangsa Moro Republic by the MNLF included Mindanao, Sulu archipelago, and Palawan. However, the Tripoli Agreement that was signed in 1976 defined the regional autonomy only for thirteen provinces and nine cities. In these areas, the Muslims comprise about twenty percent of the population.⁴

In 1984, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), under Hashim Salamat, was formed. The front reasserted for a separatist movement in Mindanao parallel to the autonomy movement being pursued by the MNLF.

With the approval of Republic Act (RA) 6734 or the Organic Act for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in 1989 by President Corazon Aquino, a plebiscite was conducted to identify the provinces that wanted to be part of the ARMM. The results of the plebiscite identified only five out of the thirteen provinces: Tawi-Tawi, Basilan, Sulu, Lanao del Sur, and Maguindanao. Despite the signing of the Organic Act of 1989, fighting and armed encounters between the military and the Moro Fronts continued in Central Mindanao and in the ARMM.

In September 1996, the Peace Accord was signed between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the MNLF, defining the implementation of two phases of action (Aguirre, 1999). The first action was the proclamation of a Special Zone for Peace and Development (SZOPAD), the establishment of the Southern Philippine Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), and the creation of a Consultative Assembly (CA). They were formed to serve as transitory mechanisms to coordinate peace and development efforts in the SZOPAD within a three-year period. One of the additional stipulations in the Accord provided for the integration of MNLF elements into the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

The second action was the establishment of a new era of autonomy, which required the Congress to amend or repeal RA 6734 at the end of the three-year transition period. The government permitted the holding of a plebiscite in 1999 to determine the prospects for expanded autonomy for Muslim Mindanao.

In 1996, there was yet optimism that the military activities of the Islamic groups would end. The MILF, however, asserted its own representation in the Mindanao crisis. It engaged in armed conflict with the government to assert its identity as separate from the MNLF. Eventually, in 1997, it signed an agreement with the government on the general cessation of hostilities. However, this was to be repeatedly violated.

In the meantime, the government outlined a four-point program for national security to address the Mindanao crisis: a) to restore or maintain peace; b) to promote socio-economic development; c) to pursue peace talks with the MILF; and d) to fully implement the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement. To date, achieving this peace agenda is still gaining ground.

In 2000, the hope for peace considerably diminished. The Estrada government initiated an all-out military offensive in March 2000. Renewed clashes between the military and the MILF prompted massive displacements once again. Military offensives waged in Central Mindanao areas aimed to dismantle the various MILF camps. Camp Abubakar in Matanog, Maguindanao, the largest camp of the MILF, was a prime target. Fighting ensued and spilled over to many other areas in North Cotabato, Lanao del Sur, South Cotabato, and the cities of Cotabato and General Santos. In Central Mindanao alone, thousands of people fled their homes, and evacuation centers were set up. Even today, there are still families that remain displaced because of this war.

The 2004 report on the social assessment of conflict-affected areas in Mindanao (NDURC, 2004) noted that the Moro land issue is a conflict that can be understood in part by attributing it to opposing systems of land use practiced by the indigenous Moro groups and the non-Moro migrant settlers who have come to occupy territories traditionally owned or controlled by the Moros. The tensions over the land rights are both a cause and an outcome of conflict.

Varied reasons are raised as contributing to the cause of the Mindanao conflict. Among them are the resentment from minority deprivations, economic and social marginalization, local and foreign political crisis, and government inefficiency. The Mindanao conflict is also attributed by some quarters to the general underdevelopment of the region, an unequal redistribution of wealth, and limited efforts by the government to integrate the Muslim population in Mindanao into the political and institutional fabric of the country. And while it may appear that religion is an element in the conflict, it is not and has never been among the contentious issues under negotiation. Some analysts observe that the rich reserves of untapped natural resources and raw materials of Mindanao, particularly in the Moro area, may also be a strong incentive for the government to fight the Muslim secessionist movements since the 1970s (NDURC, 2004).

The Armed Conflict Experiences of the Pikit IDPs

The 2000 All-Out War saw major military offensives launched to take the various MILF camps in Central Mindanao and the Lanao provinces. Most targeted was the heavily fortified Camp Abubakar, the main MILF camp that stretched across the Maguindanao towns

of Buldon, Barira, and Matanog. All over Central Mindanao, the military offensives caused massive displacement.

Pikit was one of the most affected municipalities in 2000 because the Buliok complex, a major MILF camp, is located at the border of Pikit and Pagalungan, Maguindanao. About 45,205 persons from the twenty-three Pikit barangays fled their homes; 16,245 persons were distributed in twenty-nine evacuation centers while 28,960 persons opted to live with their relatives in the poblacion of Pikit and other neighboring barangays.

Buliok was finally captured in February 2003, after the military offensives had affected twenty barangays in Pikit. Around 6,460 families with 38,760 persons were displaced. About 2,594 families with 15,564 persons stayed at the evacuation centers in Pikit while 3,866 (23,196 persons) stayed with their relatives somewhere else. Sixteen evacuation sites were put up in Pikit during this period.

The evacuation centers used by the local government to temporarily house the IDPs were the agricultural warehouses, day care centers, schools, a chapel, a gymnasium, and makeshift tents. At these evacuation centers, the displaced families had to endure the congested sleeping quarters, lack of privacy, and scarcity of food and potable water. The families endured severe heat during the day and cold during the night. Deprived of their livelihood source, they depended heavily on the relief



Inside the Islamic Center in Buliok Complex after it was bombed by AFP troops on 16 November 2003. Photo by Keith Bacongco

assistance extended by government and various NGOs, which began to dwindle a few weeks after the height of the conflict.

Among the barangays affected by the 2000 and 2003 conflict episodes were Takepan, Inug-ug, and Rajahmuda. Both times, these barangays were used as the exit points of both the military and the MILF armed groups.

In May 2000, Muslim residents from barangays Saranay/Gantong, Brotherhood I, and Brotherhood II in Barangay Takepan evacuated to Batulawan for at least three months, while their Christian neighbors stayed for a month in the Pikit Parish Gymnasium and Pikit Pilot Elementary School. The offensives spilled over to Inug-ug, prompting people to move out, especially when an intense fire occurred there on 16 June 2000. At this time also, Barangay Rajahmuda residents believed that the government troops suspected the barangay to be an MILF camp. All of them fled to some parts of Pagalungan in Maguindanao and to evacuation centers in Batulawan and the Pikit Mahad School.

On Eid'l Adha in 2003, the Rajahmuda residents would again flee the barangay as government troops bombed the Islamic Center of Buliok Complex. Lower Inug-ug, on the other hand, saw people moving out as early as February to stay at an evacuation center set up for them at Mahad in Fort Pikit or among relatives. Meanwhile, residents in Takepan experienced at least two violent episodes that caused them to leave their homes that year. On 11 February, soldiers and MILF rebels clashed in neighboring Barangay Dalengaoen, such that the Muslim residents from Sitio Saranay/Gantong rushed for refuge at the makeshift evacuation center along the National Highway fronting the Takepan Elementary School. Three months later, unidentified armed men fired at Barangay Nalapaan, an adjacent barangay. Fearing further harassments, the Muslim families went to Batulawan. Most of them eventually ended up at an evacuation site near the Church of Christ.

In May 2000, 16,245 Pikit residents were in twenty-nine evacuation centers located in the Poblacion, Fort Pikit, Takepan, Nunungan, Paidu Pulangi Elementary School, and Manaulaan Mahad. In 2003, the DOH recorded that most of the 15,564 Pikit IDPs were staying in the evacuation centers in the Buisan Dryer, National Food Authority Warehouse, and Pikit Mahad School.

The evacuation centers were mostly located in schools or day care centers, mosques and warehouses, multipurpose structures, and



Evacuees set up makeshift tents outside the crowded Buisan warehouse along the National Highway in Pikit, North Cotabato. Photo by Keith Bacongco.

makeshift tents at the town plaza or on small patches of idle lands along the highway. These evacuation centers were very crowded and lacked the necessary facilities to address the daily needs of the refugees. In most instances, families camped in the evacuation centers for extended periods. Some even stayed for years, enduring deplorable conditions there, because they feared that war would break out in their barangays again.

The DOH also reported the prevalence of fever, flu, cough, typhoid fever, and pneumonia in the evacuation centers in Central Mindanao. Skin diseases, acute respiratory infections, gastroenteritis and diarrhea, mostly among children, were also reported. A number of adults succumbed to cardiac arrest due to the severe heat. Skin diseases afflicted many women and childrens. There were also deaths.

Reproductive Health Concerns in the Evacuation Centers

Close to fifty percent of IDPs were female (Cotabato Province Annual Report 2003) — young girls, middle-aged women, elderly widows, or single mothers. Interviews in Takepan, Inug-ug, and Rajahmuda revealed the health hazards of life in the evacuation centers. These included problems related to: personal hygiene,

particularly during menstruation, due to the lack of water supply or non-access to appropriate services; birth planning and gynecological services; sexual health education; medical assistance during labor and delivery; special needs of nursing mothers; health of newborns and young children; nutrition and healthy food sources; prevention and control of infections of the reproductive tract and urinary tract and other diseases; and pregnancy and abortion.

Following are some accounts of the IDPs' experiences about life in the Pikit evacuation centers:

Death, trauma, and health problems

Baikong, 40, is a Maguindanaon widow with three children. She shared that,

Ito nangyari noong 2002 conflict. Ang Auntie ko na 60 years old ay namatay sa sakit sa puso, sobrang nerbiyos; hindi na nadala sa doctor. Ang Uncle ko naman na 70 years old, may asawa ay na-shock at nabuang. Hanggang ngayon, buang pa rin siya. Pag makarinig na may sundalong parating, magbitbit na ng kahit anong gamit sa bahay at pupunta sa labas, at gusto magbakwit. Magdala din ng baril. Mag-alis din siya dahil sa takot, kung minsan hindi na magdamit, hubad talaga. Kawawa nga ang asawa niya kasi kung magbawas siya kahit saan na lang, kahit nakapantalón pa sya. (My 60-year-old aunt died of heart failure because of extreme nervousness. She was not brought to a doctor. My married uncle who is 70 suffered shock and eventually became mentally ill. He is still unstable. When he hears that soldiers are coming, he would grab anything he could find in the house, rush out, and say they have to run. He would get his gun, too. Afraid, he would leave the house naked. We pity his wife because he would defecate anywhere, even with his pants on.)

Yung asawa ng Kuya ko na 32 years old, sa Sitio Diruyuden, nanganak sa evacuation center. After one month, namatay ang baby niya. Hindi ko alam ang dahilan. (My brother's 32-year-old wife from Sitio Diruyuden gave birth at the evacuation center. After a month, her baby died. I don't know what caused the baby's death.)

Dahil sa sobrang init sa evacuation center, palagi man kaming mainitan, naging masakit sa akin ang pag-ihì. Bumili lang ako ng gamot, di kaya ay manghingi ng gamot sa Health Office ng Pikit sa Poblacion. (Because of the extreme heat in the evacuation center, I found urination painful. I just bought medication or asked for medicine from the Municipal Health Office of Pikit).

Lower abdominal pain, cause unspecified

Miriam, 26, a Maguindanaon mother of three, had two years of college education. She had a history of urinary tract infection (UTI) prior to the 2003 evacuation. She said her health condition might have been aggravated in the evacuation center because she would hold her bladder, afraid to go out and relieve herself. She experienced intermittent lower abdominal pain.

Nagpahilot lang ako para mawala ang sakit. (I just requested a traditional healer to massage my abdomen to alleviate the pain.)

She also had vaginal itchiness. She said it was due to allergy *sa tubig* (water-borne allergy).

Nagpakonsulta din ako sa health center sa Poblacion, Pikit. Niresetahan ako at bumili ako ng ointment panghaplas. Yong sakit sa may puson, hindi ko alam bakit yon, basta pinahilot ko lang. (I went to the Health Center in Poblacion, Pikit. I was given a prescription for an ointment, which I bought and applied. The pain was in lower belly, I don't know why [it was painful], but I just had my abdomen massaged.)

Baby contracts skin disease and dies

This was recounted by an 18-year-old Maguindanaon mother of two:

Ang anak ng kapatid ko ay nanganak sa tent lang. Pagkatapos ng dalawang buwan ay nag-kaluli. 'Yon ang dahilan bakit namatay ang bata. Wala silang mabili na gamot. Inasikaso din ng mga lider at nagbigay ng gamot pero 'di na nakayanan. (My sister's daughter gave birth in a tent [in the evacuation center]. After two months, the baby contracted *kaluli* [a type of skin disease]. That is the reason for the baby's death. They could not buy medicine. The leaders gave some assistance and medicine, but it was too late.)

Ang pinsan ko rin, 22 years old, ay natamaan ng baril. Naglalakad lang papuntang evacuation center nang natamaan ng baril. Sundalo daw ang nagpapatok. (My 22-year-old cousin was hit by a stray bullet on his way to the evacuation center. They say it was a soldier who fired the shot.)

Auntie ko, 40 years old, sumakit ang tiyan at ulo; nagtae-tae, mainit kasi masyado sa evacuation center. Binigyan ng gamot pero hindi na nakayanan, namatay na. (My 40-year-old aunt complained of a headache; then she had diarrhea, maybe because it was just too hot

in the evacuation center. She was given medication, but she was too weak, she died.)

A very public birthing

Bai, 28, is an Iranun/Maguindanaon mother of three. She was unemployed and pregnant with her fourth child at the time of the interview. She said she was pregnant when armed encounters reached their barangay, forcing her to hike all the way to the evacuation center in Pagalungan where she gave birth. She said,

Mahirap manganak sa evacuation center kasi sa trapal lang, malamig masyado. Nahihiya ako dahil maraming tao. Tinitingnan ako ng maraming tao habang nanganganak ako. Wala naman akong magawa. (It's hard to give birth in an evacuation center. We had only a tarpaulin sheet, it was very cold. I was also embarrassed because a lot of people were looking while I was giving birth. I couldn't do anything about it).

Marumi kasi ang paligid. Humingi lang ako ng gamot sa Pikit Health Center para sa sakit ng pag-ih. Bago lang kasi ako nanganak noon. (The surroundings were dirty. I just asked for medication for painful urination from the Pikit Health Center. I had just given birth then.)

Reproductive tract infection symptoms

Bai, 29, is a Maguindanaon farmer and mother of seven. In 2000, Bai had the following physical symptoms — frequent and painful urination and lower abdominal pain. She explains that,

Dahil siguro sa dumi ng paligid... Inom lang ng tubig ng niyog. Iyon lang ang ginamot ko. (Maybe because of the dirty surroundings. I just drank coconut water. That's my only remedy.)

Sa sobrang pagod, akala ko malaglagan na ako noon. Pinagamot ko sa manghihilot, nilagyan nya ng herbal oil. Pero paulit-ulit ko man naramdaman ito, nagpahilot lang din ako. (I thought I would lose my baby because I was extremely exhausted. I went to a traditional healer who applied herbal oil. I had it massaged every time the pain recurred.)

Before the conflict, she also experienced painful urination, which she thought was due to her pregnancy. She remembered that,

Pag-umiinom ako ng mainit na tubig, mawala na (Every time I drink warm water, the pain would go away.)

Bai shared that she started active prevention of future pregnancy:

Nagsimula na akong gumamit ng pills noon pang 2003. Marami na kasi akong anak. Gusto ko matulungan ang asawa ko kaya dalawa kaming nagdesisyon nito. (I started on the pill back in 2003. I have so many children already. I want to help my husband, so both of us decided on this).

Dire consequences of dirty water

Monera, 21, is Maguindanaon mother of one. She recounted that,

Ang anak ng kapatid ko, mga dalawang taong gulang ay namatay dahil sa diarrhea. Ang tubig na inumin sa evacuation center ay galing sa kalot. Ito marahil ang dahilan ng pagtatae niya. Dinala sa ospital ang bata pero hindi na makaya. (My sister's 2-year-old died of diarrhea. The drinking water at the evacuation center was drawn from a well. Maybe this caused her frequent and watery discharge. The baby was brought to the hospital to no avail.)

Monera herself also experienced problems with the water:

Nakaranas rin ako ng vaginal itchiness. Dahil din sa tubig na aming ginagamit. Niligo ko lang at naglinis ng katawan. (I had vaginal itchiness. It was also because of the water. I just bathed and cleaned my body.)

Unexpected, unwanted pregnancy

Baikong, 27, is a Maguindanaon farmer and mother of six. She was pregnant in 2000 when her family had to evacuate. She narrated that,

Marami akong karanasan sa gitna ng kaguluhan sa among barangay. Una, ang isang anak ko nagka-diarrhea sa evacuation center. Dahil din sa sobrang lamig sa sentro, ayaw niyang magdede. Malapit na sana mamatay. Dinala namin sa Pagalungan Health Center at na-dextrose pa siya. (I had many experiences in the midst of the conflict in our barangay. First, my child had diarrhea at the evacuation center. Because of the extreme cold, the baby did not want to suckle. She nearly died. We brought the baby to the Pagalungan Health Center, where she was fed intravenously.)

Baikong said she had given birth in an evacuation center:

... sa Pagalungan Municipality kami kasi nagbakwit. Noong nanganak ako, walang mga gamit. Kulang ang pagkain, sobrang lamig pa sa tent. (... in an evacuation center in Pagalungan Municipality, where we

evacuated. When I gave birth, we had no things [for the baby]. We lacked food, and it was very cold in the tent.)

She also experienced frequent urination which she did not mind so much in the belief that it was all part of being pregnant. She did not know why she sometimes had painful urination, abdominal pain, and vaginal itchiness. She disclosed that,

Ang ihi ko yellow kasi. Magpakulo lang ng tanglad, yong tubig inumin ko. Palaging masakit and tiyan ko. Ewan ko, baka sa pagbubuntis ko. Nagpahilot lang ako. (My urine was yellow. I made lemongrass tea to drink. I had constant abdominal pain. I don't know why—maybe because I was pregnant. I tried to have it massaged.)

She said she got pregnant before war escalated and that she had not been happy about it:

Nalungkot ako, dahil marami na ang anak ko. Pagod na akong mag-alaga ng bata. Gusto ko sana mag-abroad, hindi payag ang Tatay ko dahil marami na akong anak, kawawa kung iwanan. Tinuloy ko ang pagbubuntis kaysa ipalaglag ko. Pero palaging magsakit ang ulo ko. Sabi ng asawa ko, magpunta ako sa health center, magpa-BP kasi anemic ako—80/60—at hindi maganda ang paningin ko. (I was despondent, because I had many children already. I was tired of looking after babies. I wanted to go abroad, [but] my father didn't approve of it because my children would suffer if I leave them. I chose to keep my baby instead of going for an abortion. But, I have recurring headaches. My husband told me to go to the health center and have my blood pressure checked because I am anemic —[my BP is just] 80/60 — and my eyesight is not too good).

She had experienced delayed menstruation before the conflict episode in 2000 when she had profuse vaginal discharges.

Nagpahilot ako, pagkatapos nagdugo na ako. Hindi ko alam ang dahilan. Nagbaba ang matres ko. Sumasakit ang tagiliran ng tiyan ko, pinahilot ko. Humingi ako ng tulong sa midwife. Magbili na lang ng gamot, sabi niya. Wala akong pera kaya pinabayaan ko na lang. Pero uminom ako ng tanglad, pinakuluan, at nawala naman. (I had my lower belly massaged, after a while I started bleeding. I didn't understand why. My uterus was [displaced and] too low. Then I had pain here on one side, so I had that massaged also. I asked a midwife for help. She told me to buy medicine. I had no money so I just ignored it [the pain]. But I drank a concoction of lemongrass tea, and it disappeared).

Postpartum mother flees the fighting

A 29-year-old Maguindanaon mother of two who was a resident of Sitio Saranay/Gantong of Barangay Takepan had this to tell:

Noong nagkagulo sa 2003, limang araw pa lang akong nakapanganak, nakaranas ako na umabot ang bala sa tabi ng bahay namin. Kaya kahit nakakaranas pa ako ng pagdurugo napilitan akong sumamang tumatakbo palayo sa aming tirahan. (It was just five days after I gave birth when violence broke out in 2003. Bullets hit the house next door. So even though I was still bleeding, I was forced to flee along with others.)

She had just a year to go in college but had to stop schooling.

Hindi na ako nakapag-enrol dahil nasa bakwitan pa. Pagkagaling sa bakwitan, nag-asawa na ako.” (I couldn’t enrol because we were still in the evacuation center. After that, I got married.)

Pregnant and contemplating abortion

Fatima, 27, is a Maguindanaon farmer with three children. She did not complete elementary education. She claimed to suffer from ulcers. She disclosed that she got pregnant while staying at the evacuation center during the conflict in 2003.

Malaki na ang tiyan ko pagbalik namin galing sa evacuation center. Noong nalaman kong buntis ako, isang buwan pa ‘yon, nagplano akong ipalaglag siya kasi nagkasakit ako. Naglagnat ako, nanginginig ang buong katawan ko. Naisip ko rin na baka maapektuhan ang bata. Sinabihan ko ang midwife tungkol dito. Sinabihan niya ako na hindi ituloy, matakot ako dahil dalawang buwan pa lang ang pagbubuntis ko. Gumaling naman ako noong dalawa at kalahating buwan na. Hindi ko na pinalaglag. Nasa akin na lang daw ang desisyon sabi ng asawa ko. Hindi ko na rin tinuloy ang pagpalaglag. (My tummy was already big when we came home from the evacuation center. When I learned that I was a month pregnant, I wanted to have it aborted because I got sick. I had fever and chills. I thought the baby might be adversely affected. I told the midwife about my plan. She advised against it, [fearing complications] because I was already two months pregnant. Anyway, I felt better at around two-and-a-half months so I did not have my pregnancy terminated. My husband let me decide.

Lack of proper toilet facilities

Vina, 42, is an Ilocano mother of one. She teaches high school in Barangay Takepan. During the conflict episode in 2003, Vina shared that,

Pirmi lang ako maka-ihì. Walay tarong nga maihian. Nag-inom lang ko ug tubig sa niyog para mawala. Dili ako makaihi sa bakwitan kay makahadlok man maggawas ug layo para mag-ihì lang. (I needed to urinate often. There was no proper toilet. I drank coconut juice to make it go away. I couldn't go to the bathroom as often as I needed because I was afraid to go farther off where I could relieve myself).

Mother considers abortion

Sahara, 30, is a Maguindanaon mother of seven. She is an elementary school graduate. She said that before the 2003 hostilities, she had hoped to have some rest from childbearing and was even contemplating the use of family planning methods:

Dili nako gusto mabuntis ba! Huna-huna nako pwerteng krisis na gyud. Mga bata gahi ug ulo. Magsakit ang akong ulo sa pagbuyag sa ila. Usahay makasulti ko, pwerteng daghana na nila. Ipahilot unta nako para ipakuha. Nag-ingon man ang manghihilot nga makagaba daw. Wala na lang nako gidayon ug palaglag. OK man pud unta sa akong asawa nga ipakuha nako. (I didn't want to get pregnant any more. I realize we were in a major crisis. My kids are hardheaded. I get headaches minding them. At times, I tell myself, there's just too many of them. I thought of having it [the baby] aborted by a traditional midwife. But, she warned me that it's bad luck. That's why I did not go through with it. It would have been fine with my husband if I had it aborted.)

About family planning, she said:

Mahadlok ko kay ang uban musulti madaot ang tiyan. Naa man daw namatay ana — labi na ang nagpa-Depo. Naa daw namatay ana. Gusto sa akong bana, mag-pills ko sa una. Ako lang ang dili kay mahadlok ko. Pero gusto na nako karon, kay daghan naman gud akong anak. Kining akong kamanghuran gani (pointing at her baby) ipakuha unta gani nako ni, pero dili lang musugot ang manghihilot. (I'm afraid because some said it can damage the insides. They say there have been deaths — especially from using Depo [Provera]. Some have reportedly died because of it. My husband wanted me to take pills then. But I didn't because I was afraid. But now, I want to because I have so many children. I even planned on having this youngest [child] aborted, but the traditional midwife was unwilling [to do it].)

A long drawn out war trauma

Rahima, 22, is a housewife. She is married to Junaid, a farmer. She has lived in Barangay Rajahmuda since birth. She remembered when the Islamic Center in Barangay Buliok was bombed. She reported what she witnessed of the attack:

Pinasok at binomba ng mga sundalo ang Islamic Center. Habang nagsamba ang mga Muslim, bigla lang nila pinaputukan ang mga ito. At dahil madaanan ang Barangay Rajahmuda papuntang Buliok, damay din sa putukan ang Barangay namin. May putukan sa Rajahmuda, natakot kami kaya umalis kami agad papuntang Poblacion ng Pikit. Naglakad at nagtakbo para makalayo sa putukan. Ang iba nagkawatak-watak ang pamilya (The soldiers attacked and bombed the Islamic Center. While the Muslims were at prayer, they [the soldiers] fired at them without warning. Since Barangay Rajahmuda is on the road to Buliok, our barangay was exposed to the hostilities. There was gunfire in Rajahmuda that scared us so we immediately headed to Pikit poblacion. We walked and ran away from the firefight. Some families lost each other in the haste).

She got sick at the evacuation center and eventually manifested some serious stress reactions. According to Rahima,

Nag-trangkaso ako at ang mga kapatid ko dahil sa ibabaw lang kami ng lupa natutulog. Naglagay lang kami ng banig sa lupa para tulugan, trapal lang ang atip namin. Talagang mainit doon sa araw. Mga dalawang linggo 'yon pagsimula ng putukan. Naglagnat ako tapos wala na ako maisip. Mga tatlong buwan 'yon na wala akong matandaan. Grabe 'yon kasi natakot ako sa putukan. Sabi ng Nanay ko dahil daw sa takot ko, nag-lagnat ako at nagka-trauma ako. Minsan tulala ako. Umiiyak lang ako palagi. Umiiyak ako dahil matakot ako matamaan ng putukan. Sa bazooka, di ako makatulog. Minsan naglalakad lang ako, tulala, di nagsasalita, parang wala ako sa isip ko. Minsan nagahubad ako sa bahay (evacuation center). Nakapantalón lang wala t-shirt. Wala nga sa sarili. Ang ginawa ng Nanay ko, binabantayan ako para 'di makalabas sa evacuation center. Minsan ang mga kapatid ko na kambal ang nagbabantay sa akin. Pinagamot ako ng nanay ko sa albalyo (I got sick with the flu, along with my siblings, because we were sleeping on the ground. We rolled out a mat to sleep on and hung a tarpaulin for roof. It was unbearably hot during the day. It was about two weeks after the start of the hostilities. I developed a fever, and then I could not think any more. For about three months, I had no memory of what happened. It was terrible, I was terrified of firefights. My

mother said it must have been because of extreme fear that I had fever and suffered trauma. At times I would be dazed. I would weep uncontrollably. I would cry because I was afraid of being hit by a bullet. I couldn't sleep when they fired the bazooka. Sometimes, I would just walk about, dazed, not speaking, seemingly not myself. At times, I would not have my clothes on in the house [evacuation center]. [I would have] my pants on, but [I had] no shirt. I was really not myself. What my mother did was keep a close watch so I would not be able to get out of the evacuation center. Sometimes, my twin brothers would help take care of me. My mother brought me to an herbalist for treatment.)

Living with a husband's pain

Samra and Alimudin are residents of Barangay Inug-ug. They claim to have experienced three conflict episodes since they got married in 2000. While in the evacuation center, the couple quarrelled several times because of Alimudin's problem. The poor man had difficulty urinating. Samra said,

Tuwing sumasakit ang ari ng asawa ko, nag-aaway kami. Magalit siya sa akin. Ang dahilan noon, ang takot niya sa putukan. Ganito 'yon, isang linggong nakalipas pagbakwit namin, nilagnat siya doon sa evacuation center. Ang epekto noon ay natakot siya sa putukan ay nilagnat siya. Pagtapos niyang mag-lagnat, may lumalabas na nana sa ari nya, at masakit daw kung mag-ihing siya. Tuwing may putukan o kung may marinig syang putukan, natatakot siya, pagkatapos mag-andar naman ang sakit ng ari niya, at inaaway niya ako. Minsan nga kung may putukan, sinisisi niya sa akin ang gulo at ang sakit ng ari niya. Sabi niya, kaya daw siya nagkakasakit dahil sa akin. Minsan nga parang wala siya sa sarili niya dahil pati ang gulo at putukan binibintang niya sa akin. Grabe na galit niya sa 'kin. Kung inaaway niya ako, hinahayaan ko lang dahil nawawala lang man ang galit niya sa akin 'pag nawala na ang sakit. (Every time my husband's penis would cause him pain, he would readily pick a fight with me. He would be angry with me. The real cause was his fear of gunfire. This is what happened—a week after we evacuated, he developed a fever in the evacuation center. His fear of gunfire resulted in a fever. When the fever subsided, pus oozed out of his penis, and he complained of pain when urinating. Every time there was gunfire, he would be greatly agitated, after which his penis would be painful, and he would quarrel with me. Sometimes, when there was gunfire, he would blame me for the trouble and the pain in his penis. He

said he was sick because of me. At times, he would not be himself, attributing the trouble and the fire to me. He believed I was the cause of it all. He would be very furious with me. When he was angry with me, I just let him be because his anger would pass when the pain subsided.)

Samra sent her husband to the Pikit Health Center for checkup, but there were no findings.

Pinainom lang nila ng Cotrimoxazole. (They gave him Cotrimoxazole.)

The couple stayed in a small tent in an evacuation center for one year. Samira reported to experience abdominal pain while in the evacuation center. She said that was because

Kasi ang init sa evacuation center. Tapos sa lupa lang kami nakahiga. Maglagay lang kami ng banig, minsan karton lang. (It was hot in the evacuation center. We slept on the ground. We laid a mat, or sometimes just a [flattened] cardboard box.

Maybe the water

Mariam Ali, 45, is a resident of Sitio Lower Inug-ug. She has six children. Her community experienced many armed conflicts, but she considers the 2000 episode to have been the most intense. She said

May mga sundalong nag-operation doon—mga rebelde at sundalo. (Soldiers conducted operations there—both the rebels and the soldiers).

They were forced to evacuate to the Pikit Town Plaza. After a few weeks, they were transferred to the Amanah dryer where they pitched their tents. It was there that she got pregnant. After she had given birth, she experienced some problems with postpartum recovery:

Pagkatapos ko nanganak, umihi ako sa baba namin. Tapos ilang araw ang lumipas, sumasakit ang pag-ihing ko, siguro dahil sa singaw ng tubig na hinugas ko. Pero isang buwan lang ang pananakit, nawala din. Uminom ako ng antibiotic at butong. (After I had given birth, I urinated downstairs. A few days later, I experienced painful urination, perhaps because of the water I used to wash myself. After a month, the pains subsided. I took antibiotics and drank coconut juice).

Marital relations in the evacuation center

Noria, 28, is a resident of Sitio Palestine, Barangay Rajahmuda. She is married to a barangay councilman and they have four children. Their main source of income is farming.

Noria and her family had experienced many armed conflicts in their community, but the most intense was in 2003 when the Islamic Center was bombed. Many people died. Noria and her family had to stay in an evacuation center. She shared that,

Kahit nasa evacuation, nagyayaya ang asawa ko na makipagtalik. Kasi lalaki, hindi 'yan sila makatiis. Tatlong araw lang ang pinakamatagal na hindi makipagtalik. Ang lalaki kasi para din nagpa-fasting 'yan, kung hindi magalaw ang babae, nauuhaw sila. Meron man din dibisyon ang aming tinutulugan bawat pamilya sa loob ng evacuation center kaya, okey lang. Kapag hindi mo kasi pagbibigyan, mag-init ang ulo niya. (Although we were at the evacuation center, my husband would like to have sex. Men are really like that, they can't stand not having sex for more than three days. It's like they are fasting. If they can't touch the woman, they get thirsty. The sleeping quarters in the evacuation center had dividers, so it was all right. If I didn't give in to the advances [of my husband], he would surely be bad-tempered.)

Access to RH Services and Assistance Extended to IDPs

Many displaced families were reluctant to return to their communities of origin, mainly because of the destruction of their houses, some of which had been burned during the conflict episodes. Others who had been away too long knew that their neglected houses would not be habitable anymore. Thus, they would have nowhere to stay if they did go back to their communities. Some women cited risk factors, claiming that the presence of combatants—either of the AFP or the MILF—presented the possibility of harm or damage to life and limb were they to return to their communities immediately after a firefight. Caught in this quandary, they had to endure the difficult life conditions at evacuation centers.

In the first few months of their displacement, they received relief goods in the form of food, canned goods, used clothing, and medicines. They got aid and support from various government agencies, particularly the DSWD, DOH, DILG, Regional Disaster Coordinating Council (RDCC), Office of Civil Defense (OCD), and the municipal government.

There were also NGOs that extended relief and rehabilitation assistance to the displaced families (MSWDO Pikit, 2003).

During the massive displacements of 2000 and 2003, national line agencies and local government units were supported by many civil society organizations, local NGOs, and church organizations that provided food and health services. Both the DOH and the Municipal Health Office (MHO) served the health needs of the evacuees. However, most of those interviewed said they resorted to herbal medication or sought the help of the midwife in healing themselves or their sick family members. Their immediate source of medicines for colds, fever, diarrhea, skin disease, and other illnesses was the Poblacion Health Center and the Barangay Health Stations. Their supply of medicines however, was limited to over-the-counter drugs that generally provided temporary relief. Emergency cases had to be referred to the nearer hospitals. Because this required transportation and money that most evacuees did not have, the cases resulted in death in some instances.

The United Nations Multi-Donor Program (UNMDP) also supported the DSWD through food-for-work programs and the health and medical needs of the evacuees. Government organizations, such as DSWD, DOH, DILG, National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC), and Local Government Units (LGUs), and NGOs, such as Oxford Foundation Against Famine (OXFAM), Community and Family Services International (CFSI), Medicines Sans Frontier (MSF), Movimondo, Accion Contra El Hambre (ACH), and others provided assistance, such as food and medicines, shelter, and latrines and water system (Cotabato Province Annual Report 2003). They also extended livelihood assistance and conducted psychosocial and trauma management sessions, and capability-building trainings and interventions. The municipal government also conducted disaster preparedness and response training for the internally displaced families.



IDPs try to put a semblance of order inside their temporary shelters in a Pikit evacuation center. Photo by Keith Bacongco

Coping Mechanisms of Women Evacuees

Women affected by armed conflict demonstrated to be very resourceful and resilient in the face of such insurmountable difficulties. In the case of those displaced by armed conflict in the early 2000s, the support of the government organizations such as the DSWD, DOH, OCD, POs, and NGOs was crucial for their survival while they were at the evacuation centers (Daylusan-Fiesta, 2005). The relief assistance provided to them helped lighten the burden and miseries inflicted by displacements.

Despite the suffering and inconvenience at the evacuation centers, they obviously lived through these. When asked how they coped, they said they (a) prayed together with the family, (b) encouraged and advised each other, (c) shared their feelings and experiences with each

other, (d) simply ignored or convinced themselves that the deplorable conditions at the evacuation center were just temporary (e) unloaded their pain to their relatives and neighbors.

They tried to be productive by helping their husbands earn a livelihood for the family. Others engaged in backyard gardening and raising livestock. There were some NGOs who provided the displaced persons with livestock, garden tools, and seedlings for this purpose. Those who were unable to find work had to attend to the family members and maintain the health and sanitation at the evacuation centers.

Other factors that helped the women cope with the situation included the support given by their relatives who also extend provisions for them at the evacuation centers. Psychosocial interventions provided by the DSWD and some NGOs, such as play centers for children and trauma healing sessions with children and women, helped relieve some of the tension that the IDPs felt.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

Congestion and crowding in Pikit evacuation centers deprived women of privacy, adversely affecting their personal hygiene and their marital sexual needs. There were women who had to give birth at the evacuation centers under conditions that did not allow them privacy and dignity. Moreover, such experience exposed both the mother and the newborn to health hazards, some of which resulted in loss of lives. The displaced women were predisposed to illnesses, such as frequent and painful urination and vaginal itchiness, which they attributed primarily to too much heat and the lack of clean water for drinking and washing.

Access to health services was limited to the services provided by the midwife stationed at the barangay. Mostly, women resorted to self-help and traditional practices and used herbal medicine when there was sickness in the family.

Relief assistance given to displaced persons was generally limited, short-term, and temporary. Moreover, these basically addressed survival needs for food and shelter. Health and reproductive health conditions were the least addressed, even though the displaced families lived in evacuation centers for extended periods of time. Program interventions on reproductive health and rights were seldom part of the assistance provided during the conflict situation.

The coping mechanisms employed by women were mainly about accessing kin and community support system. While they also engaged government offices, these efforts only allowed them to access limited help. They had little influence in determining for support agencies the kind of emergency relief that they were to receive.

Interviews with displaced women who suffered and lived a miserable life at the evacuation centers due to armed conflict have presented some policy implications that need to be addressed by the Philippine Government to protect them and their children. Disaster preparedness management systems of municipal and barangay units that host IDPs must be strengthened. Broad reproductive health programs that shall effectively reach displaced women and children need to be implemented. Most critical in the resolution of these displacement problems in Central Mindanao is the urgent need for the national government to prioritize addressing the peace issues involving the Bangsamoro people.

Notes

1 Moro is the collective term for people belonging to the thirteen ethno-linguistic groups in Mindanao that profess an adherence to the Islamic faith.

2 *Lumad* refers to the indigenous people of Mindanao.

3 Main center.

4 In the entire Mindanao, however, the Muslim population comprises approximately thirteen percent.

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Notes on the Conflict within Mindanawons

Rudy Buhay Rodil

It is not only the issue of constitutionality that we have to face in our search for the solution to the Bangsamoro problem, the Moro struggle for self-determination that has been with us since 1972. We must also confront the emotions that come with the basic issues of identity, ancestral domain, self-governance, control of natural resources, and the right to determine one's final political status. Maybe we should even regard these emotions as one of the basic issues. The truth of the matter is that there seems to be a predominance of negative thoughts and feelings among Pinoy settlers, Bangsamoro, and Lumad alike. The emotions are not exactly kind, and they have also reached the level of official policies.

How, for instance can we explain, the strong resistance from among Christian settlers and Lumads to the use of the phrase "Muslim Mindanao" in the Constitution when it was under deliberation in the Regional Consultative Commission (RCC) and in Congress? Yes, they, the very people who expressed opposition to this phrase were likely among those who took part in the overwhelming ratification of the 1987 Constitution and, consequently, of that phrase, too. On the opposite end, how do we understand the overwhelmingly favorable response to it from among Muslims, such as was duly documented in the public consultations conducted by the RCC? The predominantly Christian provinces of eight out of thirteen provinces listed in the Tripoli Agreement vehemently expressed their desire not to be included in the territory of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The reasons given revealed negative thoughts and feelings about Muslim rather than the objective merits of both the draft organic act produced by the RCC and the actual Organic Act enacted by Congress.

The same manifestations were repeated in 1996 when the famous — or infamous, depending on where one stood — Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD) surfaced in

the peace talks between the Government of the Philippines (GoP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Yet it turned out that most of the protesting public, including very educated ones, had not read the document.

Substantially the same demonstration of emotions was reportedly triggered by Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) joint Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in 2008. Voicing popular but negative sentiments from among the settlers in Mindanao, indignant politicians filed for a temporary restraining order (TRO) in the Supreme Court to prevent the signing of the agreement in Malaysia. The Supreme Court did not only abort the signing, it also ruled that the MOA-AD was unconstitutional. Angry rallies denouncing the MOA-AD were held in Zamboanga City, Iligan City, and Kidapawan City, even before the document itself was made known to the public, indicating unmistakably that the anger was not exactly because the protesters or their leaders knew what the MOA-AD was all about, but because of deep-seated emotions that were triggered by the MOA-AD. Which leads one to ask, was MOA-AD the problem? Or was the problem the perceived MOA-AD? Or that, the angry perceivers had something within them that had been agitated and that rushed disturbingly to the surface with the mere mention of the document?

I had the privilege to be “in” many of the above events, and I can attest that the feelings expressed were not necessarily objective reactions based on a thorough reading and understanding of the documents they were opposing. At one point, I asked the owners of some voices in one audience: If the MOA-AD had come from a Bisayan or Christian group, would you have the same reaction? The answer was a quick and resounding “NO!”

Loob, or the inner self, is very important in Pinoy social relations, not only among individuals, but also within families and within the bigger communities. The emotional reactions to “Muslim Mindanao” in 1988-1989, to SPCPD in 1996, and to MOA-AD in 2008 unmistakably displayed what was inside the minds of people and the feelings they have harbored for a long time, much of it inherited from the Spanish period through several generations, cultivated through the years by Spanish and American colonizers, and carried on by the various governments of the Republic of the Philippines. If one looks closely at the social sciences or social studies being taught in

Philippine schools, the Bangsamoro or the Lumad will not find ample and accurate descriptions of themselves in the textbooks; the hand of government in the acts of omission is everywhere in the classrooms.

The Commission on National Integration (CNI) of 1957 and the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 had been perennially underfunded. The implementation of IPRA itself leaves much to be desired. Today, there is the GoP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement of 1996 that — even representatives of the government admit — nearly fourteen years after the signing, several provisions of which have yet to be fully implemented.

Now we ask again, what is the government's problem?

Maybe one of the good things that came out of the nonsigning of the GRP-MILF MOA-AD and its being declared as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court is the realization by both private and government institutions that something is indeed amiss. So, now we have combined official and private efforts — community consultations (Konsult Mindanaw, among others) and Dialogue Mindanaw — where people from the settlers and the Bangsamoro and the Lumad can publicly express their sentiments. This is good, it is therapeutic; we need more of this at the local government unit (LGU) level.

Emotion, defined as thought with the element of “like” or “dislike” to it, reveals our innermost feelings about anything, but especially about problems that hit us intensely. It varies in intensity depending on our level of feelings about something. Thus, if something good or bad happens to someone close to us, we spontaneously feel good or bad, too. But if something good or bad happens to someone not close to us, we exhibit hardly any reaction. Worse, when something bad happens to those we regard with disdain, we do not even care.

Our thoughts, words, and feelings for and about each other — the settlers, the Bangsamoro, and the Lumad — have been shaped over many years, handed down from generation to generation. I am of the impression that one highlight of the relationship between Moros and Pinoys from the north is mutual rejection. Many times this is called prejudice. The seed had been sown and nurtured over many years. Now, we are harvesting the whirlwind.

We recall the 333 years, Moro-Spanish wars from 1565 to 1898, interrupted with some quiet years along the way, and the fact that the wars were triggered by Spanish ambitions to colonize the Moros. To do

so, the would-be conquerors employed thousands of Pinoy Christians in all expeditions against them (Moros). They conveniently labeled the Moro as *Piratas* (pirates) in Spanish documents. The Moros for their part relentlessly counterattacked by hitting Christian communities in Luzon, the Visayas, and in northern and Eastern Mindanao. If we recall all these, then we should have no difficulty comprehending why there is bad blood between and among Pinoy Christians and Bangsamoros.

The Americans contributed heavily not only to the transmission of negative emotions, they also created their own labels. In the 1903 census, they neatly divided the population into Christians and non-Christians, adding that Christians were civilized and the non-Christians were uncivilized. The latter were categorized under the Moros and the Wild Tribes. These labels colored the public land laws and the number of hectares that people could acquire. These are now classic examples of what is called class legislation, or laws with unequal application. Christian homesteaders were entitled to sixteen or twenty-four hectares, depending on which version was under implementation; the non-Christians were limited to ten or four hectares. It was through the use of these patently discriminatory land laws within the framework of government resettlement programs that the Bangsamoros and Lumad of Mindanao were marginalized in their own ancestral territories.

Prejudice is negative thoughts and feelings; prejudice is negative emotions; prejudice is negative energy. Negative thoughts or feelings for one another remain alive for years, even as we thought we have forgotten about them. Certain triggers send them spontaneously to the surface, as in “Muslim Mindanao,” SPCPD, and MOA-AD.

But energy can be transformed. So, there is hope.

Emotion is thought based on “like” or “dislike,” as already said earlier. Every word is a thought; it is also energy. That is why, according to Dr. Masaru Emoto, a Japanese scientist who has experimented with labels and water crystals, words impact clearly and palpably on water crystals. For example, he pasted the label “beautiful” on a glass of water, and the water crystals came out beautiful; the label “ugly” is pasted on another glass with water coming from the same source, and the water crystal turned out to be just that: ugly. Another label was “Mother Teresa,” and the water crystal appeared awesomely pleasant; its counterpart was labeled “Hitler,” and the result was hideous. Dr. Emoto concludes that if words can do this to water, imagine what

these can do to humans. Humans are up to sixty percent water, and if humans were to be so labeled as Emoto's glasses of water, we can very well guess how they would turn out.

This, as a matter of fact, is what we humans have been doing to each other. We do not only label things, we also label people, we label one another. What we feel inside comes out as thoughts and words. The textbooks we use in social studies and in the social sciences reveal how we feel about ourselves and about each other. The laws we have — the very Constitution we all vow to uphold — reflect our mass consciousness. *Kung ano ang nasa loob, 'yon din nasa labas* (What is inside appears outside).

What does the history of the Lumad Indigenous Communities and the Bangsamoro in Mindanao tell us?

How do we explain the emergence of liberation movements among the Bangsamoros, such as the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM), the MNLF, and the MILF? How do we explain the ability of such a movement to remain active for more than forty years, despite the massive manpower requirements, the gargantuan logistics needed, the terrible losses in lives and property?

How do we also explain the growing Lumad movement for self-determination?

A rebellion generally reveals an acute level of accumulated hurt and a very deep sense of alienation. A broad-based recourse to armed violence is a very serious decision; it involves entire communities as lives of relatives and friends are put on the line. Indeed, thousands of lives were lost, as well as untold damage to property resulted in the war for Bangsamoro national liberation that was launched in the latter part of 1972. It needed the deployment of seventy-five percent of the entire force of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to quell the uprising.

A quick look into interrelated events in our history will reveal a pattern of acceptance, rejection, and acceptance. *Sandugo* (the blood compact) is one way of bringing strangers, even enemies, together into a relationship of brotherhood. It has deep roots in our various cultures, coming in various names but meaning the same thing. Enemies who have reached a state of mutual rejection, even mutual elimination, submit to a process that transforms negative energy into positive energy: mutual exclusion to mutual acceptance. In our culture, the sandugo, the mixing of two bloods into one, is the most powerful image of mutual acceptance. Unfortunately, it has been submerged in

layers of colonial impositions and practices.

Are we ready to shed our colonial overcoats to solve a festering problem?

We need to look *sa ating loob* (inside ourselves) *at makiramdam sa isa't isa* (and to feel each other out). Do we have it in our heart to accept, not reject, our Bangsamoro co-citizens? Because if we do not, then the automatic response is counter-rejection. That is why there was a movement for national liberation, for counter-identity, for self-determination; that is why it became necessary to resort to arms.

To be annexed in the Treaty of Paris was a form of wholesale nonrecognition and rejection. It meant having one's communal land opened to private ownership through the resettlement program. Seeing one's land being parceled out and titled to individual settlers and corporations is a form of rejection. Being displaced and marginalized in one's territory, being ruled by strangers in one's home, and not being able to decide anymore what to do with one's life are the various ways to mean the same thing: Rejection.

And when rebellion is launched by victims of rejection, those of us who belong to or represent the "stranger" and "dominant" community feel justified in sending government troops to quell these troublesome rebels. We feel safe and comfortable by assuming that the rebels started the trouble. But, did we not push them to do exactly that?

Being taught and compelled to adopt a history that is not one's own is a subtle and grand rejection of one's self-esteem. Government has never officially looked inside itself to see and admit where it has not only failed but where it has actively contributed in the first place to the very creation of the Bangsamoro and Lumad problem. Thus, we yearn for a government with a conscience.

Labeling is rejection. Called Moro piratas during the Spanish colonial regime, non-Christians and uncivilized during the days of American colonization, national cultural minorities in the early days of the republic, now we call them "rebels" or "secessionists." The word "secessionist" has been thoughtlessly used against them, even when they have been part of and have accepted life within the republic. We charge them with wanting to take our lands which we have legally taken from them in the first place — the government said these were public lands, even when they say they will respect vested rights. We react to the MOA-AD as if it was the handiwork of a some terrible *wakwak* or *aswang* (witch) and sought from the Supreme Court.



We say we want to solve the Bangsamoro problem but we refuse to make changes in the Constitution that had legitimized their marginalization and that would change Bangsamoro life for the better. We need to put a stop to this vicious cycle of rejection and counter-rejection. Our best choice for the future is mutual acceptance. We really cannot adopt a policy of expelling each other out of Mindanao and the country.

If the problem is aggravated by poverty and government neglect, do we answer with half-hearted development? When we respond to victims of the vicious cycle of rejection with palliatives, isn't this compounding the earlier rejections with a new form of rejection — *gilingaw-lingaw lang* (being entertained), as they say in Bisaya.

At this point in time, the cycle of cause and effect has become vicious and never-ending. We cannot tell any more which came first: the roots of the conflict or our feelings about the conflict. Never has there been an admission, especially a public admission, by leaders on both sides of the conflict of the costs of war. Never has there been a common act of acceptance, an act of sorrow that one's behavior and action have caused hurt and immense suffering.

Constitutional change will redefine relationships of communities anchored on the consent of the governed. We have to reflect on a history that does not hide and lie. We have to accept the ideal of peaceful



coexistence. Acceptance is decolonization of our minds; it can liberate us from destructive emotions. A common acceptance can be a source of political strength; the mark of political maturity by all concerned.

Are these strange words to us? No, these are an integral part of our culture no matter how diverse: *nakaugat sa ating kultura...nasa ating kalooban... sa bawat isa... sa bawat komunidad... nagkalayo ang ating mga loob... may kalinaw kapag nagkalapit ang loob* (rooted in our culture...it is part of our inner selves... in each one of us... in each community...our inner selves are distant from each other... there can be peace when the inner selves are united or whole).

Loob is a vital ingredient in social relationships among us Filipinos, whether in harmony or in conflict. Where there is harmony, we say *nagkaisang loob* (union of inner selves); where there is conflict, *nagkasiraan ang loob* (severance of inner selves). In between, a step before harmony we say *nagkalapitan ang loob* (coming together of inner selves); prior to conflict when the element of distancing sets in, we say *nagkalayoan ang loob* (distancing between inner selves). This goes for individuals as well as for groups.

When the relationship between two people is in harmony, we say *nagkaisa ang kanilang loob* (there is union between their inner selves). Sometimes we also say *para silang magkapatid* (they are like siblings). They are sensitive to each other's feelings; they feel for each other; they identify with each other's interests; there is plenty of give and take. We have two individuals, who accept each other's distinctness, accept each other's dignity, who are sensitive to each other's sensibilities. We achieve a union when two selves respect and offer kindness to each other.

Expand this into communities and we have a union of two identities: two families joined by intermarriage or a baptism. Where the two families represent barangays, we have an alliance of two barangays. Among nation-states the union is sealed with diplomatic relations, exchanges of ambassadors, treaties of friendship and commerce, and so on. Among corporations we speak of partnerships or joint ventures. Notice that as the relation expands beyond the individual, it also acquires impersonal features, like formal written contracts with clearly defined terms not necessarily attached to feelings.

In the Philippines, this formal written contract can only be a new Constitution, the ultimate response. And final solution. It means *Meron tayong lakas ng loob na tanggapin na nasaktan natin ang isa't*

isa, at handa tayong makipag-isa (We have the strength of the will to accept that we have hurt one another, and we are ready to come to a union). The seal of a new relationship is a symbolic sandugo, a new Constitution for a new Philippines.

Notes on Deportation from Malaysia

Magdalena C. Cabaraban
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Introduction

Halaw, a Malayo word, literally means to “cast out, to eject, to throw away.” This word came to the nation’s consciousness when in mid-August of 2002, thousands of undocumented Filipino workers were deported from Malaysia. They were called halaw, an apt description considering the often-forcible means of their removal from an unwelcoming country.¹

The halaw is not a recent phenomenon. It had its beginnings when people from Tawi-Tawi and neighboring provinces risked crossing the ocean in search of work and to engage in buying and selling of goods (Dañguilan-Vitug and Yabes, 1998). Trading was good and lucrative; taxes were not imposed. Thus, there was a strong lure for people to venture. The clandestine buying and selling peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, with cigarettes as the most popular item being smuggled to the country. Barter trade stalls proliferated in Zamboanga carrying goods produced in Malaysia and Indonesia.

The steadily increasing influx of people to Malaysia, most heavily in Sabah, went on over the years. The coming and going was mostly illegal and there were sporadic cases of migrants being sent back. Yet the streams of movement from Tawi-Tawi to Sabah remained unabated; Tawi-Tawi then came to be known as the “southern backdoor” of migration to nearby islands.

In 1997, the issuance of a border pass was considered a significant act to legitimize migration. The pass bearing the stamp of the Philippine Immigration Office allowed a Filipino to stay for a maximum of thirty days in the eastern part of Malaysia, including Sandakan, Tawau, Semporna, and Lahad Datu (Dañguilan-Vitug and Yabes).

The open and somewhat legalized travel to and from Malaysia resulted to more waves of migration. Over time, however, the issuance of border pass was riddled with corruption and abuses. Tampering of documents or selling them at an exorbitant price rendered the

border pass inutile. The Malaysian government then fine-tuned the immigration bureaucracy and imposed stringent entry measures. Thus, Filipino traders and workers caught without the necessary documents or those considered dissident entrants were deported or sent back to the Philippines.

As early as 1996, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Field Office IX started to receive and serve deportees from Sabah, Malaysia. However, the agency report stated that “they were only few in number.” The number of repatriates doubled in 1997, tripled in 1999, and further increased in the next couple of years (DSWD IX, 2002). While no record of deportees prior to January 2002 was obtained from the said agency, it was reported by the Malaysian Federal Special Task Force that 20,441 irregular migrants were repatriated in 1999, of which 10,332 were sent back to the Philippines.

By the third quarter of 2002, the DSWD had processed a total of 15,385 deportees since January 1 of that year (DSWD Memo, 2002). This number represented only those who came by the DSWD processing centers. A newspaper account placed the number of repatriates, both voluntary and forced deportees, at 64,000 from February to the end of August (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 29 August 2002).

An undated report obtained in October 2002 from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) Region IX quoted a Bureau of Immigration IX report that 29,619 Filipino repatriates had been processed from January to 10 September 2002. Forced deportees constitute about twenty-seven percent (8,008) while voluntary repatriates numbered about 21,611 (or 72.19%). The same TESDA paper quoted a DSWD IX report dated 10 September 2002 stating that the latter had served a total of 22,473 deportees (TESDA IX Report, 2002).

The variation in numbers cited may have arisen from the confusion in categorizing those who had been considered as “served,” “processed,” or “arrivals as recorded from boat manifest.” The figure cited by the DSWD IX varied very widely from that given by Habib Majahab Hashim, a top official of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) who claimed that there are as many as 500,000 undocumented Filipinos in Malaysia. Hashim said that that around 400,000 among these are detained in various camps in Sabah and Sarawak (www.newsflash.org, 2002).

From August to September 2002, newspapers bannered pictures

which stabbed at the nation's conscience: Thousands of halaw packed liked sardines in rickety sea vessels, reminiscent of the 1960s boat people fleeing from Vietnam; anguished and desperate faces in an immigration queue; a young Filipino staring blankly behind detention bars; a woman weeping over her dead child in a holding center in Sabah (ABC News, 2002).

At the height of the deportation controversy in the last half of 2002, Filipinos expressed a mix of outrage, dismay, and indignation at the hostile treatment received by the deportees from Malaysian authorities. Politicians and civil society groups rivalled each other in issuing statements condemning Malaysia and demanding redress. Some burned the Malaysian flag and pictures of then-Prime Minister Mahathir at public demonstrations; others called for boycott of Malaysian products; and a number lobbied for the international community to denounce Malaysia's blatant human rights violation against undocumented Filipino migrants. The fingerpointing among the various government agencies eventually heaped most of the blame upon the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) for its failure to act soon after Malaysia announced a crackdown on illegal aliens.

The forced migration reached its peak in September and October 2002. The Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrant and Itinerant People (ECMS) deplored the heavy influx of the deportees and the way the government agencies grappled with the emergency situation. The issue drew numerous articles and commentaries, culled from the testimonies and opinions of the deportees, stakeholders, government officials, and international observers.

The Impact of Forced Migration

Migration of refugees has taken place since time immemorial albeit systematic data on the number of these migrants have only started to be recorded in the last fifty years (Keely, et al., 2002). It is noted that the numbers have been dramatically increasing during the past decades due to famine, ethnic cleansing, conflict, or natural disasters.

In general, the movement of people from one place to another is propelled by a web of factors jointly at work yet exerting varying pressures. While economic reason predominates, other equally significant and forceful factors act as direct motivators to migrate. Migration takes into account the geographic and political characteristics of the sending and receiving areas, the demographics of migration, and the warlike or pacific intent of the movement.



Photo by Charie Salceda

Forced migration usually comes about as a response to the enforcement of migration policies or by the occurrence of disastrous events. People are forced to leave their place of origin and seek refuge in places of destination. Or it could be about migrants who are forcibly driven out of the place where they migrate to. The migrants driven out of a country are viewed as dissident population. When a country promulgates a policy to expel dissident groups from its territory, the expulsion leads to displacement. Getting rid of these people can be done by repatriation or deportation.

Forced migration produces an emergency situation that affects both the individuals and the receiving communities.

On the individual level, the emergency situation approximates a disaster which impacts on one's health, livelihood, family structure, and on the psychosocial aspect of a deportee's life. The receiving communities, on the other hand, have to grapple with the consequences of too many deportees. Immediate assistance for basic necessities, maintenance of sanitation and hygiene, and provision of health services and livelihood are gargantuan tasks given the immediate need for massive resources. In the case of deportation and repatriation, the methods of expulsion exacerbate the difficulties for the deportees. The interaction between the dissident population and the country's law enforcers is decidedly unbalanced with the former being placed at a very disadvantaged position.

Looking into the Halaw Phenomenon

The findings here were drawn from in-depth interviews with twenty-five deportees and from the proceedings of focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted among twenty-five other deportees from October to December 2002. The FGDs, as well as most of the interviews, were held in the processing centers in Zamboanga City and Bongao, Tawi-Tawi. However, there were some deportees who were reached in their homes after they had complied with the processing of their re-entry to Philippine territory. Most of these primary respondents were found to be from Mindanao – Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Basilan, and the Zamboanga Peninsula. There were also a few who came from Luzon and the Visayas.

A total of fifteen key informants composed mostly of health providers and stakeholders were also interviewed for data on institutional responses to the humanitarian crisis. The key informants primarily come from government agencies involved with providing assistance for travel documents and health services and having access to memorandum orders, reports, statistical data, and other pertinent records on the deportation of Filipinos from Malaysia.

The Geographical, Cultural and Economic Context of the Halaw Phenomenon

The halaw phenomenon and the attendant problems of deportation are best understood by taking a look at the historical context that had

shaped policy decisions.

Malaysia: Home to Migrant Workers

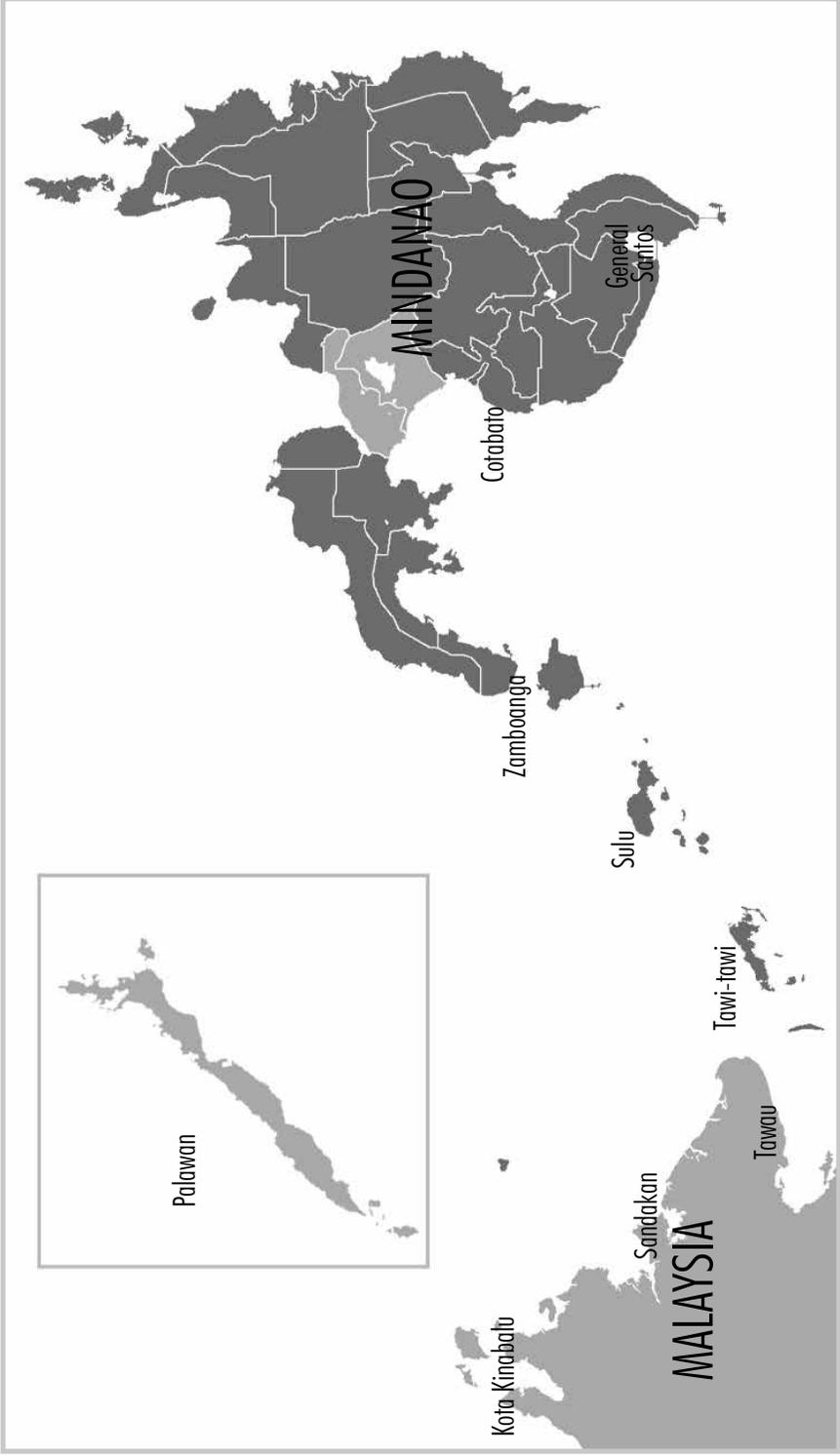
Malaysia is a relatively new state, formed in 1963 through a merging of the former British colonies of Malaya and Singapore, including the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak on the northern coast of Borneo. Divided into two regions of Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia, the country comprises thirteen states and two federal territories. Its border countries are Brunei, Indonesia, and Thailand. Its estimated population as of midyear 2002 is 22.7 million, composed primarily of Malay and other indigenous groups (58 percent); Chinese (24 percent); Indian (8 percent); and others (The World Factbook, 2002). In the few years after the founding of Malaysia, it was rocked by Indonesian efforts to control Malaysia, the Philippine claims to Sabah, and Singapore's secession in 1965.

Malaysian economy flourished in the 1970s. Today, it is widely regarded as one of East Asia's greatest economic success stories. This growth is attributed to the shift of its development strategy from being a mere producer of raw materials into a multisector economy. Export-oriented industries propelled its economic growth, such that its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate was sustained at eight percent over some years.

In its early years as a newly industrializing economy, Malaysia welcomed migrant workers, especially to its so-called 3D (dirty, dangerous, and demeaning) employment sectors - mainly in agriculture and logging. The fast growing manufacturing, construction, and service sectors soon prompted the government to legalize importation of foreign labor. The resulting expansion of the country's middleclass and the increased employment of Malaysia's female workforce in the industries also created a demand for foreign female domestic workers to tend to their homes. Like a magnet, Malaysia attracted hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Sri-Lanka. As of 1998, Malaysia was the largest importer of foreign workers in East Asia (Malaysia Country Report, 1998).

Precisely because they are undocumented, the number of illegal migrant workers is difficult to track and ascertain. Consider the variation of the figures in the following reports:

In 1994, it was estimated that there are over 1 million illegal immigrants



Source: Redrawn from [wikimedia commons](#)

in Malaysia, including 800,000 Indonesians, 100,000 Filipinos and 100,000 Bangladeshis (Migration News, 1994).

Malaysia's Central Bank estimated that for a total workforce of 8.6 million people, there were 1.7M foreign workers at the end of 1997, of which 1.14 million entered the country legally (World News Inter Press Service [IPS], 2002).

Migration News reported that in 1999, Malaysia had one of the world's highest percentage of foreign workers: roughly 2M of the country's eight million workers. About half of this is estimated to be undocumented (www.hrw.org/report, 2002).

In Malaysian Migration News 2000, official estimates of irregular migrants in Malaysia remain at approximately 300,000. The government regarded irregular migration in Sabah as particularly serious. Estimates of migrants in Sabah ranged from 400,000 to 600,000, perhaps 100,000 of them in an irregular status. As of February 2000 authorized migrant workers were estimated to number 697,219, mostly from Indonesia (517,766), Bangladesh (129,004), the Philippines (30,510), Pakistan (3,280), Thailand (2,888) and others (www.hrw.org/report, 2002).

Foreign workers made up 20 percent of Malaysia's workforce. In November 2001, 1.1 million migrant workers had legal work permits. Even more, however, were undocumented migrants (Inglis, 2002).

Most probably, these estimates of Malaysia's undocumented migrant workers do not take into account a significant number of migrant family members, such as the women who do not join those formally hired, but still earn from the informal sector of the economy, as well as stay-at-home women and minor children. Also, children born of undocumented parents could not be registered at birth and therefore remain unaccounted.

While immigration laws regulate the inflow of tourists and migrant workers, the economic boom in the 80s to the late 90s and the high corollary demand for workers forced Malaysia to ease its migration restrictions. Many among the repatriated Filipinos related how even though they were not holding valid travel and identification documents they had stayed in Malaysia or travelled in and out of the country virtually unmolested for close to thirty years, in fact, a number of deportees had been born in Malaysia or were brought there when they were still very young. They had known no other home but that country.

Malaysia had periodically expelled undocumented persons from the country, but it was in 1997 when it started a massive crackdown, evidently in response to the Asian economic crisis. The regional crisis affected the flow of migrant workers across national borders. While people left their distressed home countries for work elsewhere, they found that what used to be welcoming countries were driving out foreign migrants so as to prioritize their nationals for employment. But even as the climate for employment soured for migrant laborers in Malaysia, Filipinos desperate for work that could not be had in the Philippines continued to brave the risks in going to that country.

Sabah: The Entry Point From Tawi- Tawi

Many Filipinos in the cluster of islands of Southern Philippines, particularly the Tausog, Sama, and Badjao, have historically been free to go in and out of Malaysia, especially in the province of Sabah or North Borneo. Similarly, Malaysians have freely travelled to Southern Philippines. The respective national borders are just a few nautical miles apart, such that the lights of Sandakan in Malaysia can be seen from Turtle Island in the Philippines. The boat trip from Bongao, Tawi-Tawi to Sandakan takes only a few hours.

In Turtle Island, the Malaysian ringgit and the Philippine peso are accepted even in small sari-sari stores and sidewalk stalls. Radio and television broadcast Malaysian programs and stores sell Malaysian-manufactured coffee, detergent, and cosmetics.

In these border islands, the people may differ in nationality but share common ethnic origins and the Islamic faith, and even relatives. It was only during the formation of modern states in recent times that the demarcation of their corresponding geographic boundaries restricted this intercourse.

The Philippines has a long unresolved claim over the province of Sabah. Historically, in 1658, the Sultan of Brunei gave the Sultan of Sulu the north coast of Borneo in return for his help in settling a civil war dispute between Sultan Abdul Mubin and Pengeran Bongso. The Sultan of Sulu leased the island to the British East Indies Company. Thus, in 1888, North Borneo became a British Protectorate but obtained the right to self-govern in August of 1963. In September of that year, North Borneo's name was changed to Sabah.

The geographic proximity of Sabah, its cultural heritage, its social and religious similarities plus the historical claim had led to a consciousness among Filipinos, especially the generational residents

of Turtle Island, that Sabah is an extension of home. According to Rina Jimenez-David,

There is no ‘border’ to speak of between Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Sabah. In fact, the Philippine claim to Sabah is based on the documented fact that the oil and timber-rich island is part of the Sultanate of Sulu. The Sultan merely leased the island to the British East Indies Company but the British turned around and claimed it as part of their colonial territory and then passed it on to Malaysia upon independence.

These historical and political arrangements though went unnoticed by the people of Sabah and Sulu and Tawi-Tawi as they traded and intermarried for generations. (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2 September 2002)

Economic opportunities in Malaysia, especially in Sabah have, for years, lured Filipino southerners to come. But for a great number, the reason is not merely economic, but political. According to a United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNCHR) estimate, about 45,000 Filipino Muslims who fled ethnic strife in Mindanao in 1972 and 1974 had been locally integrated in Sabah (Inglis, 2002).

The Crackdown on Illegal Migrants

The term “illegal,” “irregular,” and “undocumented migrant” are used interchangeably. In the context of this research, these terms apply to all persons present in a state without formal permission to be there. It includes both those with no official form of identification and those with passports from their home country but without visas that allow them entry into Malaysia (www.hrw.org/report, 2000).

For a Filipino national to legally stay in Malaysia, a valid Philippine passport and a work permit are needed. Identity Cards (IC) and permanent residence cards or temporary passes, which deportees call *pass pangti* or *gambal pulis*, are also issued to legalize the stay of migrants.

Starting in 1994, Malaysia tried to rein in a fast growing migrant labor force and rationalize its migration policy. This move was prompted primarily by the perception of local residents that these migrants took away their jobs, provided competition for their small business, or were responsible for crimes including theft, prostitution, and drug trafficking.

The government mandated employers to register all their employees by December 1996. During this amnesty period, the employers who submitted work permit applications to the Immigration Department



on behalf of migrant workers were issued a “Yellow Card” to signify that a temporary work permit had been approved. To complete the process, however, employers had to pay a levy before the temporary card expired on 15 August 1997. Meanwhile, workers were to carry a photocopy of the card at all times.

However, while some employers collected from their workers to pay for the levy, many among them did not bother to complete the registration process. Many workers thus became illegal migrants

in the absence of such employment registration (Malaysia Country Report, 1998).

In late 1997, Malaysian immigration police became more zealous in arresting people who could not show proof that their stay in the country was legal. Checkpoints were set up, and factories suspected of harboring illegal migrants were inspected without warning. Police and immigration authorities swooped down and raided residences at odd hours to catch and cart away undocumented persons — babies and children included — to detention centers in preparation for shipping them out of the country.²

On 8 April 2002, the Malaysian Parliament passed The Immigration (Amendment) Act 2002, which provided a maximum fine of 10,000 ringgits (USD2,600) and a jail term of no more than five years, or both, for both the illegal immigrant and those who harbor him. Amnesty was given until end of August 2002 for undocumented persons to voluntarily surrender for repatriation to their country of origin or face arrest, detention, fine, and forcible removal from Malaysia. Inglis observed that,

The immediate government explanation for the most recent crackdown was concerns about possible involvement of undocumented workers in the drug trade and other criminal activities. However, local human rights groups also cite the slowdown in the economy and concerns about possible terrorist connections with Muslim fundamentalists as factors encouraging this latest effort.

It was at this point that the horde of undocumented Filipinos started streaming out of Malaysia, finally galvanizing the Philippine government into action.

The Deportation Experience and Its Consequences

The Halaw Respondents

Forty forced deportees and ten voluntary repatriates, all relatively less educated Muslims with a mean age of thirty-three, agreed to take part in interviews and discussions for this report. Thirty-five were women who reported to have worked in Malaysia as domestic helpers,

entertainers, or plantation laborers. The men, on the other hand, had been employed in fishing, trade, construction, or agriculture.

They all claim that it was easy to find work in Malaysia. Men, however, expected to be paid more at an average monthly income of 500 ringgits. The women took home about half that amount.

A third of the respondents claimed to have migrated to Sabah at an early age, with some as young as twelve years old when they first came to Malaysia. There were two who had been born there. Among them, the shortest stay had been four years, while the longest stay was reported at twenty-four years. Included in the respondents was an Indonesian woman who was married to a Filipino.

The Process of Expulsion

Deportation was not an alien experience to the respondents, some of whom report to have been deported out of Malaysia once or twice before. Most of them knew that their stay there at that time was illegal. They were also aware of the risks that included five years' jail time, a heavy fine, and potential caning. Moreover, most of them knew of the government crackdown as the move was publicized and circulated over a greater part of Malaysia through television, radio, and newspaper. A few deportees, however, claimed to have been caught unaware.

Those who knew of the crackdown tried to avoid being apprehended by law enforcers. "We slept in different places," said a female halaw who, together with her three brothers, moved from relative to relative, seeking shelter for the night. "We slept in the farm because the police conducted house search very early in the morning, usually 1:00 to 2:00 o'clock," said a male respondent who was an agricultural worker. A diver and his wife eluded arrest by sleeping under the house. They padlocked their door, making it appear that the house was vacant.

Sometimes tipped off by friends about impending raids or the scheduled inspection of their premises, several Malaysian employers aided their employees' evasive attempts by transporting them to temporary shelter to avoid being seen by the police. To dry up this bootleg support to illegal migrant workers, the Malaysian government imposed a stiff fine on employers who hired and coddled illegal workers. Many among those who were hiding were eventually caught because the law enforcers were tipped about their whereabouts. Among the respondents for this study, there were six who claimed that unidentified persons filed complaints or notified the policemen about their illegal status and where to find them.

The final decision to be voluntarily repatriated seemed to stem from several reasons: unemployment, depleted resources, the enticement of free transportation, and fear of imprisonment or caning. Some who had tried to avoid being deported remembered the circumstances of their capture:

“We were apprehended at the house. It was past 10:00 in the evening. We were sleeping. There was a loud knocking at the door by people identifying themselves as policemen. They demanded to show our IC and passport. I have a border pass because our employer obtained it for us but was not able to show it. Together with my children and companion, we were directly brought to jail in Kudat.”

“I was taking a bath early in the morning when policemen came. I was told that the Chief of Police wanted to see me at the police station. Upon arrival at the station, I was immediately placed in a cell without any questions asked. Then I was immediately sent to Kunnak in Panampungan. My family was worried; it took some time for them to trace me.”

“It was after midnight; we were sleeping. Suddenly, policemen arrived, banging and demanding to open the door. I was immediately handcuffed. It was a good thing my wife and children were spared of being handcuffed.

Tales of Detention

The length of stay in jail varied from person to person. Several male prisoners languished for six months or more, while the females generally had a shorter incarceration. Detention facilities were segregated by sex. In both facilities, the halaw reported some measure of police brutality, such as mauling, physical blows, and caning. A male respondent reported having witnessed a fellow detainee being mauled to death by the detention authorities.

Those who had been taken for detention earlier reported that conditions at these holding facilities had been a lot better then. Water was abundant, quarters were clean and spacious, and there was adequate rice, although the dried fish that went with it at mealtime was of an inferior quality. As more detainees were brought in, however, the conditions worsened. Food rations went down to a cup of rice and some dried *tamban* (sardinella) every meal. Bathing time and restroom access was also regulated.

At its worst, some forty to fifty people crowded a jail cell

intended for ten. Because restroom access was regulated, children were relieving themselves inside and causing the smell to permeate the entire cell. Even adults had taken to defecating in plastic bags which an assigned detainee collected and disposed of in the morning.

Visitors were restricted; the packages they brought were closely inspected, sometimes confiscated. Thus, some relatives had no recourse but to bribe the guards just to make sure that their loved ones received basic necessities. In the Rumamera jail, in

particular, the deportees reported to have been subjected to harsher conditions and equally harsher punishment, such as water treatment and brutal mauling. In some detention facilities, on the other hand, some respondents were a lot luckier. According to one: “In fact, I felt safer in jail. They treat you well if you just follow the rules and regulations.”

Consequences of Forced Migration

Deportation, whether it had been voluntary or forced, caused the deportees to go through a crisis situation. Beyond the loss of income, it seems evident that the direst effects of the ordeal were on aspects of the halaw’s health and family structure.

The crowding and unhygienic condition in the jail exacerbated the health risks for deportees, especially the children. A female deportee who remained in detention for three weeks along with her children reported that the authorities had her children attended to when they got sick. Another female deportee, however, was not as lucky. She was travelling with her Indonesian husband and their eight



children whose ages ranged from six months to eight years. She took ill in transit from Malaysia to the Philippines. She was given medical attention in the vessel, but required more care for her recuperation upon arrival in Zamboanga. This proved difficult as her husband was not allowed to disembark and look after her and the children because he lacked travel papers.

A nurse who was sent to Sabah to receive and accompany deportees observed the following health conditions of her charges:

The first time I saw them, their condition was deplorable. Children were sick; they were crying; they were dirty and they stank. You could sense the neglect. They were starved. Some women were pregnant; they were all sickly and haggard-looking. Some looked like they hadn't slept. Mothers carried their children. A woman told us her two children weren't moving or talking. My partner and I checked the children. They were dead; one had probably been dead for over an hour already as rigor mortis has set in. The other must have just expired; the body was still warm. I estimate the children to have been one and two years old, respectively.

While still in transit aboard the Philippine Navy boat, government personnel treated cases of respiratory infections, pneumonia, measles, diarrhea, and related gastro-intestinal diseases. Department of Health (DOH) personnel who received the deportees off the boat affirmed this observation of their general health condition. Their state of malnutrition was glaringly evident even at a glance.

Cases documented by the DSWD staff reflected how deportation affected the health of illegal migrants. A pregnant woman miscarried sometime during the month she was detained prior to deportation; a man became mentally-unbalanced; two young children died of complicated ailments exacerbated by the stress of detention and travel. Cases of dehydration, acute gastro-enteritis, pneumonia, and severe malnutrition were recorded and addressed by the DSWD. The Tawi-Tawi Provincial Health Office, on the other hand, reported an outbreak of measles among the deportees just as soon as they arrived.

One of the more stressful consequences of migration was the physical separation it caused on families. Gender segregation of detention facilities forced wives and husbands, parents and children apart. Many among them lost contact with each other, unable to inform their loved ones about their whereabouts.

In Zamboanga, a Tausug male who was detained for six months

did not know what happened to the other members of his family; a 46-year-old mother of three who had been a Malaysian resident for seventeen years was deported with one of her children;³ a 54-year-old woman from Siasi, Sulu who resided in Malaysia for ten years had to leave behind her husband and their four children; a 35-year-old male was separated from his wife and children and he did not know what happened to them; a documented Filipino had to send home his wife and their five children who did not have the necessary papers to stay with him in Malaysia.



In Tawi-Tawi, 33- year-old Wahid, a Sama male said he did not know if his wife and their three children knew what became of him. Several women deportees reported that their last contact with their husband had been during their arrest or detention in Malaysia. Meanwhile, an NGO worker told of how a penniless grandmother kept her infant granddaughter alive throughout the ordeal of deportation. They had gotten separated from the child's parents at some point during their ordeal. Although stunted and emaciated, the child arrived alive in the Philippines.

Institutional Responses to Mass Deportation

Data analyzed in this section were derived from in-depth interviews of fifteen stakeholders and service providers who were greatly involved during the height of the crises situation brought about by massive deportation.

Management of Deportees

As repatriated deportees tricked in beginning early 2002, the Philippine government did not immediately issue official directives on how its line agencies should respond. By October, however, the number of deportees swelled to thousands and their reports of illnesses, deaths, and maltreatment suffered in the hands of

Malaysian authorities gained national and even international attention. This prompted the Philippine government to recognize and act on the crisis situation.

Perhaps the slow response of both the populace and the government was due to the fact that the deportation had been going on for some time. After all, such had happened before — people get deported, stay in the country for a while, then return to Malaysia still without a passport or border pass. In the scheme of things, the coming and going of illegal workers had been commonplace in these islands.

However, the emergency situation in August 2002 caught the attention of the media. The plight of the deportees was bannered in newspaper headlines and became the focus of television news. Concerned people began to drum up support and assistance to the deportees.

To coordinate the efforts of government agencies in responding to the humanitarian crisis, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo issued Administrative Order No. 40 dated 1 October 2002 creating Special Task Force “Pagbabalik Tulong” to address the problems posed by the deportation of Philippine citizens from Sabah. Chaired by the Presidential Adviser on Muslim Communities, the Task Force was composed of the heads of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA),



DSWD, Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), DOH, Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of National Defense (DND), the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Bureau of Immigration of the Department of Justice (DOJ), and LGUs.

Among others, the primary functions of the Task Force were given to be:

To ensure maximum coordination and cooperation between the concerned national

government agencies and LGUs to address the requirements of the deportees and to show the concern of the national government for the well-being of our returning countrymen;

To ensure adequate humanitarian facilities and social support services to include the reception, classification, alternate livelihood, temporary shelter, including transportation of Philippine citizens from Sabah to their respective places of origin or domicile;

To provide adequate health services to deportees as may be necessary upon their arrival in the Philippines;

To facilitate the documentation of those who wish to return to Malaysia, upon compliance with the pertinent immigration laws rules and regulations of that country; and

To arrange for adequate security while returning deportees are in transit, upon their arrival in the country, and during their reception and processing at designated government processing centers.

Shortly after the creation of Task Force, representatives of LGUs, DOH, and DSWD were directed to go to Sabah and attend to the deportees. The first batch of service providers were inadequately prepared for what they would find. Their medical supplies proved drastically lacking. Their report, however, informed the interagency team on the needs of the deportees, such that they were able to smoothly begin the registration of 1,500 deportees as soon as the team got to Sandakan. At the same time, they were able to put in place a more effective detention camp management that addressed the needs of the Filipino detainees. Doctors and nurses on the team promptly got down to treating children and pregnant women as the team visited each detention center to officially oversee the turnover of deportees.

According to one key-informant who witnessed the turnover proceedings, deportees were transported to the dockyard where the

Navy boats were anchored. The men were handcuffed, bare from the waist up. They looked pale and haggard, but disciplined. No one was talking or complaining. They walked by twos to the boat ramp under the watchful eye of Malaysian police who were armed with M-16 rifles.

The condition in the Navy boats turned chaotic as soon as the voluntary deportees joined the ones from the detention centers. The voluntary repatriates brought personal belongings with them and aside from the physical crowding, soon there also were reports of stolen belongings.

When the deportees got to the processing centers in Zamboanga and Tawi-Tawi, volunteers from civil society and rights groups joined the hard-pressed government workers in seeing to their needs. The DSWD provided Php90 daily meal allowance per person for seven days, augmented by the distribution of rice, instant noodles, and others. Bottled water and plastic water containers were also distributed, and aside from the convenience package provided by the DSWD, private entities and business corporations donated mosquito nets, diapers for children, blankets, shampoos, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and soap.

Coordinating and harmonizing the emergency response proved to be a logistical nightmare given the number of people who needed attention. Among the donated stuff were medicines scraped together from the inventory of government health units, LGU executives and other elected officials, and pharmaceuticals company. Despite the amount of the medicines gathered, it was still a problem getting these to whoever needed these.

Various agencies and institutions did medical outreach and critical incident stress debriefings (CISD) among those coming off the boats. For verified repatriates, the DFA issued passports free of charge. The DOLE, through the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) and the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), provided assistance to process the deportees' membership in welfare fund and health insurance. The arriving deportees were also provided assistance to locate missing family members and to unite them with their loved ones. Efforts were made to give the dead a decent burial. After processing, the repatriated workers were also given money for fare so that they could finally go home.

Some NGOs that sent their personnel to help out perceived that they were less than warmly welcomed by the staff of line agencies. Perception was high among NGO women that the government workers

did not view their voluntary offer of services as sincere. Bureaucratic red tape hampered the formation of a meaningful partnership between the government workers and their civil society counterparts. For instance, NGO workers were told that solicited donations must first be given to implementing agencies for acknowledgment of the donors and distribution to those in need. Many among the NGO volunteers questioned the need to course their material donations through government channels. They felt that the crisis situation deserved immediate response and people should not be made to wait when what they need is already there.

Interagency Actions

The continued arrival of deportees en masse from Malaysia ferried by Navy and commercial boats demanded that procedures be streamlined for processing them. In the context of interagency action, processing meant receiving the deportees upon their arrival, attending to their most immediate needs like food, shelter, medical attention/medicines as needed, and obtaining the necessary data for their proper documentation.

When done, those who had homes or relatives to go to were given transportation expenses to enable them to go and join their families. Minors who had been separated from their parents and had no identified relatives in the Philippines were housed at the DSWD Crisis Intervention Unit until a more long-term solution could be arrived at.

An Interagency One-Stop-Shop was put up on 9 September 2002 at the Office of the Civil Defense in Sta. Barbara, Zamboanga City. Representatives from the DOLE, DFA, the Office of Muslim Affairs (OMA), National Statistics Office (NSO), Local Civil Registry (LCR), Bureau of Immigration and Deportation (BID), and National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) staffed this set-up primarily to facilitate the re-employment of deportees/returnees. A process flow was devised to clearly show the steps, documents needed, and time frame involved for the processing of required papers. The DFA waived the fee required for passport application. The only amount required from the deportees was PhP100 for NBI clearance.

As agreed by the Task Force, the DSWD, in coordination with the BID, was made the “universal registrant” of all the deportees/returnees. This meant that the DSWD — which had the master list of all deportees — issued the General Certification attesting that the



holder was a deportee/repatriate. The Regional Disaster Coordinating Council (RDCC) coordinated the implementation and monitoring of the short-term emergency intervention for deportees, while participating agencies implemented the component programs.

Two processing centers were established. The first one which was in Talon-Talon, Zamboanga City, was used to temporarily house the deportees. The center is a makeshift tent, open on one side and with wooden plywood on planks for floor. While not very comfortable and providing no privacy, the Center offers a haven after the deportees' grueling detention and travel. Deportees were allowed to stay at the Center for a maximum of one week. Those who had special concerns were housed at the Sta. Barbara Crisis Intervention Unit. A processing center was also put up. Assistance programs and projects were evolved and implemented by various line agencies. Among these are the following:

- The DOLE has created the Special Employment Assistance Center (SEAC) in Zamboanga to assist, train and re-employ

Filipino workers in Sabah under Department Order No. 28-02 series of 2002. The center provided for the simplification of employment documentation through special registration for re-employment. It despatched a mobile team to Malaysia to “continue to explore employment opportunities for Filipino workers with concerned government authorities and employer federations in the said country and implement on site registration system for Filipino workers already staying legally in Sabah who shall be hired by employers.”

For the issuance of an Overseas Employment Certificate, a work permit from the Malaysian employer and an Affidavit of Undertaking duly attested by OWWA⁴ that workers would pay welfare fund and Medicare contributions on installment basis were required.

- The TESDA implemented livelihood training courses for an organized halaw group in Arena Blanco, Zamboanga City and in the Barangays of Cawit, Mampang and Sta. Barbara. Repatriated halaws were taught food processing and garment making. At the end of the course, the graduates each received PhP1,000 to start a small business (e.g., fishball making and vending, or sewing) and to buy equipment such as kitchen utensils and sewing machines. TESDA also planned to hold courses for finfish culture, fish processing, enterprise development, seaweed or *agar-agar* farming, hair science, food processing (*ampao, kropek, and pancit*), mat weaving, farming of high value crops, hollowblock making, and manual arc welding. Later, the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), through funding from the German Technical Cooperation, also initiated a project to assist the halaw with their immediate needs.
- The PNP was tasked to “conduct intelligence and investigation activities geared towards the identification of the individual deportees and those unscrupulous individuals who may take advantage of the confusing situation” and “maintain an information system relative to the actual number of deportees at the designated Zamboanga City Evacuation Centers prior to their transport to their respective destinations.” In addition, the

PNP undertook the task of photographing the deportees and providing them with pictures necessary for their documentation, such as for securing their passport and NBI clearance.⁵

- The Zamboanga City Legislative Council (Sangguniang Pampook) responded to the humanitarian crisis as early as March 2002 when more than a thousand deportees arrived. It allowed for the Joaquin F. Enriquez, Jr. Memorial Sports Complex to initially shelter deportees. Several resolutions were formulated, covering a range of assistance: allocation of area/space to accommodate the deportees; creation of medical and a social relief team to attend to the health condition of illegal migrants; and request for the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) to provide space within the port area for processing the arrivals from Malaysia.

Despite the considerable combined efforts of LGUs, line agencies, civil society, and concerned individuals, it would prove to be months before the conditions would normalize for the deportees and their host cities. A lady councilor in Zamboanga City complained that national government ignored the LGUs' petitions for assistance in behalf deportees made earlier in 2002 before the situation escalated to crisis proportions. The mass concentration of deportees gave local executives a lot of headache. They feared that the deluge of repatriated migrant workers would exacerbate problems in health, housing, and employment, as well as the peace and order situation (Daily Zamboanga Times, 9 September 2002).

Notes

1 The term also extends its applicability to dissident individuals expelled from Malaysia.

2 Prior to this crackdown on undocumented migrant workers, Malaysia has already been detaining illegal migrants who had been accused of some crimes. In 1996, TENAGANITA, a Malaysian women and migrant rights

group, exposed the appalling conditions of these detention centers and the cruel, dehumanizing treatment of detainees. In the course of researching the HIV/AIDS incidence among migrant workers in detention camps, the NGO documented the ill treatment, sexual abuse, and denial of adequate medical care to the detained migrant workers (Claude and Issel, 2000).

3 The two others had Malaysian birth certificates and had to be left with her husband in Malaysia.

4 As a sub-agency to the DOLE, the OWWA worked on the registration and membership of the deportees in order for them to avail of benefits: loan program for livelihood, scholarship for their children, training on skills for employment, hospitalization, burial gratuity in the amount of 20,000.00 pesos, medical assistance and repatriation program.

5 This service, however, was met with suspicion by some deportees who were apprehensive that their photos might be used for other purposes.

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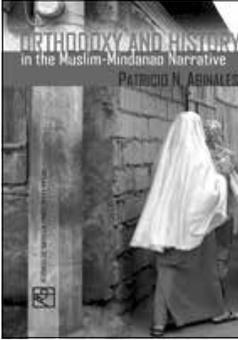
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BOOK REVIEWS



Abinales, Patricio N. 2010. *Orthodoxy and history in the Muslim-Mindanao narrative*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press. ISBN 978-971-550-600-7. 278 pages.

This book offers a very sharp, sustained critique of the Muslim separatist rebellion in the Southern Philippines. It is a timely one, coming at a time when the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Philippine government are about to resume their long-running peace talk or, failing that, face the prospect of more bloodshed. While five of the seven chapters in the book had been separately written previously as individual essays or book chapters, their reissue under one cover serves as a series of multiple empirical and analytic grounding for the central argument of the book, namely, that the narrative underpinning the rebellion is something of a myth. It is this ideological invention of tradition that is under attack in the pairing of orthodoxy and history.

To better appreciate Abinales's critique of the contending positions around separatism, it is well to remember that he does not deal in the common currency of ethnicity, culture, or religion, which are standard categories in most of the literature on Mindanao political and cultural history. He strongly believes that in invoking cultural, ethnic, or religious distinctiveness, many Mindanao intellectuals gloss over more fundamental differences like class, warlordism, and

political clans and their access to and control over the resources of these extremely rich areas. He prefers to use and categories as institutional categories, such as national authority, armies, local states, economic agencies and politico-organizational movements, parties, patronage networks as his arsenal for debate. He says, "...my debate is with scholars and public intellectuals who, like me, look at structures and general trends" (x).

Most scholarly works by historians, anthropologists, public intellectuals, political activists, and policymakers have uncritically bought into the Bangsamoro orthodox narrative, which interprets past Moro actions against Spanish, American, and Filipino presence in Mindanao as instances of heroic Moro resistance against colonialism. The fact that this seemingly eternal opposition is further embedded in an Islamic identity and value system and a political authority distinct from the rest of the Philippines has tended to cement this view of events in the popular mind. It has become an unthinking mantra accepted by nearly everyone that Muslim separatism has a history longer than that of the nation-state. The essays, to quote Abinales, "contend that this orthodox view has enraptured these works to a point where they begin to slide into the rigid world of primordialist thinking, thus obscuring a more complex portrait of an island and its people" (x). It is this primordialist posture and selectively ahistorical mindset that the book attempts to shake up with a battery of undeniable contrary facts, carefully crafted counter arguments, and illuminating statistics and quotations from both proponents and opponents of separatism. Abinales uses a strategy of effective deconstruction: To argue that the dynamics and failure of separatism can be better understood if it is de-linked from the mythology of a long history of Muslim "resistance, and seen as a modern phenomenon in which contradictions coexist alongside uniting elements" (152).

The de-linking reveals that the separatist mantra does not give full recognition to actions other than resistance, such as the history of Muslim elites' collaboration with Spanish, American, and Filipino political overlords. The orthodox narrative likewise obscures other kinds of conflict in Mindanao, such as the horizontal conflict between warring Moro warlords over control of territory and resources. These conflicts do not congeal with the orthodox view of Moro conflict as a heroic vertical opposition to the expansion of Philippine state power in Mindanao.

The role of collaborating Muslim elites is an unsolvable paradox to the creation of a Bangsamoro Republik. Left-wing analysts, such as

Saturnino Borrás Jr. and Eric Gutierrez, have traced the backwardness, poverty, and misery of the Moro masses to the compromises traditional leaders made with the Philippine state in defense of their own political and economic interests (124). To succeed in reforming Moro society, as the separatists dream of doing, demands a revolt against the old ruling class as well. A well-known Moro public intellectual, Alunan Glang, had already reached the stark conclusion some thirty years ago that “the real problem in the country is not economic political or social, *but the Muslim leadership itself*” (126). It is thus rather suicidal for the separatists to go against both their own Moro traditional leadership and the Philippine state.

The central pillar in the book is Chapter 5, subtitled “Sancho Panza in Buliok Complex: The paradox of Muslim separatism.” It fully articulates the main lines of the critique. Separatists face serious structural problems — how to deal with the collaborating Moro elites; how to deal with the centrifugal forces unleashed by *rido* (clan feuds) revenge cycles; how to control political clans and strongmen that support entrepreneurs of violence that are endemic in the fragmentation of the *umma*. Another structural problem is how to convince the Moro mass base of the viability of a radical separation from the Philippine body politic. Frank M. McKenna’s study, *Muslim rulers and rebels: Everyday politics and armed separatism in the Southern Philippines* reveals a divergence between the separatist leadership and the rank-and-file insurgents vis-à-vis those who surrender to the government. A surprising statistic shows that community support for the MILF rebellion in provinces with substantial Muslim populations has never exceeded fifty percent (126):

What makes this future [Bangsamoro] republic most surreal is the discrepancy between the hype surrounding its eventual realization and the actual daily military effort to make the dream come true . . . the war has been confined to the provinces of southwestern Mindanao and affects, on the average, less than 50 percent of their populations (134).

An equally problematic structural issue is how to co-opt the Lumad communities that are legitimate co-inhabitants within the claimed Moro ancestral domain. The so-called United Indigenous Nations of Mindanao has declared its “strong opposition for [*sic*] the inclusion of Our Ancestral Domains/Ancestral Lands in the Bangsamoro homeland” (130).

De-linking of issues from a narrow orthodoxy is also attempted through comparative cases, e.g., (a) comparing Cotabato and Davao as both administrative creations of the Manila central government, in which Moro local leadership were integrated as power brokers, as well as officials in local government; (b) comparing traditional Moro chiefs, such as Datu Piang, with his counterpart trader-chiefs —Orang Besar, in particular —in maritime Southeast Asia who played ball with rather than fight Dutch, British, and Spanish colonial intruders; and (c) comparing Muslim Mindanao with Okinawa as regions where foreign troops are stationed under the power of foreign overlords.

There had been two faces to separatism, and both encountered military as well as structural challenges. The first is that of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which achieved international recognition by the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and which resulted in the establishment of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Its dream of establishing a Bangsamoro Republik has not materialized, as the MNLF became integrated into the state it once fought. The second is that of the MILF, which did not join the MNLF peace treaty with the Philippine Government, refusing to give up its commitment to independence. It, too, has ceased to be truly radical; it has called upon the good graces of the United States to broker the peace.

The process of de-linking and deconstruction in no way denies the horrors and human cost of the MNLF and MILF rebellions in Mindanao. *The Philippine human development report 2005* cited the following figures on casualties, wounded, and displaced persons: 60,000 dead; 54,000 wounded; and 350,000 displaced. The Ibon Foundation estimates the total cost of the war since 1973 to be about Php 73 billion or Php 7.1 million per day (137). Yet, the geography of the fighting was relatively narrow, much narrower than the grandiose Bangsamoro homeland of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. Abinales wonders how one can begin to realize the Bangsamoro homeland if one's military and political priorities are simply to defend Pikit, Buldon, Matanog, and the Buliok complex (137).

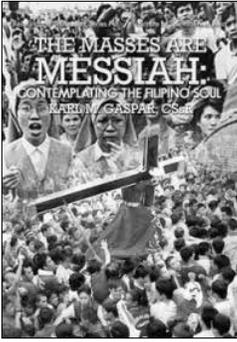
At the conclusion of the Sancho Panza chapter is an intriguing intimate look at the interactive games public intellectuals play. Abinales anticipates a pushback: "Pro-separatist academics and public intellectuals will probably have a lot to say in response to these arguments [made in the book]" (153). Willingness to engage

in debate is announced in response to an invitation made by Datu Michael Mastura, a respected MILF adviser. In his introduction to the 1999 edition of Salah Jubair's book, *Bangsamoro: A nation under endless tyranny*, considered to be the most comprehensive defense of separatism by far, Datu Mastura is on record that the value of Jubair's book lies "in the documentation of sentiments and aspirations *that now invite open debates*." Abinales finds this remark a challenge to anti-separatists to engage Jubair's book. It may be also read as a subtle recognition that the myth is no longer invincible, that some of the criticisms directed against it and its practitioners may have to be taken into consideration. It may also be an indirect admission that separatism may just be too utopian a goal, and that perhaps it might be wiser to fight for a lesser goal: A better version of autonomy perhaps? So Abinales ends his book with an open agenda for partisans as well as public intellectuals:

We may never know what motivated an exceptional political survivor like Mastura to make this call. All we can do is take him up on his offer and with hope help initiate a series of dialogues and debates—passionate, lively, and empirically grounded—to further clarify the separatist question and continue to expand the spaces of peace and stability now spreading all over southeastern [sic] Mindanao. (153)

To this reviewer, one significant message from the book is the author's dry and laconic remark as to why the faulty orthodox view continues to reproduce itself. It is because no new studies attempt to transcend the older studies so even the newer but unreconstructed works repeat the conspicuous lapses of their elders (152). Abinales's new book may be the first definite quantum jump towards transcending the orthodoxy. He sets a daring example of how public intellectuals might engage in a series of dialogues and debates that are openly passionate, lively, and empirically grounded.

- Eric Casiño



Gaspar, Karl M., CSsR. 2010. *The masses are messiah: Contemplating the Filipino soul*. Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia. ISSN 1908-0611. 451 pages.

Karl Gaspar's latest book, *The masses are messiah: Contemplating the Filipino soul* is a rare book — a significant contribution to the scholarship on *babaylans* (the spiritual leaders, especially women, in pre-Hispanic times who engaged the communities in social transformation and resistance movements), Filipino struggles for social transformation, and spirituality, long overdue but so difficult to make.

Of course, it's no surprise that the author could pull off this scholarly but captivating work. Gaspar's academic background as an anthropologist and sociologist, his grassroots experience of resistance during Martial Law and beyond, and the wide social network he has built over the years were all a preparation for this timely research.

It helps that Gaspar was CEO of several Mindanao-based institutions, including the controversial Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC) in the late 1970s, roamed the region as poet, minstrel, and playwright in the early 1980s, and has now put all his tremendous talents to the service of the Redemptorist missions, some of which consist of the poorest communities in Mindanao and elsewhere.

It also helps that Gaspar is himself a Wounded Healer (to borrow the term from the Dutch mystic Fr. Henri Nouwen), one who exercises compassion out of a heart that has experienced deep suffering. The author had been imprisoned and tortured during Martial Law and

would probably have disappeared but for his firm faith and the swift response of people who cared for him the world over.

Having come from a social and political movement whose mainstream often sidestepped discussions of spirituality and took for granted the cravings of the soul, Gaspar fills the gap for those of us in the “Martial Law generation” who continue to work for justice and social change, but who aspire for the numinous especially now that we have grown much wiser. It is a generation that, having laid down their lives and sacrificed all, wonder where the militant project has taken us, or whether the fruits had ripened and whether the desired harvests of our “revolution” were indeed brought in.

It is a rare book because it gathers together, in its massive fieldwork, voices of men and women who lived through some of the most trying and exhilarating times of our history. Here are poignant voices of agents who share their doubts and discoveries, their most intimate experiences and encounters with the Transcendent, and how they grappled with mysteries in their lives.

In a way, this book can be read as a diary of many a respondent’s soul in its journey towards healing and completeness. I found some passages moving, with precious stories such as these:

I became blind for a month. I disposed myself to those who looked after me. It was most difficult as I was used to have a hectic pace with my medical work. But during this one month, I found myself — most of the time — alone with God. I could really concentrate on being with God. I was brought to the hospital and the doctors did not know what was wrong with me. But I was not sad because while I was blind, it was not darkness but brightness — there was light at the center emanating outwards with pink rays — and my body felt light. I knew that eventually my sight will return. I said goodbye to the Blessed Mother saying I better go home... After that I knew that all that I would do would be God’s work. This is why I cannot just play around ...

And here’s another sharing, bordering on the mystical:

I listen to a voice from within me, which has only lately happened. It wasn’t there before in my life as a religious. Especially when I am faced with a crisis situation, I can hear this voice very clearly... I believe it is a gift God has given me. I need to be really silent to be able to hear the voice. I cannot tell when and where the voice will manifest itself. It comes when I am in a relaxed mood or when I

am in the thick of a very busy schedule. It comes at any time of day, when I am walking, cooking, doing work at any place, e.g., the office, the garden or even while I am in the CR. But it is only when I am alone, when I can get into a deep silence. I need to stay quiet and maintain an inner silence and just wait and the voice comes. ... I cannot fully understand this phenomenon, my understanding of this is very limited. But I embrace it...

It is a tribute to the researcher's careful handling of interviews that the 369 respondents felt safe to share their innermost selves, thoughts, and emotions that are often entangled and so difficult to express. And because local language is at risk when translated, Karl wisely retains the respondent's expressions in the dialect (both Bisayan and Tagalog) for us to get their texture and full flavor.

Which leads me to the next point of why this book is rare.

Karl has solidly built on previous scholarship and done for the Bisayan speaking communities what highly respected Filipino scholars Rey Iletto (*Pasyon and revolution*) and Vince Rafael have done for mostly Tagalog-speaking regions — disabused the audience of the persistent and colonial discourses that viewed the Filipino as subservient, passive, and fatalistic.

He has also done immense service to students of the culture of babaylans by acquainting readers on past and current literature, tapping their imagination on what still needs to be done.

Almost all scholarly work that pertains to Filipino spirituality and faith, culture and identity, are cited. If one needs to read only one book to know where else to look, *The masses are messiah* is the book to buy or borrow. Gaspar does a wonderful job of pulling together the existing strands of Filipino scholarship on these subjects and where they intersect.

Finally, this book is rare because it is an affirmation. It affirms what many of us have sensed all along but did not have evidence to show for it: That a large part of being Filipino is being deeply spiritual — recognizing the power of the Transcendent and expressing this spirituality in love and compassion, a reaching out to an embattled nature and the afflicted masses. Here, the “masses” (as I understand it) refers not to a dogmatic notion of the triumvirate (working class, peasants, and urban poor) but has been significantly expanded to include all who have been marginalized in our society: those Others

discriminated by virtue not only of social class, but also by their age, disability, tribal origins, gender, faith, color, sexual orientation, cultural affiliation.

Because Gaspar onstage is a performer and an articulate speaker, effortlessly expounding on any topic thrown at him, the book is friendly and accessible. It even takes the reader on quirky sidetrips that include the world champion boxer Manny Pacquiao's devotional habits and love for the Nazarene in Quiapo Church, for example.

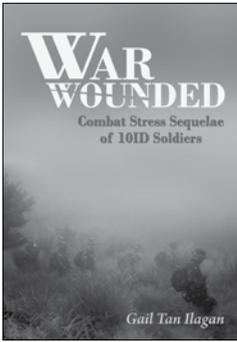
And because as a participant observer, Gaspar is faithful to the research process, he wants to give us people's reflections in a straightforward and undiluted form. This has its weak spots, of course, and sometimes the text repeats itself. But all great things have its flaws, and one can imagine these reflections taking a life of its own in another book and another creative project by Gaspar.

The important thing is that *The masses are messiah: Contemplating the Filipino soul* is as striking and relevant to us ordinary Filipinos as to the church clerics, whom the author presumably has in mind, as they try to live out a Gospel for a riven society. For Gaspar as a Redemptorist, the church is again at a crossroads, when memories of People Power and its failed promises are strongly evoked and embodied in its current president, P-Noy Aquino, and when issues of social justice sound more urgent than ever.

Definitely, the book calls us out of our pessimism, fear, hopelessness. It asks us to rediscover the transformative ways of our ancestors of old, and listen to the impulses of a rich outward-oriented Filipino spirituality to which we are heir.

I learned a lot about the Filipino soul from this book. The analysis is sharp, and the road to be taken is clear. It is up to us to make the journey together, working with the amazing material we were given while embracing the deep mystery that works within.

- Marilen Abesamis



Ilagan, Gail Tan. 2010. *War wounded: Combat stress sequelae of 101D soldiers*. Davao City: ADDU Research and Publication Office. ISBN 978-971-0392-18-6. 156 pages.

Even before I cracked open its pages, I already suspected that *War wounded* would explore ground never before covered — or perhaps simply ignored — by the rest of Philippine letters. To put to rest this nagging suspicion, I did a little cursory research before writing this review. The question I wished to answer: How many books prior to this slim volume have documented the stories of the modern Filipino combat infantryman?

The answer, sadly, is none. I confess that my search was not as exhaustive as I would have liked. I only got as far as Google Books and the Ateneo de Davao electronic catalog would take me. Perhaps there are other books out there that have covered the subject before. If so, I would be grateful if someone pointed them out.

The books that I did unearth tended to cluster around history, the Philippine Military Academy, or a dissection of political events. None of them dealt in any great depth on the lowly infantryman. When they do touch on the foot soldier, it is in terms of troop movements and casualty figures, aggregate and anonymous, humanity stripped away. If there are any personalities that figure in these stories, they are of officers and politicians and rebels.

Why is this so? Is it because Philippine intelligentsia is more closely associated with the Left? Or is it because the social existence of those who must bear arms is so far removed from those who can

afford to take up the pen? Or is this all just the fault of my own skewed perceptions? I don't know. I think those answers are harder to get at.

In *War wounded*, though, we finally have a book that opens up the world of the hitherto-anonymous modern infantryman. Its stories are of the soldiers who have engaged the enemy in combat, who have seen their comrades die, and who have lived to tell the tale. *War wounded*, however, is not a book about the glories of war or the thrill of narrow escapes; its stories are of horror, pain, fear, anger, regret, shame, and lingering guilt that follow the survivors for months and years. There's heroism, yes, but not the blazing sort; rather, it's the heroism of dogged determination, of the will to slog on in the face of danger and fatigue.

To its credit, *War wounded* takes no sides in the political or cultural divide. The conflict is a given, and it attempts no explanations or justifications, much in the same way as soldiers approach war. In fact, *War wounded* is strongest when it is the soldiers who speak. The book is peppered with first-hand narratives from the soldiers, culled from the many interviews that Ilagan conducted over the course of her research. Though rendered in English, the translation largely retains the authenticity of what I can imagine as the original spoken Filipino. Ilagan preserves the cadences, the hesitation, and the lingo of the soldiers. In its authenticity lies the power of the stories.

...They were dying. The most painful one for me was my commanding officer, Lt. Paler. He was a good man. I was the aid man, at the same time I was the team leader of the leading team. So while I was treating him, he told me, "Don't leave me alone," so I told him, "Yes, Sir — I'll be here for you, Sir." But he died as we were withdrawing. He never got to Parang alive. The doctor there said he could have stood a chance had he gotten in ten minutes earlier. But we had a hard time withdrawing. We couldn't do it very fast. Too many...we almost couldn't get them all out.

Lt. Paler was hit...Heavy fighting...around 4:45AM until 1:00PM. Lt. Paler was hit around 10:00AM. It was quite some time that he could talk. Then he said, "Take care of me." I said, "Sir, I'll take care of you." And I did, Ma'am. That's why it's very painful when I remember.

...

He said, "Take care of me." I told him, "Yes, Sir, I won't let anything happen to you, Sir." But he couldn't walk anymore. I propped him against a tree by my side. Sometimes, I had to leave him to take care of someone else. And then the enemy fire would get intense again,

and I had to help fight back. He'd say, "It's okay, Ben. Go." He still had strength. He still gave commands.

In a way, *War wounded* is as much the soldiers' book as it is Ilagan's. That's why the book is groundbreaking and important: because it gives us a glimpse into the minds of the soldiers. In their stories, we comfortable privileged ones catch a glimmer of their humanity.

War wounded has dozens of stories, many of them are short, even anecdotal. But there are three long stories, which I think form the core of the book and take several chapters to play out. Two of the stories take place some six years apart, and would be otherwise unrelated until linked by the third.

The first story is that of Ben, a technical sergeant who was involved in Operation Dominance in Matanog in 2000. His company pinned down by heavy fire, Ben took over from his commanding officer after the latter was shot. He organized the remaining men during their withdrawal, rescuing several of the fallen while fighting off the enemy. The excerpt I quoted above came from Ben's narrative.

The second story is that of Raf, a staff sergeant whose team fell into an ambush while in pursuit operations in Monkayo in 2006. Raf narrowly escaped death when the land mine he fell on failed to explode. He took leadership of the surviving teams, and they fended off the enemy. However, it was another seven hours before reinforcement arrived to extract the wounded and dying.

Ben and Raf rated highly in the stress index, carrying the burden of the trauma and reliving the scenes over several years. They became part of Ilagan's therapy group. These sessions, built around *torya-torya* (literally, storytelling), were conducted in late 2009 with four other volunteer soldiers.

I don't know if Ilagan intended it as such, but the progress of the therapy sessions formed a complete story in itself. Ben and Raf's stories are interwoven into the narrative of the sessions; the sessions themselves act as a framing device with which the two stories unfold. Now and then, the volunteers chime in with their own experiences, which enrich our understanding of the mindset of the soldiers.

All the while, the narrative persona in this story — Ilagan herself, presumably — attempts to maintain clinical distance. After the soldiers' first-person accounts, the persona provides context and dissects the situation with analysis drawing from the established literature on psychotherapy. I say "attempts" because, despite the care with which the persona chooses the language, I cannot help but sense a permeation

of the boundaries. It seems to me that within the narrator herself runs the thread of some inner conflict: On the one hand, the desire to remain professionally objective, and on the other, the effect that the interaction with these men have on her at a deeper personal level.

My suspicions to this end were confirmed when I reached the concluding chapter of the book. Ilagan admits:

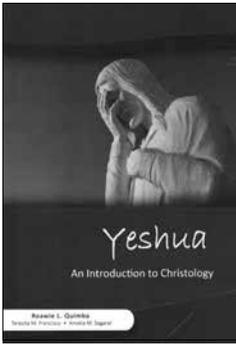
As a practicing psychologist, I would like to think that I have a higher tolerance for all manner of responses to various situations that people choose. I had no pretensions of being the expert to soldierly experiences, but I also thought I knew what there was to know about what soldiers go through. But I was wrong. During the first session so, I got the shock of my life when Jam started talking about head counts. The image of heads rolling on the table popped into my mind and stayed there for some uncomfortable time. I came away from the first session not knowing if I'd have the guts to come back for second helpings of borrowed trauma.

With my objectivity compromised, my mentor Dr. Orange Lozada took over for the next two sessions until I could regain my balance and see the pilot run to its conclusion.

From the framework, the structure, and the language of the book, I surmise that Ilagan originally embarked on this project mainly as a clinical undertaking — certainly with the sincere desire to improve the plight of soldiers, no doubt about that, but nonetheless with the view toward achieving a professional end. Many parts of the book in fact read like an academic paper. At the end Ilagan puts forth some very sound proposals that the Philippine Army might adopt. As a layman, though, I find these to be the weakest parts. Ilagan does not enlighten us what the Mississippi Scale or DRS-15 are, though they appear frequently throughout the text. It is during these parts where I feel most distant as a reader.

Despite the flaws, I believe that this approach contributes to the overall strength of the book. The subtle tension between the personal and the professional in what should have been a purely objective narrative persona serves to highlight how deeply affecting the soldiers' stories really are. In showing restraint, the narrative persona serves to highlight the soldiers' stories by way of contrast.

In this respect, *War wounded* is truly unique. Not only does it break new ground that other writers have forgotten or ignored, but it takes a culture that is so utterly Other and gives it a human face that we can begin to relate to.



Quimba, Roawie L., Teresita M. Francisco and Amelia M. Sagalar. 2010. *Yeshua: An introduction to Christology*. Davao City: MS Lopez Printing & Publishing. ISBN 978-971-93578-8-9. 161 pages.

In his message before World Youth Day in Sydney in 2009, the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI insightfully described youth as a time of many important questions. Young people, confronted not only with the future and its many possibilities but also the present with its many problems and obstacles, find themselves seriously asking about the meaning of life, about what will bring them happiness, about the choices one needs to make to find a future of hope. In a world that offers many ultimately unfulfilling answers to these questions, the Church wishes to share the gift of Jesus Christ, who alone brings fullness of meaning and life. The Holy Father addresses the young people of the world with these direct words: “Jesus also wants to encounter each one of you, my dear young people. Indeed, even before we desire it, such an encounter is ardently desired by Jesus Christ.”

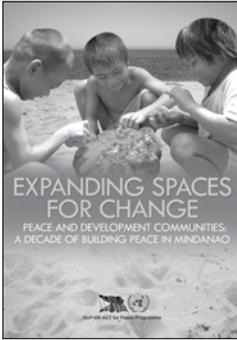
I think the value of this little book, *Yeshua*, is precisely that it seeks to be an instrument of this encounter between young people and the Christ who longs to meet them. Modestly subtitled “An introduction to Christology,” the book does not claim to be a comprehensive Christological treatise. Rather, it is a textbook with a very definite aim. It summarizes in a helpful form the fruit of sound contemporary historical research into Jesus and to experience His “reality” as described in the Gospels: The times He lived in; the consoling and challenging message He preached; the deeds of power and compassion

He performed; the way He died or was killed; and the ways in which His rising from the dead has changed everything. Hopefully, in the process of reading and studying this book, students catch a glimpse of the beauty of Jesus, the sheer attractiveness of His person and His way, and realize that He is not a dead historical figure of the past, but the Living One, the Son of God who continues to call and offer fullness of life to all.

I wish to offer a personal word of congratulations to Roawie L. Quimba and his co-authors for their good and valuable work. I pray that this textbook will be used by creative and committed teachers who, fully aware that our young people are being “sold” so many “dreams” by our contemporary world, will be able to present Jesus in an inspiring and life-transforming way, for the truest happiness of our youth, for the sake of the service our young people can give to our country and world, and for the greater glory of God.

- Fr. Danny Huang, S.J.

BOOK NOTES



Andot, Diosita T. 2010. *Expanding spaces for change - Peace and development communities: A decade of building peace in Mindanao*. Davao City: GoP-UN ACT for Peace Programme. ISBN 978-971-94632-1-4. 67 Pages.

The quest for sustainable peace and development lies in empowered citizens and communities that value justice, assert their rights, and take collective action for the common good. Attaining peace and development though continues to be a challenge, especially in Mindanao where human security is threatened by a fragile peace.

The Government of the Philippines and the United Nations saw the opportunity for moving peace in Southern Philippines brought about by the signing of the Final Peace Agreement between the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Government in 1996 through the implementation of the Multi-Donor Programme in 1997.

This partnership led to the evolution of a grassroots peacebuilding model drawn from the context and nuances of conflict-affected communities in Mindanao. Its implementation since 1997 has opened the framework to finetuning anchored on reflective peacebuilding practices by the ACT for Peace Programme. This evolved the Peace and Development Community (PDC) framework from a purely

humanitarian response to a peacebuilding approach in transforming conflict-affected communities.

This document is a product of over a decade implementation of a humanitarian, rehabilitation, and peacebuilding program in conflict-affected, conflict-vulnerable, and postconflict areas. It is a collection of valuable experiences, lessons, and good practices, including challenges in grassroots peacebuilding from the accounts of the Peace and Development Advocates, local governments, and other key actors to peace and development in the PDCs. It provides practical, context-specific, and adaptable approaches that can spell a difference in transforming communities in conflict situations.

It is hoped that the rich experience of the ACT for Peace Programme in grassroots peacebuilding and its PDC framework embodied in this book *Expanding spaces for change: Peace and development communities: A decade of building peace in Mindanao* will serve as an effective guide among actors and institutions that implement peace and development programs in Mindanao.

- **Jesus G. Dureza**



Salita, Rey T. 2009. *Under a jealous sky: Saga of the Aetas of the Philippines*. Quezon City: Central Book Supply Inc. ISBN 978-971-971-691-957-8. 379 pages.

The Aeta (*kulot*) culture, I believe, works like a sponge that takes in little bits of different cultures surrounding their communities that some fragments of the ancient Tagalog, Kapampangan, and Sambal cultures of Central Luzon can still be seen in the everyday lives. They adapt whatever they find useful and keep such community practices as their own until their usefulness serve its purpose. The Negrito pygmies, however, are very selective about this, and it would be a folly to introduce something to force them to integrate such culture in their everyday living. This is one hard lesson the Philippine government has learned in introducing community programs to the Aetas, thinking that any community-based program will work similarly as with the other ethnic groups (*unats*) in the country. Regrettably, such thinking costs both the government and the Aeta people, clearly resulting in lost hopes and broken lives.

Their language is almost gone and may well be clinically dead, except for only a few words here and there and for some fancy counting system. Their religion that almost always changes, adapting to whatever branch of Christianity or Islam that they embrace in search of a more suitable channel for the Aetan faith, shows the constant need of the Aetas for freedom. On an onset of a sense of confinement, they move on, to their judgment, to better pastures. It's a lifestyle (nomadic even in thinking) etched in the Aeta psyche for hundreds or thousands of years. Traditional? Anything that would suit the present

situation and the situations after that, the Aetas will hold onto, as long as there is a purpose to it or until a better one comes along.

But in the very lives they live, they know they are the keepers of the Watch. This is something they understand very well, a fact lost in most people. And so is balance the Aetas keep with a staunch heart — the ultimately delicate equilibrium in Life, in Nature, and in the Universe.

Being the aborigines of the archipelago with their first settlement dated more than 30,000 years ago, the Aeta culture undoubtedly has undeniable contribution in enriching the multitude of cultures in the region. This project is an attempt to somehow peek into the lives of the Aeta people.

- **Rey T. Salita**



Amorado, Ronnie V. Forthcoming. *Kakistocracy: Betrayal of public trust*. Davao City: ADDU Research and Publications Office.

Entrenched, systemic corruption poses challenges that citizens of more fortunate societies often do not understand. Where accountability, governance institutions, and ethical frameworks are strong, corruption is the exception — not the rule. Usually it consists of discrete, clearly transgressive actions for which legal and political recourse is readily at hand. A bureaucrat who accepts a bribe, or an elected official who abuses the powers of office in order to extract campaign contributions or personal gifts, breaks clear rules. While some dealings will go undetected, over time there is a significant probability of investigation, prosecution, and punishment for the guilty. Even where the activities in question do not so much break the law as exceed the limits of fair play — think campaign contributions that are too large, excessive patronage practices, or price-fixing among business cronies — a variety of public agencies and professional/trade associations set up to maintain open and equitable political and market processes can quickly impose a variety of sanctions. Backing it all up is a citizenry that expects fair play and accountability, and can demand action when things go wrong, as well as an elite culture in which rules and accountability are accepted facts of life. To be sure, even the best-governed societies fall short of these ideals from time to time; still, corrupt figures and abusers of power know they are taking significant risks, while citizens and honest business people have alternatives to corrupt ways of getting things done.

Not so, however, in systemically corrupt societies. There the abuse of power is the norm, rules are vague or poorly enforced, and citizens can do little to demand punishment or reward accountability. In a *Kakistocracy* — a government by the worst — reporting abuses of power to authorities may amount to little more than informing one corrupt official about their rivals' gains and techniques. Where elections are commonplace promises of reform are the rule, yet little seems to change; indeed, campaigns and voting create new corruption in their own right. Courageous judges and journalists must fight a broader system in which bribery, intimidation, and violence protect the powerful and silence dissenters. Grassroots leaders seeking to mobilize their neighbors encounter resignation and distrust, often as understandable responses to deprivation and exploitation in everyday life. Many citizens will have little choice but to deal with venal and dishonest officials, and to do so from a position of vulnerability and weakness, while those involved in corrupt dealings all too frequently come to believe in their own impunity.

No place fits the latter description perfectly; corruption reflects a wide range of local influences everywhere it occurs. Still, because of its immense potential as well as its long-term governance problems, there is no better place than the Republic of the Philippines to begin to understand those contrasting realities. A strategic country and its large, energetic population have been very poorly served by its government over the decades. Deep poverty and the waste of human potential are distressing realities in a society that by all rights ought to be one of the leaders of its region. In this book — a worthy successor to his well-known *Fixing society* — Amorado not only gives us the broad outlines of corruption and its consequences in Philippine society, but also develops a detailed understanding of the specific varieties of corrupt situations, individuals, and techniques that confront would-be reformers. His discussion shows us just how entrenched and complex corruption problems have become, and why they are not the sorts of clear exceptions to the norm that they might be in some other places. We also get a clear picture of why past efforts at reform have had indifferent results, and why the common view that corruption can be “tackled” or “fixed” with sufficient effort and good intentions overlooks persistent historical, institutional, and systemic difficulties. At the same time, Ronnie Amorado develops positive ideas and proposals — none of them simple or easy, but all rooted

in the complicated realities of wealth, power, and corruption in the Philippines — that should be the subject of serious analysis and debate.

Every society on earth has corruption. No country has all the answers when it comes to good governance and reform. It is crucial to remember that corruption does not explain everything that is bad in any society. No more does it negate all that is good. There are, at the moment, reasons for hope and optimism in the Philippines — a country, after all, whose corruption realities have much in common with those of many other emerging societies. For that reason the efforts of a new administration, and the opportunities that may emerge for Filipinos themselves to step up their demands for better government, will be closely watched around the world. Those of us who care about those efforts, and who are looking for ways to support committed officials, businesspeople, and citizens as they continue their push for reform, will all benefit from a close and thoughtful reading of Amorado's work.

- **Michael Johnston**

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SPECIAL ISSUE on WOMEN and the MINDANAO CONFLICT

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