

**REFLECTIONS ON THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED
PEACE ACCORD AMONG THE BANWAONS
OF AGUSAN DEL SUR**

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This is a report on recent engagements in peace process and in co-designing an organic indigenous leadership programme. I would like to share with you my insights on (1) the vivid realities that I witnessed on the ground particularly on the thought and practice of an indigenous justice system, (2) on peace building and the tribe's aspirations for security and general well-being, and (3) the inspiration from the latent potentials of indigenous leadership—from their being ancestral domain land managers, to great mediators and arbitrators of conflicts, to communicators with the unseen, and to seers of the future appealing to save the environment, our Mother Earth, in the context of their ancestral domains. There is a strong message conveyed by the tribe's *baylans* (spiritual leaders) calling on humanity towards stopping war and bloodshed and for healing and forgiveness to take place.

***Keywords:** Indigenous conflict resolution, community-initiated peace process, social justice, indigenous justice system, anthropology of peace.*

The war in Agusan

The current peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People's Army and the National Democratic Front (CNN) on one hand, and with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front on the other hand, have taken the national spotlight. From time to time, social weather surveys tend to remind the peace panel on both sides to consider whether the terms they are trying to level off are practical, relevant and carry more humanitarian and innovative solutions to settle it. Since such negotiated solutions to a conflict have national (and even local and global) significance, the least to expect is that the desired peace

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accords are morally acceptable and socially sound to be upheld by political authorities who can be held accountable for its merits as well as unforeseen or unpleasant scenarios.

However, beyond the 'main event' in the peace process, this account is about one of the least known tribes in Agusan that was/is trapped in a war, but dared to dream to make conflict resolution and forgiveness an everyday reality. It is hoped that this paper can provide new insights in looking at conflicts, their history, and the culture that influences human behavior, particularly in the attainment of reconciliation and peace, and how local peace building initiatives benefit the greater humanity by mitigating the increasing societal conflicts besetting our world.

There is a strong link between state-centric peace negotiations and community-centric peace building initiatives. On the one hand, there's the explicit part. We can examine the acts of leaders who assume responsibility to resolve the conflict, his/her social and cultural capital and extent of guts to absorb damages, the social climate or perception indicating the readiness of parties to 'end a war,' and the degree of direct participation of the most affected and vulnerable stakeholders. On the other hand, there are also hidden dimensions to it; the essence, the precepts, and timeliness that compel and bring out the inspiration and courage to engage in a 'peace pact.' Failure to see these processes will break the thin line of hope that the communities hold on to as they exert their best efforts to secure their lives and to keep their human dignity intact.

For over two decades, militarization and insurgency have been constraining the peace and order situation in the indigenous peoples communities in northeastern Mindanao, particularly in the Agusan and Surigao provinces. A microcosm of this kind of internal conflict is still brewing despite local tribal peace initiatives. There is deep interconnection between the discord among the tribes and the clash between the Government armed forces and the New People's Army.

The Banwaons

In the heart of Agusan Del Sur there exist Banwaon communities particularly along the Maasam River. The name of the tribe was taken from the word *banuwahan* meaning 'community', or *Banuwaon* – 'people of the community'. They are closely related to the Talaandig and Higaunon, the lumad peoples in Lanao Del Norte, Misamis Oriental, Bukidnon and Agusan Del Sur. The territory is bounded in the East by the Agusan River, the traditional boundary with the Agusanon Manobo; in the West, by Pantadon Ranges in Bukidnon bordering the Talaandig and Matigsalug Manobo; in the

North, by Libang River in Esperanza, the traditional boundary of the Banwaon with the Higaunon; and in the South by the Umadjam River from Bukidnon, the natural boundary with the Agusanon, Wawaanon, and Umajamnon Manobo (Brief Information on the Banuwaon Lumad of San Luis, Agusan del Sur, 2011).

There is no accurate figure on the Banwaon population except for an old estimate by the National Council of Churches in its Ethnographic Map (1983), which recorded them at 33,000. According to a SILDAP-SIDLAKAN study, the Banwaons are descendants of Apo Saya-saya, a famous *bagani* ('warrior') that fought against the Spaniards during the colonization period (1996:5). Apo Saya-saya's predecessors of four generations way back are linked to Minbaoo, although his story could not be talked about by ordinary mortals.

Banwaon's great ancestor Apo Saya-saya, together with his brothers Manpatagan and Mansiliohan and their families, moved from Tagoloan of Cagayan de Oro which is about 200 kilometers away. Apo Saya-saya and Manpatagan chose to remain in the upper part of Maasam River while Mansiliohan settled farther away in Adgawan. When the Spaniards went up to the interiors of Misamis and Agusan, Apo Saya-saya and his two brothers led most of the resistance against the foreign invaders. These three warrior brothers were known throughout the territory for their fearless spirit in protecting their clans and communities from foreign intrusion (SILDAP-SIDLAKAN 1996).

One of the sons of Apo Saya-saya is Manlihok who is the father of Manlag-udan who became a *tumoay* ('*pangulo*' or 'headman') who lives in Manlahing, now a sitio of Mahagsay. Manlag-udan sired five children, namely: Manpidawon, Manbalanse, Mansidukan, Adorno and Mansiliohan. Meanwhile the other brother Manpatagan also had a son Napongahan who settled peacefully in Kandiisan, in the upper interiors of Maasam. When World War II broke out, of the three brothers only Manpatagan survived.

The present Banwaon communities are divided in two districts: Side 1 and Side 2¹. However, these communities are strategically spread in several major river systems. The conduct of special a community celebration like *Panalogsabit* ('thanksgiving for harvest') enables the Banwaon of distant places to have brief yet festive reunions.

¹ "Side 1" and "Side 2" comprise local referencing of the divided Banwaon Territory in Agusan del Sur. A 'side' clusters several barangays and is not bound by government district boundaries.

In San Luis municipality, the Banwaons are distributed in five riverine communities along Maasam: Nuevo Trabajo, Balit, Policarpo, Sta. Rita and Mahagsay. These five barangays form part of Side 1 of the Banwaon territory under the leadership of Datu Mandagsangan and a council of *odangs* ('elders'). Part of Side 1 extends up to Libang and Hawilihan Rivers close to Esperanza municipality.

The Side 2 part of Banwaon territory covers Binikalan and communities including parts of Laminga and Adgawan Rivers towards La Paz municipality. It is managed by Datu Mambiyahe Benhur Mansolonay, who is Katangkawan's nephew and leads a strong force of *bagani* warriors who are members of the paramilitary Civilian Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU).

The Banwaons are relatively isolated; their communities are largely inaccessible. To get to San Luis from Butuan City, there are double-tire jeepneys that ply the route to and from the town proper at least 3-4 times a day. A trip takes about 4-6 hours. In Kalilid or the Poblacion, there are *habal-habal* "skylab" or 'winged' single motorcycles which can be hired at the exorbitant cost of ₱2,000 to get to Barangay Mahagsay (known as "KM 36"), the center of Banwaon community, which is surrounded by forest landscapes. One may also reach the area via Agusan and Maasam Rivers using a motorized wooden boat – a long and slim outboard, but strong enough to navigate against the cascading high waters of Maasam River.

The Banwaons subsist on corn and rootcrops and maintain their small farms along the Maasam River. They proudly inhabit the last remaining forest blocks of Agusan in Caraga region. Years ago they were active in preserving their forests against logging companies while living independently and actively practicing their culture. They are known to their closest allies among the Manobos and Higaonons. The Higaonons from Libang had a history of serious bloody conflicts with the Banwaons.

Only a few studies had been made on the Banwaon. Anthropologists like John Garvan (1929) first mentioned the existence of the "Banuaon" in his book *The Manobos of Mindanao* which expounded on the name of the tribe as having come from the word *banua*, meaning 'organized village' or 'country' found in the Maasam and Adgawan Rivers. Fifty years later, Samuel Briones (1979) in his study on the "Socio-economic and Religious Institutions of the Talaandigs in the Rainforest in Bukidnon and Agusan Del Sur," also made reference to the Banwaon as descendants of Palagsulat, one of the three great beings in ancient times. As cited in the SILDAP study (1996), contemporary anthropologists like MC Barrameda; Ponciano Bennagen; Sr. Lucero Natividad, RGS; Augusto Gatmaytan; and Erlinda

Burton, at different periods in the last 25 years, had immersed and interacted with the Banwaon either as a mentor on basic skills in research, an ally for their ancestral domain claims, or for specialized cultural studies.

Memories of the *tampuda* ('peace pact')

My acquaintance with the Banwaons started in 1985 when I left my hometown in Cebu City to find some work in Mindanao where my anthropological background would be useful. My invitation came from an NGO called Mindanao Tribal Resource Center (MINTREC), which was managed by a nun from the Religious of the Good Shepherd. MINTREC took me in as its exposurist and later offered me a job as Research Coordinator after I survived my lumad/tribal community integration with the Subanens of Midsalip, Zamboanga Del Sur and with the Banwaons and Manobo in Agusan Del Sur.

I first saw Datu Mandagsangan Mario Napungahan in early November 1985. I was told to observe him, him being *Katangkawan*, the Banwaon's 'Supreme Chieftain'. In 1980, Katangkawan's ailing father, Datu Suminibug Napungahan, had named his son to be his successor. The elder Napungahan's last word to his son was 'to preserve their forests no matter what.' However, due to the tremendous responsibilities of being a Supreme Chieftain, Katangkawan and his wife Bae Edna declined. At that time, their communities were experiencing the peak of their problems—massive militarization, the persistence of the *kalaanan ha lidu* or 'old tribal feud' with the Higaonons from Libang, and logging companies had already encroached and destroyed their forests (Brief Info on the Banwan 2011:1). In October 1984, one big *dumalongdong* ('gathering of datus/chieftains') was held to formally institute Katangkawan's position, thus earning for him the respect of Agusan-Surigao leaders. Napungahan's heir was bequeathed the new title "Datu Mandagsangan," which means 'heavy downpour', as it rained hard the moment he was declared in his *pagdang'ul* ('ceremonial investiture') as the Katangkawan of the Banuwaon people (Brief Info on the Banwao 2011:2).

Datu Mandagsangan was one of the officiating ritualists of the *Lumadnong Bugkot sa Surigao ug Agusan* (Lubasan), a coalition of Caraga tribes that include the Manobo, Mamanua, Talaandig, Higaonon and Banwaon. Its main objective is to organize the tribe against development aggression (logging and mining) and acculturation, and to preserve their indigenous identity.

The datus in the Lubasan assembly gathered in a circle and performed a rite meant to bless and strengthen their region-wide Lumad organization. It was my first time to see excellent performers dancing "*binaylan*" or

“*inagong*” beats although I found out later that those who danced were ritualists in their trance states. It was hard to believe these dancers were under the influence of nature spirits invoked in the ritual since their movements were so graceful, flowing naturally according to the rhythmic beatings of the *agong* (brass gongs). The Manobo and the Banwaon also displayed their *dasang* (‘fast chanted recitation’). It was an awesome spectacle to be witness to for someone who had just graduated with a degree in Anthropology. I had a feeling of ‘anthro books coming alive.’ “This is it!”, was my silent exaltation for I had just had my great reward for braving to come to Mindanao at a time when resistance to the Marcos dictatorial regime had reached its peak and student activists then were like endangered species.

My initial volunteer work in MINTREC exposed me to the life and struggle of the five tribes of Caraga who were already then resisting logging companies eyeing the tribe’s thick forest domains. The RGS sisters were our guarantor-ambassadors thanks to their Tribal Filipino Mission Center (the *Convento*) located in Kalilid which assured safety for NGO staff and visitors when they would visit. Moreover, Diocesan priests of the Tribal Filipino Apostolate also joined us in their fieldwork as they were also implementing their TF (or tribal Filipino)/lumad programs.

A month later, I was included in the NGO delegation (made up of SILDAP-SIDLAKAN (*Silingang Dapit sa Sidlakang Mindanao*), TFA (Tribal Filipino Apostolate based in Sacred Heart Convent, Butuan City) and MINTREC staff. We were bound for Katangkawan’s community in Mahagsay to be with the Banwaons for immersion and especially to witness their *tampuda* (‘peace pact’) with their adversaries, the Higaonons from Libang. Holding a *tampuda* had been jointly agreed upon by both tribes to end almost three decades of tribal feud that had cost many lives on both sides. We had been warned that attending a *tampuda* was risky because if it ‘fails’ (e.g. the rattan pole meant to be cut would not yield to the blade) tribal war would immediately resume, and if we happen to be on the Banwaon side, we—NGOs, nuns, visitors—would not be spared from harm. No amount of admonition could stop us from attending this once in a lifetime event. However, we the young NGO workers made sure that we stayed close to Katangkawan’s side in case untoward incidents might happen, as we knew his *bagani* warriors would also protect us.

I remember the high spirits of that day as the tribespeople were preparing for the *tampuda*. Rather than a climate of fear and restlessness, the energy was like restrained anticipation or contained excitement, perhaps to hold back people’s feelings and to maintain the solemnity of that day. Security

measures were discussed during the peace dialogue. Katangkawan, though looking young for his position, was always unassuming, reserved, and gentle in his ways. He was well-guarded by long-haired and armed bagani warriors who maintained distance from him but were always keen in watching his movements.

Since we had walked for almost ten hours to reach Mahagsay from Balit, we were exhausted. We were glad to be accommodated in Katangkawan's residence. On the day of the *tampuda*, we woke up early. We were famished, and we ate a hearty breakfast of steamed upland rice and dried fish. By nine o' clock, we went to a neutral spot that had been agreed upon for the meeting, which was along Maasam River. Together with Katangkawan, the Banwaon delegation and NGO support groups were waiting for the representatives of the Higaonons to arrive. Shortly, we saw two armed men carrying M-14 armalites emerging from the other side of the hill which was covered with woods and tall shrubs. The Higaonons had arrived. The Banwaon *baganis* clutched their swords tucked in their waistline.

We were surprised to hear tinkling sounds of small bells. The armed Higaonons took a few steps then made way for an elderly woman in white adorned blouse and dark, long tube skirt wrapped around her waistline held by a belt with tiny bells attached to it. Walking like a queen, this *bae* was simply glamorous, wearing layers of beaded necklaces, and earrings and bracelets made of brass. Bae Salima, as we later knew her name, briskly walked down the trail heading towards us. The presence of the *bae* heralded a change in the scenario that was about to unfold before our eyes.

Upon seeing the *Bae* (woman leader), the Banwaon *baganis* locked their bladed weapons, while those with rifles slowly pointed the barrels down. Datu Mandagsangan smiled and acknowledged the surprise guest and he ushered her inside their *tulugan* (tribal hall). The rest of us followed and settled ourselves in a circle. Datu Mandagsangan offered Bae Salima a betel nut as courtesy, which the *bae* accepted. The elegant-looking *bae* opened her small shoulder bag and got a brass kit with lime and pounded it then sandwiched the softened white powder in the sliced betel fruit and chewed it up. As all leaders were already chewing the betel Bae Salima looked around to see the faces of those gathered around. The conversations were contrite and polite. Bae Salima frankly conveyed her message that there will be no *tampuda* today given that a member of the tribe had recently died. For the Higanons, if someone dies, strict observance for mourning includes a week of silence and inactivity. To commiserate with the families of the bereaved, everyone is required to stay put and to suspend their usual undertakings or

journeys. Consequently, a major act like *tampuda* could not be held properly.

I was witness to mutual courtesies between two adversaries. Their exchanges and light gestures were hard to believe since we knew that the two were leaders of tribes that were trying to settle blood debts amongst themselves. Remarkably, it was hard to see traces of enmity or treachery in their actions.

After their conversations, Datu Mandagsangan performed a ritual, killing three chickens while his guest and all of us observed in silence. The chicken intestines were examined for some ominous signs and its blood poured on a china plate. Mandagsangan and his wife Edna used this to put a cross mark on the soles of everyone in the *tulugan*. Blessed Mallorca white wine was poured into a glass which went around for each participant to take a sip. I took my first sip thinking that refusing it might exclude me from any rites in the village. I was determined to see more of their culture and learn its deep meanings. As the chickens were cooked, a *panampulot* ('communion') ritual followed and everyone was enjoined to partake of the offering. Lunch was served with chicken soup, some sardines, delicious upland rice, and boiled camote. After Bae Salima finished her food, she thanked the Banwaon hosts and stood up to leave. Katangkawan and Bae Edna (and all of us still following behind) also thanked her as they bade farewell; she was ushered back to the spot where her bodyguards waited.

With the aborted *tampuda*, sporadic killings in Maasam attributed to the attacks by Higaonons from Libang side still happened. This prompted other Banwaon leaders to conduct another bid for reconciliation based on their traditions. In 1988, three Banwaon datos named Sulundanon, Manlumibay and Mansaulog reached out to do a *tampuda* with the Higaonons. However, news reports made it appear that these three datos surrendered to the Higaonon Lavi Manpatilan ('News on Banwaon Fake Surrenderers' 1988:14). Consequently, any discussion on holding a *tampuda* was frowned upon. It was only seven years later that another initiative came, this time from a grand elder of the Higaonons.

In 1995, in lieu of a *tampuda*, a *begula* ('renewal of ties') was initiated by the Higaonon Deo Manpatilan and Banwaon Datu Mandumaguig, an *odang* or highly revered tribal elder, backed by Datu Mandagsangan, who was specially requested to be present by the great elder of the Higaonons who came for the occasion to meet him, for he knew his father Datu Napungahan. The Higaonons expressed interest to end their conflict with the Banwaons with no other than Deo Manpatilan facilitating it to happen. A friend working in SILDAP relayed that in the *begula*, "the revered *odangs* of

each party lay their blessings while they also utter a curse should anyone violate the renewed ties among the two neighboring tribes.” To make the *begula* more effective, I learned later that one of Mandagsangan’s daughters was asked to marry a Higaonon.

Experiencing logging and militarization in the ‘80s

The economy of the province of Agusan relies on the logging industry. Since the day I first stepped into Butuan City and explored its interior lumad areas, the trading of falcatta and hardwood (mostly mixed and hidden items) has been a business, be it discreetly or overtly. It’s uncertain if all transactions are legal given the tedious process of getting a permit from the Community Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO) as the Banwaons of Binikalan themselves have experienced— since June 2011, the Banwaons have planned to dispose of the almost overdue and harvestable falcatta planted inside their ancestral domain (and for which they now hold a CADT or Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title). These falcatta have already encroached on their *kagulangan* or ‘old growth’ natural forests. The CENRO imposed one requirement after another, its uncooperative stance pushing the tribe’s application to a dead end.

In the mid ‘80s, many logging companies operated inside Banwaon territories and eventually destroyed almost 40% percent of its forestlands. The logging firms had Timber License Agreements. A decade later these were repackaged into Integrated Forest Management Agreements (IFMA) executed with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources under Administrative Order No. 42 (s. 1991). This order allows private companies to maintain large areas of forests managed as industrial tree plantations. The grant of IFMA inevitably gave the logging companies the license to cut natural species before they can operate their IFMA. This corporate practice made the Banwaons furious, as their forests have been transacted with outsiders who had no idea that what they’re doing would have direct implications on the tribe’s life and welfare.

The logging companies include the Philippine Packing Corporation which created logging roads that paved the way for more logging concessionaires to follow suit. In Side 1, other logging companies operating in Banwaon territory were: the Woodland Domain Inc. (WDI), the Provident Tree Farms, and Jose C. Aquino (JCA) Lumber and Plywood Industries. In the Laminga and Adgawan part of Side 2, the firms include: Royal Match Inc., and Casilayan Softwood Development Corporation. The Liberty Forest Inc. operated in Libang side.

With nil choices, in 1986, Katangkawan with his *alimaongs* ('warriors') affiliated with the rebels to seek NPA support in defending their forest resources from exploitation by the logging companies that took away their *lauan*, *balete* and *bay-ang* trees. Hundreds of other IPs aside from the Banwaons' own *bagani* and *alimaong* warriors, were recruited and trained by the NPA as rebel combatants.

In most cases the logging companies were brokered by the local politicians and capitalists whose enterprises provide support services to these ventures. With logging compounds built inside the Lumad territory, waste like crude oil and gasoline were also dumped, affecting their water sources, and killing fishes and eels in the rivers and creeks which they relied on for food. The establishment of logging roads hit some of their sacred places including burial grounds. As the logging operations continued, the Banwaons observed that their food supply in the forests had dwindled, even the wild pigs had no more place in the forests where they may roam for food, thus these animals started to attack their farmlots (SILDAP News Desk Service 1996).

The newly installed Katangkawan (since 1983) led the Banwaon resistance against the logging companies WDI and JCA that had ravaged the resources in their ancestral domain. The fight was the new kind of war that Banwaons waged for their survival.

The Banwaons' membership in the communist-led NPA made them prime targets of the AFP and its counterinsurgency campaigns. The Corazon Aquino government's total-war policy had no idea that the Banwaon rebels being subjected to airstrikes, food blockades and militarization had no intention to seize government authority. Although they were famous as members of the *Pulang Bagani* Unit of the NPA, the Banwaon warriors were forced to fight the military mainly because they associated the government and military as allies of logging interests.

Moreover, the tribe's experiences reinforced their perception to be true since militarization, though aimed at crushing the insurgency, had also displaced them almost totally from their forest territories.

In 1995-1996, I participated in the SILDAP-SIDLAKAN NGO research on the Banwaons upon the request also of Katangkawan to produce a document that would attest to their existence. We were conducting our key informant interviews and focused group discussions inside thick forests cognizant that some distance away, bombings of Banwaon communities had been launched to destroy the NPA mass base. During those times, it was hard to imagine that a government popularly installed by people power and

supported by the Church had a hand in such massive destruction. Ironically, these incidents were untold in the news headlines.

The war in the countryside had a great impact on the simple family and community life of the Banwaons. The people's means of living like farming, hunting, harvesting rattan in the forests, and fishing in their rivers were constrained as anyone who went far away from the clan might be ambushed and killed in case fighting between the NPA and the military broke out.

The *Panalogsabit* were no longer performed for reasons of fear and poor harvests. Only two harvest celebrations were held, in 1991 and 1995. Likewise, it took 13 years for a *dumalongdong* ('assembly of datus to confer new ones') to take place, in February 1996 (SILDAP-SIDLAKAN 1996:8). Even simple celebrations became impossible to hold.

Bereft of means to support the schooling of their children, Banwaon parents learned to cut down timber and sell these in retail to the logging firms for instant cash.

The biggest test happened in 1995 when nature's wrath affected not only the Banwaon communities in the uplands but also the entire San Luis Poblacion. The Maasam River rose and flooded all places it could reach destroying farms and houses. We were in the RGS Mission Center in Kalilid at that time collating our research data when strong rains fell and caused the biggest flashflood so far. It was fortunate that the convent was highly elevated thus it was not reached by the flood, but elsewhere in town, all residences were submerged up to their rooftops.

In 2000, changes in governance and national policy in addition to certain incidents led Katangkawan to withdraw his support from the NPA. Foremost in his mind was to pursue a peaceful way, in particular the recognition of their rights to their ancestral domain under the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997. Katangkawan's option is contrary to the Banwaons previous stance decades ago when they used to be detached from government processes, and correcting old impressions that only 'fake datus' were being recognized by authorities.

Since the Banwaons, together with the 18 tribes of Lumad Mindanao, have remained connected in their network of dialogues and solidarity, they sought to understand where they are in the greater scheme of things. Their own problematique, analysis, and experiences brought forth new realizations and courage to break their association with the things that have impaired their goals of restoring unity, peace and harmony in their communities; they were determined not to give up their right to self-determination, cultural integrity and identity, as these are vital elements in ensuring their collective

well-being. Waging war under a new government administration which has opened new doors for reconciliation seems illogical.

Katangkawan and his supportive elders and leaders who had once allied with rebel forces realized that no matter who or what they associated themselves with, they still possess unique indigenous ways of depicting their community life. They still have mechanisms for justice, of redressing grievances, and that in the absence of war, they can provide for their people's food security and survival. More than any political cadre, they want to educate their young ones with the peaceful ways of their ancestors, guided by their *keala batasan* ('Code of Conduct').

Katangkawan's withdrawal prompted his *bagani* warriors to follow suit. The insurgency in the hinterlands has become less popular with the masses. Rebel factions have imposed "progressive taxations" including on logging and mining companies. The revolutionary tax, in the eyes of the tribes, is one form of alternative source of income which the rebels need to survive.

Meanwhile, the Government's reintegration program allows former IP rebels who have 'returned to the fold of the law' to enlist as members of the CAFGU. Since these tribal dissenters have embraced a new loyalty – to the State and its cohorts, their leaders, like Katangkawan, always hit the top in the guerillas' order of battle. With no alternatives, IP chieftains had to concede to their new affiliation as CAFGU mainly to hold firearms, which they need in case the NPAs run after them and their families.

On the side of the Government, the CAFGUs who undergo military training are considered to be reserve forces and are actually strong military machinery for counterinsurgency. By arming citizens and positioning them in the countryside, the CAFGUs are State agents in critical areas to contain the NPA influence. In most cases, the CAFGUs are front liners in military operations, and they serve as surveillance agents and counter-forces should battle with the enemy occur.

The cycle of NPA-AFP armed conflicts have made the Banwaon's negotiation for a path towards peace problematical and complex. Currently, as a Lumad leader 'backed by the military', Katangkawan is accused by progressive groups of being a 'traitor' and 'killer', and his CAFGU members as human rights violators. The Supreme Chief cannot but face humiliation and disdain as he is tagged as the brains behind the killings of activists or NPAs, and of harassing not only ordinary citizens but also fellow Banwaons who either are sympathetic to the rebels or not supportive of his ancestral domain claim ('Across Mindanao, Lumad vs. Lumad' 2007).

Brothers, cousins, uncles or distant relatives have been transformed into foes enslaved by the uniform of the enemy (either of the NPA or the AFP). Sometime in 2008, one of my Mandaya friends who came to visit Katangkawan saw the great chieftain in tears— he longed to go home to Mahagsay without fear of being ambushed by his former comrades and to pass by Balit where his other relatives sympathetic to the NPAs can accept him back.

In 2009, I spoke with Bagwis, Katangkawan's son-in-law, a Higaonon, who shared that he had dreamed his *apo* ('grandparent') reminded him 'to prepare for the time to return to their own uniform.' His *bagani* identity is his indigenous identity, which is an esteemed position just like a tribal chieftain. But at that time, as *baganis* and *alimaongs* had been mobilized for an ideological cause outside of cultural norms which originally had the purpose of protecting the tribe from oppressive outside forces.

Coincidentally, the Manobos of Agusan del Sur were also guided by a shaman's admonition. The great Datu Mandagasi conveyed two messages to me in 2005: for the tribe 'to stop the bloodshed (unjustified killings) pouring out on their ancestral domains. Otherwise, peace and prosperity will evade their kind.' The other message was, 'only a sacred ritual of the land can stop the killings among the tribes.' Mandagasi told me these messages when he visited me in Malaybalay City together with Mindanawon staffers while we were conducting a workshop on ancestral domain development planning for the Bukidnon-Daraghuyan. Feeling the gravity and seriousness of the message, I was determined to go back to Agusan and to personally see Mandagsangan and see how he connected with the message.

On New Year's Day of 2009, there I was, back in Maasam and teary-eyed to see the great Datu Mandagsangan and Bae Edna and their very grown-up kids. The datu seemed to have not changed at all. He was still young looking, frail, gentle, impeccable. The biggest consolation I had when I returned back to the city was that, yes, he knew about the sacred ritual of the land that Mandagasi had mentioned to me. However, he said the details cannot be talked about for it was not an ordinary matter.

Fast forward to 2011, cultural rites reunite the Banwaon

Sometime in June 2011, a factsheet from the new Banwaon organization *Tagdumala* was circulated in preparation for a new level of reconciliation initiated by Katangkawan and intended to bring his people back to unity. A portion of this information sheet reads:

It's been 11 years or so since the Katangkawan abandoned the movement to the ire of the NPA Regional Party Committee in Northern Mindanao arranged logging venture with some Butuan City's businessmen targeting the Maasam's untouch forestland under Katangkawan Mandagsangan Mario Napungahan. Upon confirmation of the plan, Napungahan, then the overall chief of the NPA Pulang Bagani Yunit or PBY called on his most trusted alimaong (warrior) kin and hostaged [sic] the men and equipment of the logging venture. He demanded not to forego the plan of logging in Maasam. This action infuriated the NPA against Napungahan. The NPA committee in the region declared for the physical termination of Napungahan and his men. To save their lives and their families, Napungahan submitted himself to the military. But some Banuwaon alimaong and datu remain under NPA control and command. Napungahan's turning back from NPA cost him more than 40 lives of his tribe including his son and younger brother, Joel "Maak" Napungahan who was ambushed by the NPA last October 2010.

While the national government is having its peace negotiation with CPP/NPA/NDF, the Banuwaon find it an opportune time to patch up the difference with their brothers and sisters who are under the control of the NPA. This endeavor for peace started in 10 June 2008 through dialogue with datu and bae who serve the cause of the NPA. This process will be commenced on 05 July 2011 in Balit, San Luis through husay and rituals of peace and reconciliation strengthening the unity of the Banuwaon as "One Territory, One Governance, And One People". The internal conflict to be husay or resolved is called "Sisim ha Lidu" meaning a conflict within the clan. This can be resolved through Binayungbungan customary laws. (Tagdumala 2011).

So, 11 years of conflict among Banuwaon Datus has finally come to an end through a traditional conflict resolution called "*Husay Hu Sisim Ha Lidu*" ('reconciliation', especially among clans). The process was divided into three major parts: (1) *Pamulisong* which symbolizes the act to 'bury the hatchet and free them from bad fortunes because of conflict,' (2) *Talawagan* and *Pamalas* to 'wash and renew life from bad deeds', and (3) *Tumbasa* or traditional exchange of *Begola* or 'peace offerings'.

I was one of the very few who were invited to witness the *Husay hu Sisim hu Lidu* rite that was held on the 5th of July 2011 in Barangay Balit, San Luis. The *Husay Sisim hu Lidu* is a resolution of blood conflict among clan members intended as a closure to grievances and to seek forgiveness from both parties in order to reunite the divided kin. For over a decade, they had been trapped in a deep conflict compounded by the tribe's alliance with the NPAs in order to defend their forests.

The invited guests and witnesses arrived the day before on the 4th of July. A ritual preceded this event that was held in the residence of Datu Mandagsangan on the night that we arrived in San Luis town. Katangkawan's closest Manobo allies from Esperanza represented by Datu Makalipay Eric Rico, one of the sons of Mandagasi, and his two siblings also came to attend. This initial rite was witnessed by tribal allies from Surigao and Misamis representing the Northern Mindanao Coalition of the Banwaons, Higaonons, Manobo and Mamanua, Inc. (NORMINBHI) and invited representatives from the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, and Samdhana Institute.



Figure 1. The Banwaon parties to the resolution of *Lidu*.
Datu Eric Rico (center) listens to both sides' prayers and lamentations.

A divination rite was performed by Mandagsangan, to seek guidance from the spirits of ancestors. A table was set up for the altar with material offerings that included one-peso coins, bronze bracelets, and betel chew placed on top of a white ceramic plate. As the candles were lighted, the Banwaon datu uttered their chants in a *dasang* mode. Two white chickens were offered to release all the bad luck, and their internal organs dissected to

examine if there were signs indicating permission to push through with the main activity.

Acquaintances followed the first part of the ritual while waiting for the *panampulot* ('communion') part. Datu Makalipay explained that this time, he could not afford to decline the invitation of Datu Mandagsangan. He knew there had been several attempts by the Banwaons to conduct the said reconciliation and was glad it's coming to a reality. Observing the candles standing on the table, he remarked that the two candles melting and bending down represented their tribes and culture, which are becoming weaker due to external interventions. So it is their responsibility to help them to stand again, through the initiatives of the leaders uniting their own people so that others would also learn to respect them (Gimena & Canoy 2011).

The *Husay Hu Sisim Ha Lidu*

On the following day, July 5, at exactly 7:30 a.m., the two conflicting parties met at the entrance of Barangay Balit. It was good to see the leaders of Balit led by Datu Manlumibay Badbaran and Datu Batoy Manpadayag, Katangkawan's brother in law seated on the opposite side. This was to perform the first part of the ritual that symbolized their unity and acceptance.

Together with Paring Bert², we came to see Katangkawan in his residence and greeted him "*Maayad ha Masalum*". Katangkawan was already dressed up and smiled towards us. He was very prepared to leave that morning for the resolution of the great *lidu*. We were with Katangkawan's side as we proceeded to the spot where the opening ritual of *Pamulisong* was to be held. As we arrived, we saw the leaders in Balit were already waiting, their faces warm and welcoming. However, as part of decorum, we were instructed to be quiet and solemn. The first part of the ritual was rather risky because any mistakes that might happen here would cost one's life.

Pamulisong. As described by Datu Tagulambong, the first part of the ritual was the *Pamulisung (pugbulisung)*, which literally means 'burying the hatchet'. In this ritual, two small chickens were sacrificed and buried in the ground, covered with broken china plate together with some beads and coins. Before the chickens were killed, the leaders of both sides simultaneously uttered their prayers and lamentation asking for forgiveness by exclaiming their apologies that there were evil spirits that had embroiled their hearts against each other. After the humble exchanges, Katangkawan and Datu

²Fr. Albert Alejo, SJ is an anthropologist and was a consultant to the GPH-CNN peace talks in 2011.

Manlumibay held one chicken each and tossed it around to opposite sides as Mandagsangan gave his blessings to the people of Balit seated in front of them, while Datu Manlumibay and Datu Manpadayag did the same to bless the persons sitting and standing at Katangkawan's side. The performance of *Pamulisung* symbolized that the hatred between the two parties were buried and forgotten. And that whosoever violates it will be broken like the plate or bowl.

After the *Pamulisong*, Katangkawan and Datu Manlumibay, Datu Loay-Loay and Datu Manpadayag met at the center and embraced each other and shook each other's hands, showing a picture of a family that was reunited after more than a decade of being separated and divided. It was obvious to see that they had missed each other much. Seeing the leaders with their friendly gestures, we – the visitors familiar to them – were so elated and tried to hold back tears. We also took our chance to cross to the other side and greet the Banwaons from Balit. There were lots of hugs and embraces as well as shaking of hands. Tears fell among the *Baes* (datus' wives) and also the younger Banwaons who were touched to see their uncles and aunts reunited. Proceeding from this rite, Katangkawan locked elbows with Datus Manlumibay, Loay-Loay and Manpadayag as they walked together to the Barangay plaza for the next ritual. We were all happy and eager to proceed.



Figure 2. The Katangkawan of Km 36, Mahagsay, and his members, extending greetings of friendship and reconciliation with his brother-in-law Datu Manpadayag and uncle Datu Manlumibay of Balit community.

Talawagan and Pamalas. As Datu Tagulambong explained in his advisory note, this second part was a cleansing ritual. It required sacrificing two pigs

tied to a wooden altar offered to the *Talabugta*, the spirit of the *bugta* (or land). The Banuwaons believe that only the land can absorb everything including conflict and hatred. In summoning the *Talabugta*, the two pigs were sacrificed by stabbing with a spear and spilling the blood to the ground. This was to wash away the blood of those who were killed in the conflict. The act sought to cleanse the land and restore its good spirit and that of the forest. 'The forest will bloom again, animals, birds and insects will come alive, rice will grow and bear fruit and the harvest will once again be bountiful for the Banuwaon.'

Katangkawan and his reunited leaders were seated side by side, doing their chantings together. This rite symbolized the start of a new peaceful beginning. The *Talawagan* required doing the *pamalas* or 'washing one's self from bad deeds' by staining either a person's hand or foot with animal blood. Members of Katangkawan's clan stepped on the blood spilled on the ground as they passed by one of the pig offerings.

Indeed, the Banuwaons were moving forward through peaceful ways as their 'blood debts had been cleaned' in community rites, with their contrite hearts presented to each other in peace and to the *Talabugta* to show remorse and to beg for forgiveness.

Tumbasa. While the pigs were removed from the altar for cooking, the third and final rite was to follow inside the *Balay Tigumanan* where everyone was invited to go up. In this closing rite, the parties exchanged their peace offerings in payment for the damages that were incurred during the bloody years since 1990s. A peaceful welcome waited inside the big hut where representatives from the provincial and local government units witnessed the *Begola* part of the reconciliation rite.

As explained by Datu Tagulambong, before going up for the final rite, a *pamada/pananghid* would be invoked by Katangkawan, thanking the people of Balit particularly the owner of the house where the *husay* ('conflict resolution') was held. Their kindness would be appreciated and heard by the spirits of their ancestors. So everybody had to come up now to the house to witness the *pugsug-uta* or *sumbaka*, another exchange of gifts or *bigela* (*begula*). The Katangkawan aka Datu Mandagsangan Mario Napungahan laid down his *bigela* gifts consisting of two (2) .45 Caliber ACP Pistols, one (1) 12 Gauge Pump Shotgun, (1) a carabao and ₱10,000 cash. Datu Manlumibay, in exchange, offered a *tubao* and *sundang* to Katangkawan. This meant that Datu Manlumibay had accepted the peace offering of Datu Mandagsangan and paid respect to the latter as the Supreme Datu.

The last symbolic act of reconciliation was witnessed by Agusan del Sur Governor Adolph Edward Plaza, together with the Vice Governor, *Sanguniang Panlalawigan* members, and the San Luis Mayor and Vice Mayor. Governor Plaza presented gifts to both datos, consisting of aluminum cooking pots and some cash. In his remarks, the governor expounded: ‘Any problem can be solved internally, giving each other a chance to communicate, and not thru other people.’ He further said that government presence in the occasion was meant to help empower their tribal community, and that they need not ask help from others.

The NCIP Caraga Regional Director Dominador Gomez called the attention of government agencies as he stressed that not all policies may be applicable to the Lumads, hence a special consideration is necessary in implementing projects in IP communities. Agencies concerned cannot impose policies in IP communities without respecting their cultural rights.

Finally, Fr. Albert Alejo expressed his heartfelt happiness to see the brothers reunited. He gave updates on the GPH-NDF peace talks, and presented the prioritization of IP agenda in which a chapter on IP concerns is included in their proposal to the NDF.



Figure 3. Agusan del Sur Gov. Adolph Plaza extending his personal wishes to the reconciled Banwaon leaders.

Updates

One week later, a team of Samdhana consultants went back to San Luis to interview Katangkawan and Datu Manlubibay on their insights on the recent conflict resolution that they had. Security was tight and there was talk that Katangkawan was again the subject of a 'shoot to kill' order from the NPAs. The rebels' order of battle reportedly includes Datu Benhur Manbiyahe. Meanwhile, in Binikalan, a follow-up Banwaon and Talaandig *bigela* rite had been requested. Some Higaonon leaders who were inspired by witnessing the *husay* (justice system) are also contemplating their own reconciliation rites.

On October 8, I got a text message that Datu Benhur, who was traveling on a motorbike with his brother-in-law and his son (in the next motorcycle) had been ambushed by armed men believed to be NPAs. His companion died on the spot as one bullet hit his head and the motorbike they were driving rolled down by the wayside. The datu was on his way to attend a meeting in the municipal office where his fellow Banwaon leaders were also gathered. Benhur had not been expected to come but upon knowing that his relative datus were meeting in the *Municipio*, he had decided to join it with great eagerness. Benhur received six shots including one that hit his left leg and nearly cut his limb. He was immediately taken to a hospital in Butuan City. The OPAPP helped in contacting the AFP requesting assistance for his immediate treatment and also to provide him security while recovering.

The strength and resiliency of Banwaon political institutions

These experiences have shown the Banwaon resilience in the face of intense political conflicts. As early as the '80s, Katangkawan had led his people to resist the logging intrusions into their territory. With the military on the side of the business interests, the tribe had no choice but to seek assistance from the NPAs, which at that time was already organizing the lumads to support their national democratic struggle. As the logging firms gradually destroyed the tribe's sacred spaces and burial grounds, this inevitably also affected their natural growth forests. Soon enough, the Lumads experienced the dwindling supply of food, the pollution of their rivers, and changed behavior of wildlife (like wild pigs attacking their farms). The '90s was a period when the tribe had to move to safer places to escape from aerial strikes that the military were using to destroy NPA mass bases.

From *tampuda* to *begula*, Banwaon and Higaonon determination and wisdom in seeking to maintain harmony with their kin and in their communities had ended enmities and armed clashes that took a heavy toll on the lives on both sides. Without need for external assistance, the Banwaons

were able to show fairness, equanimity, tolerance and sincerity in their attempts to dialogue and seal every act of reconciliation with high levels of rituals invoking the world of spirits. A Bukidnon *baylan*, Bae Inatlawan once told me, ‘...requesting the presence of higher (spirit) beings is important in a ritual since these entities can clearly see through the hearts and intentions of the subjects, like the lead mediators or arbitrators who act or owe forgiveness and extend peace offerings’. Despite casualties on his side, Katangkawan’s ability to temper his feelings in dealing with his enemies had greatly influenced the peaceful outcome that they desired.

For 30 years, the Banwaon people had treaded divergent paths that led them to experience four kinds of war: (1) against their neighbors the Higaonons, (2) against logging companies, (3) against the military, and (4) currently against their kin and former comrades among the NPAs. To ensure a smooth transition from war to peace, a serious analysis of its causes and dynamics is essential.

The Banwaon internal wars stemmed, on one hand, from assertions of authority over their territory that displaced indigenous self-governance and self-determination, their right to livelihood, and general welfare. On the other hand, it was a simple case of giving loyalty to a group (which elders described as ‘the enslavement of their traditional uniform’), thereby putting at risk their affinities by causing unending bloodsheds in their ancestral domains. The accounting of these injustices (or knowing the cause of conflict) becomes primary so that an appropriate reconciliation effort can be executed.

It is said that “reconciliation will be fragile if the roots of conflicts are not addressed” (*The Cartagena Contribution to Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration* 2009:57). The Banwaon experience in implementing their justice system and conflict management shows the potentials of barangay (community) level peace agreement that can add experience and insight in dealing with national level peace negotiations. The Banwaon case also shows the important factors of culture and of leadership, which added weight to a peace-mover’s skills and credibility. There are interlocking connections between political leadership, knowledge of culture and its embedded spiritual values, and credibility (legitimacy) that make a peace initiative viable.

An imperative support needed to sustain the Banwaon peace initiative is to activate a kind of local ‘peace monitoring’ or to have ‘peace observers’ to ensure that the reconciled Banwaons are spared from NPA attacks and retaliation. There are remote areas whose communities needed be explained to about the closure to the great conflict, *Sisim hu Lidu*. Katangkawan

wished that he could visit more of his relatives and members around the territory to explain personally his intentions and perspectives. This personal approach could intensify the peaceful energy being reinstated as the big *lidu* was resolved.

Conclusion

The Banwaon case shows a good link between state-centric peace negotiations and community-centric peace building initiatives. Combining both explicit and tacit dimensions, there are essential elements that highlight the Banwaon experience and the leadership in peace building as exemplified by Katangkawan and his reunited relatives holding high positions. These are (1) responsibility and accountability of a great leader who also takes seriously his role as a great ‘parent’ to his people, (2) the strong regard for culture and link to traditional authorities, (3) command, and (4) the reliance of spiritual authority and admonitions that guide the proper conduct of negotiating for a peaceful treaty.

As Katangkawan, Mandagsangan proactively set action and direction for his people in order to protect them and to secure their territory. Mandagsangan assumed most of the accountability for the times when wars broke out and lives were lost in the process. Remarkably, despite his unassuming ways, Katangkawan’s command over his people is formidable and his sincerity as a leader had, thus far, shielded him from harm and betrayals. Mindanao tribal leaders who personally know Katangkawan can attest to the exceptional leadership traits unique to his person. Katangkawan dreams and envisions peace and prosperity for his people anchored on the guidance of Magbabaya and nature spirits that aided them many, many times when hope was his last hold to bid for a lasting peace.

As for the State, it could choose to learn from the success of the Banwaon experience. While it may be difficult to include the tribal leaders in the GPH-CNN talks, the PNoy government can at least reinforce the gains and legitimacy of the Banwaons’ peace building initiatives by protecting them from being caught once more in the war in the countryside—whether NPA or AFP provoked. Meanwhile, what is imperative for the Banwaons is to take the reins in rebuilding their damaged lives, communities and territories. And for the rest of us IP advocates—we must individually and collectively resist every act of war that rises in our midst.

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APPENDIX A
GLOSSARY of Banwaon terms

- Alimaong* – ‘Warrior’.
- Bae* – ‘Female leader’.
- Bagani*– ‘Warrior’.
- Begula or Bigela* – Exchange of gifts/peace offerings.
- Dasang* – ‘Fast chanted recitation’.
- Datu* – ‘Male leader’.
- Dumalongdong* – ‘Gathering of datos/chieftains’, ‘assembly of datos to confer new ones.’
- Husay* – ‘Justice system’, ‘conflict resolution’.
- Kalaanan ha lidu* – ‘Old tribal feud’.
- Katangkawan* – ‘Supreme Chieftain’.
- Lidu* – ‘Feud’.
- Odang* – ‘Elders’.
- Pagdang’ul* - ‘Ceremonial investiture’.
- Pamalas* – Rite of ‘washing one’s self from bad deeds’.
- Pamulisung /pamulisong, pugbulisung* – Rite which symbolizes the act to ‘bury the hatchet and free them from bad fortunes because of conflict’.
- Panalogsabit* – ‘Thanksgiving for harvest’.
- Sisim hu Lidu* – Resolution of blood conflict among clan members.
- Sundang* – Bolo.
- Talabugta* – The spirit of the land [*bugta* - ‘land’].
- Tampuda* – ‘Peace pact’.
- Talawagan* – Cleansing ritual.
- Tubao* – Big handkerchief often used as a scarf or as headwear among the men.
- Tulugan* – ‘Tribal Hall’.
- Tumbasa* – Traditional exchange of *Begola* or ‘peace offerings’.

APPENDIX B**GLOSSARY of Acronyms**

- AFP** – Armed Forces of the Philippines
- CAFGU** - Civilian Armed Force Geographical Unit
- CENRO** - Community Environment and Natural Resources Office
- CNN** – Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People’s Army and the National Democratic Front
- CPP** – Communist Party of the Philippines
- GPH** – Government of the Philippines
- IFMA** – Integrated Forest Management Agreement
- JCA** – Jose C. Aquino Lumber and Plywood Industries
- Lubasan** – *Lumadnong Bugkot sa Surigao ug Agusan*.
- MINTREC** - Mindanao Tribal Resource Center
- NCIP** – National Commission on Indigenous Peoples
- NGO** – Non-Government Organization
- NORMINBHI** - Northern Mindanao Coalition of the Banwaons, Higaonons, Manobo and Mamanua, Inc.
- NDF** – National Democratic Front
- NPA** – New People’s Army
- OPAPP** - Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process
- RGS** – Religious of the Good Sheperd
- SILDAP-SIDLAKAN** - Silingang Dapit sa Sidlakang Mindanao
- TFA** - Tribal Filipino Apostolate (based in Sacred Heart Convent, Butuan City)
- WDI** – Woodland Domain Inc. (logging company)

APPENDIX C
List of Personae***Banwaon***

Datu Mandagsangan Mario Napungahan [*Katangkawan*]
Bae Edna (wife)
Datu Suminibug Napungahan (Katangkawan's father)
Joel "Maak" Napungahan
Datu Manlumibay Badbaran
Datu Batoy Manpadayag
Datu Mambiyahe Benhur Mansolonay
Datu Sulundanon
Datu Mansaulog
Datu Tagulambong
Datu Loay-Loay

Higaonon

Bae Salima
Lavi Manpatilan
Deo Manpatilan
Bagwis (Katangkawan's son-in-law)

Agusan Manobo

Datu Mandagasi
Datu Makalipay Eric Rico
Datu Mandumaguing

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