

The Process of Healing War Wounds

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This study explored the phenomenon of healing from the trauma of war through the narrative accounts of ten Filipino war survivors from the town of Pikit, North Cotabato, Philippines. Using a phenomenological approach, the study identified the deeper and qualitative dimensions of the healing and reconciliation process including the long-term experiences beyond coping and recovery. The study revealed six interconnected major themes with regard to healing from war trauma. Healing is: (1) a process of repairing and making whole again, (2) a process of coming home, (3) a spiral process, (4) a complementary and cyclical process, (5) a process with a spiritual and divine dimension, and (6) peace come to life.

Wars cause not only deaths and physical wounds but also economic, psychological, and social devastation, where the wounds take a lifetime to heal. Yocum (1999) reminds us that trauma can be handed down from generation to generation. The wounds that are not healed become the seeds of new wars. Quisumbing (1994) stated that because wars begin in the minds of people, the defenses of peace must likewise be constructed in people's minds. Recently, more attention has been given to the emotional wounds created by war in individuals and families and the coping mechanisms of families (McKenry & Price, 1994; McCubbin & Patterson, 1981). Special attention is given to the needs of children. Protacio-Marcelino (2000) described a study of Filipino children—victims/survivors of torture which showed that the psychological effects were deeper than the children's physical injuries.

There is a rise of new literature describing healing approaches and presenting actual experiences in using these approaches. For example, Peters (1996) talked of her workshops in trauma healing and counseling cases aimed to help people grieve their war experiences. Helping persons (and groups) to speak about their loss and grief not only helps in the process of healing their trauma, but also begins a much larger process of conflict resolution and peace building. Group psychotherapy is generally considered to be very helpful to allow people to emotionally reconnect with the actuality of the experience and receive support from people who have gone through the same or similar experience. Hyper-arousal and sleep disturbances in PTSD may in many instances be best treated with medication, in addition to individual or group intervention. Others have had success with mastery or efficacy enhancing intervention, such as teaching self-defense skills (Friedman, 2000). Quintos-Deles (2000) revealed that healing and reconciliation necessitates dealing with the guilt of soldiers and citizens alike, at the same time with the processes of forgiveness and internal healing; with journeys of repentance and redress.

Some innovative approaches include the use of plays, theater, and music to re-enact war and give some kind of a mirror for the pains of war, other constructive means such as dance, drama, arts and sports, and special poems and songs for children, as the poems of Afghan poetess, Fariga Jawad Mahajei (Assefa, 1994). An approach worth mentioning is the program of psychological self-care and mind-body skills that the Center for Mind-Body Medicine (CMBM), a nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC, is undertaking in Kosovo. This approach includes an understanding of family and group dynamics, and individual psychology. It uses self-care approaches as relaxation techniques, biofeedback, nutrition, physical exercise, drawings, meditation, and guided imagery (Yocum, 1999).

The healing from wounds of war and violence is not only an individual but also a collective process. In situations such as war

and genocide, people have gone through the trauma as a group and thus, may need certain kinds of rituals or ceremonies for them to heal (Straub, 1999). Garcia (1994) quoted Sochua Mu Leiper, one of the participants in the International Colloquium on Peacemaking, who speaks of the healing process necessary in Cambodia. Leiper said that healing cannot be done unless the self, the inner self is healed. Then, people need to go beyond that to the healing of the nation by building up trust.

The family is both a subject and a support for the healing process. The role that the family plays in healing cannot be overemphasized. The Culture of Peace Seminars demonstrate this reality. The family is the main unit of action in slowly letting go of the old culture of war and creating a new culture of peace. Santos (2001) likened this process to a gentle birthing, the birthing of new dimensions of relationships. The critical role of women is considered. Santos proposes that women should be in the forefront in the process of rebuilding peace, since, as reproducers of life, they fully understand the nature of life and death, of giving birth.

In the Philippine experience, three approaches are commonly used for healing of war wounds—play therapy, family therapy, and establishment of peace zones or spaces for peace. Counseling and therapy sessions for children victims use a lot of play activities aimed at realizing their controlled or pent-up emotions, feelings, and other reactions to the traumatic life event to help restore disrupted routines and other structures within the family (Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). One such program is the Balik Kalipay Program in Mindanao, which trains teachers and youth volunteers to use play therapy to help children cope with the difficulties of living in a war zone. Through a series of creative activities, they facilitate a child's expression of the effect of trauma on themselves and others. Structured exercises simulate real life situations and give the opportunity for the children to learn alternative and more constructive viewpoints (Lopez, 2003).

Family therapy and the family systems approach is another method used for war healing. This involves working with the family members to rebuild relationships, revive old, effective patterns of communication and develop new ones, and regenerate the inner resources of individual family members and the family as a whole. This approach is based on the family systems theory which believes that the members of the family affect each other both in a negative and positive way (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991; Rosenblatt, 1994).

The establishment of peace zones is a unique Philippine contribution to peace-building approaches. These peace zones serve as *healing spaces*, where previously warring peoples find the freedom and courage to dialogue. They serve as social spaces for transformation and healing (Garcia, 1993). These peace zones are highlighted in this study through the concrete experience of healing made possible by the Space for Peace Program in Pikit.

This study hopes to contribute to the growing interest in the holistic process of healing and to help fill in some gaps in existing research efforts. It attempts to break away from the traditional quantitative approach and instead, uses the less explored path of qualitative research using the phenomenological approach.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

This study is primarily aimed at exploring healing and reconciliation as phenomenological, experienced, and perceived by these persons in different circumstances of trauma from war. It seeks to answer the following specific research questions:

1. What are the respondents' experiences of recovering and healing from their trauma from different situations of war and armed conflict? What steps did they take to resolve the issues that arose from the trauma and to reconcile with themselves and the people who caused these issues?

2. What kind of memories do they have of the trauma they experienced? What were their concrete experiences of trauma and its effects on their personal lives and on their family and social relationships?
3. What personal meanings do they find in their experiences of healing and reconciliation?
4. From the participants' perspective, what internal and external factors facilitate their process of healing and reconciliation? Who supported and helped them in their healing? How did the family members help? What is the role of the family in healing?

METHOD

Participants

The ten respondents were purposively selected based on the following criteria: (1) they have all experienced trauma from exposure to incidents of war in different forms; (2) they all claim to have experienced a healing and reconciliation process in the past 5 years and show evidence of this healing through changes in some attitudinal and behavioral aspects of their lives; and (3) they are all functioning and contributing members of their families and communities, as observed by the referees. Some of the respondents are peacemakers who are involved in certain activities that involve collective healing or reconciliation among other people. The selection of the respondents was done through the assistance of Fr. Roberto Layson, the Pikit Parish Peace Team and the staff of BALAY, an NGO that provides psycho-social intervention to family victims of war. All except one respondent chose to use their real names.

All respondents come from the town of Pikit, which is located in North Cotabato, in Central Mindanao, in the southern part of the Philippines. Pikit is composed of 42 barangays that lie along

the Malitubog-Maridagao river basin from the North and Pulangi River to Liguasan Marsh in the southern part. Pikit is one of the towns which have suffered because of the war between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and government forces. Since 1997, the people of Pikit have been forced to leave their homes five times already due to war. The effect on families is severe.

The ten respondents are grouped into four clusters. These groupings are based on similarity of their experiences and their biological, geographical, or functional relationship or closeness with each other:

1. *The Dalingaoen Women*, who include four women, all Christians, from the Barangay of Dalingaoen, a village that is in the path of war. The MILF and the military frequently cross paths in this community resulting in bloody encounters that have terrorized and displaced the families repeatedly. Dalingaoen was the site of a hostage taking incident by the MILF in November of 2001, which left several people dead and many houses burned. Lee, 47 years old, Merlie, 48, and Lumen, 45 are mothers from poor families with eight, two and six children, respectively. They lost loved ones, their homes, and livelihood because of the war. Adel, 55 years old, the fourth Dalingaoen respondent is a professional and a member of the Pikit Parish Team. Her family is middle class but was nevertheless not spared from the ravages of war.
2. *The Andik Family*. Two members of this Muslim family, Bapa Kadtong Andik, 45 years old, and his daughter Taya, 23, are participants in the study. Bapa Andik is a prominent Kagawad of Barangay Nalapaan and an active leader in the peace programs of the Pikit parish. He has seen many wars since his childhood. His family has lost several members and has experienced repeated displacements and extreme poverty due to war. Taya is an active woman leader in their village and a staff of BALAY.

A young mother with two children, Taya talks of the effects of war on her family and the families she serves. Barangay Nalapaan was the pilot barangay for the Parish's Culture of Peace Seminars and Space for Peace Programs. It has served as a model, which has been copied by six other barangays in Pikit and is inspiring many communities and groups all over the Philippines.

3. *The Peace Team.* This refers to the members of the Pikit Parish Inter-religious Rehabilitation team which I call 'the Peace Team'. Bapa Butch Gilman, 52, and Bapa Mike Alon, 44, are Muslim leaders with seven and eight children respectively. Bapa Butch is a former MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front) commander turned peacemaker. He is in charge of advocacy in the Peace Team and is a council leader of the Mindanao People's Caucus, a coalition of peace NGO's (non-government organizations) and peace movements in Mindanao. He is also a founder of the Mahid Multi- Purpose Cooperative. Bapa Mike is a farmer who lost his mother in war. His family suffered heavy economic losses due to war. These two Muslim fathers speak of their families' war trauma and the plight of the Muslim people especially Muslim children victims of war. Alfredo ('Bibot') Recana, 45 years old, is a Christian farmer leader and church worker. He has four children. As a child, he suffered irreversible losses when war uprooted his family from his home and disrupted his schooling. He joined the NPA (New People's Army) and the Alsa Masa movement in his search for solutions. His search for peace led him to join the Peace team. Adel Nayal, earlier mentioned in the Dalingaoen series, joins the Peace Team as the fourth member.
4. *Fr. Robert Layson*, 45 years old, is a cluster by himself because of his unique role in the healing of the others and his experiences that cross both the Muslim and Christian side of war trauma. Mentioned by all the

respondents as a key supporting factor in their healing, Fr. Bert is the Catholic Parish Priest of Pikit and the Coordinator for the Inter-Religious Dialogue of his congregation, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI). He is the prime mover of the rehabilitation programs for the war torn communities of Pikit. He formed inter-religious communities of volunteers and an inter-religious parish team to spearhead the peace programs in Pikit. He is a co-chairman of the Mindanao People's Caucus. Fr. Bert has suffered the loss of loved ones, (members of his expanded family structure—Quezon, his Muslim best friend and Bishop Ben, his spiritual father) and severe war trauma as a child and as a young priest. He has transformed his trauma into a seedbed for peace.

Instruments

The phenomenological approach was the research method used to provide rich documentation of the "lifeworld" of the respondents and to unveil the essence and meaning of their lived experience of healing from the trauma of war. The phenomenological interview, together with the narrative story telling approach, was the main technique for data gathering. The interview guide was written in both English and Filipino for easy understanding of the participants. The participants were also allowed to speak in Cebuano, a dialect which the researcher also understood. The interview used open-ended questions and allowed the participants to tell their stories in a free-flowing stance. Primary questions were used to elicit narratives—to draw out the respondents' personal experiences, along with the reflections and meanings they attach to their experiences. The researcher conducted all interviews herself at a time and place previously agreed upon with the participants. Care was given to establish rapport and the conditions of confidentiality, privacy, and voluntariness so as to help the respondents develop a sense of trust and security to share their stories freely. The interview

session was treated as a sacred place and a time of dialogue between two co-journeymen. The self also served as an important tool in this investigation. The researcher tried to be an effective instrument in the research by immersing herself in the whole process and by bringing to each interview a lot of sensitivity, respect, empathy and compassion. She conducted field research and spent several days in Pikit, visiting the respondents in their homes and accompanying them as they went back through their healing stories. She also practiced focused attention and self-reflection—to listen not only to the co-researchers' stories, but also to her own inner thoughts and processes.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then written as ten case studies which describe the participants' experiences of war trauma, their process of healing from trauma, and the role of the family. The case studies used texts directly taken from the transcriptions. All efforts were done to preserve the authenticity and real texture of each testimony. These case studies were reviewed, edited and approved by the participants.

The methods of analysis used were: immersion in the data, bracketing or suspension of biases and suppositions, critical reflection, surfacing of themes, clustering into core themes, and intuitive synthesis. The researcher repeatedly immersed herself in the stories, reading them again and again but stepped back at various points to gather her thoughts and to let the themes, patterns, and meanings emerge.

RESULTS

The analyses of the narrative accounts revealed the essence of healing as a multi-leveled, multidimensional, and immensely profound phenomenon. The findings from this study may be grouped into six major core themes that describe the essence of healing and reconciliation. Healing is: (1) a process of repairing and making whole again; (2) a process of coming home; (3) a spiral

process; (4) a complementary and cyclical process; (5) a process with a spiritual and divine dimension; and (6) peace come to life. These themes are interconnected.

Healing is a process of repairing and making whole again.

The narratives bring out four major areas of war's destructive impact: damage to relationships, people's sense of power and control, rational thinking, and sense of dignity. Corollary to these four areas of destruction, four subthemes of healing emerge under the first major theme. Healing is: (a) a process of connecting and bringing together; (b) a process of empowerment, of regaining power lost; (c) a process of restoring rational understanding; and (d) a process of redeeming dignity and self-esteem. These sub-themes intertwine with each other like threads in a tapestry. For better appreciation of the dynamics of the healing process, the study also analyzed and described the dimensions of war trauma.

Healing is a process of connecting and bringing together.

The study describes how war destroys relationships between persons, families, and friends and divides peoples and communities. Poignant examples are the broken friendships of Fr. Bert and Quezon, Mike, and his Christian friends.

The separation of families magnifies the torture from war that is experienced by the Pikit respondents. They experience this separation during the initial chaos of war. For some, the separation lasts for some time and causes extreme stress and pressure. This violent separation also occurs on the community level. At the outbreak of war, neighbors who normally live side by side in harmony and peace, suddenly become afraid and suspicious of each other. Andik laments the change in his community, the loss of friendship between Muslims and Christians, which used to be very strong in his father's generation. Mike, Butch, and Adel, echo this regret over the loss of this peaceful paradise which prevailed over Mindanao, before the great intruder, war, came into their community.

Thus, one important dimension of healing is the repair of broken relationships. Even if the relationship with the presumed perpetrators is difficult to repair immediately, an important step in healing is connecting with people. Always an urgent step is reuniting the family. The Dalingaoen women and Taya also found it helpful to talk with friends and to attend seminars where they linked arms with other women war survivors. These mothers also observe the healing effect of the children's camp where their children had the chance to find comfort in the company of other young victims of war. For both adults and children, it was a healing experience to discover that they were not alone in the pain.

It is also important to cross the borders and see the suffering of the other side. Merlie mentions how Muslim and Christian women found a meeting point in a seminar given by BALAY. Although divided during actual war, the Dalingaoen women and their neighbors would slowly come back to their multicultural community once the fighting subsides. The sight of the suffering of their neighbors at the other side healed the Christian women's anger and mistrust towards Muslims. The suffering of their Christian neighbors likewise had a healing impact on the Muslim respondents. This experience of shared pain and the realization that they were all victims pushed Fr. Bert, Butch, Mike, Bibot, and Adel to form an inter-religious team for the rehabilitation of the war torn communities and families of their town.

Since war widens the gap between groups of people and breeds blanket hatred and judgments, it is important for war survivors to once again encounter people from the other side as persons, to transcend their divisive labels by coming together and experiencing again their common humanity. Thus, the inter-religious color is seen in all the efforts of Fr. Bert and the Peace Team—inter-religious dialogues, inter-religious Culture of Peace seminars and inter-religious economic projects. The interfaith celebrations are central to their programs. If we look at the importance of faith to the lives of these people, the bridging of religions takes a special role. And for this task, the value of

respect is paramount. Fr. Bert declares it as a guiding principle and models it with his life. "*Kahit anong relihiyon, tama ka rin.*" Bibot echoes this, "*Ang mahalaga ay paggalang.*"

Fr. Bert, as an Ilonggo, serves a special role in the healing process of Butch, Mike, and Andik. Fr. Bert's sincerity and genuineness touches them and allows them to slowly heal their trauma from cruel acts done to them by Ilonggo war perpetrators. Thus, even if Mike admits difficulty in forgiving the Christians who stole their land, he speaks with joy and pride of his friendship with Fr. Bert, who visits him at his home. The healing is mutual. His friendship and brotherhood with Butch and Mike likewise heals Fr. Bert from his anger towards Muslims whom he used to call, "*the killers of Bishop Ben.*"

Healing is a process of empowerment, of regaining power lost. The study brings out different ways of losing power because of war. The loss of power is first drawn from the respondents' experience of danger at close range, visceral experiences of war that torture the senses —the sound of gunfire, sirens and tanks, the sight of soldiers and heavy artillery, the smell of smoke from burning houses, the sight of dead bodies in the streets. Fear and hunger combined produce physical torture. Some even had to endure the experience of witnessing the killing of their loved ones or became direct victims of violence. The torture is magnified as one lies, trapped, in the underground foxhole, with the chaos of war exploding all around. The images of danger become blown up in one's mind so that one feels the imaginary but also real possibility of being the next victim.

The terror is recurring, storing fearful memories in their mind. These memories rise from the person's consciousness and cause recurring trauma at the slightest provocation. This brings to mind the special vulnerability of children. Many of the respondents experienced the intensity of war trauma as young children, with their mind still fragile and unable to process.

The respondents experienced both physical paralysis (loss of consciousness, inability to walk, hypertension and other ailments, sleeplessness, and loss of appetite) and emotional paralysis (panic, shock, depression, inability to focus and to do normal household chores). Andik starts to develop physical and emotional symptoms of war fatigue due to persistent worries about the future of his family and his people. Taya, as the eldest sibling, absorbs the worries and is also aging fast. The "*tyrannical memories*" described by Fr. Bert also cause paralysis trapping war victims into a state of immobility and helplessness.

Even families experience some kind of paralysis. Taya remembers how war disrupted their normal family routine. Bibot missed a normal family life for several years as his family lived in two separate homes. War freezes life for families, while robbing them of a normal future for the children. All the parents in the study, mothers and fathers alike, lament the disruption of their children's studies. Education is a prime source of power, security, and stability that they long to grant to their children. Butch worries that without a sound education, the Muslim children are "*becoming like robots.*" Perhaps, the loss of power is strongest felt by the families in the economic domain. The repeated wars and displacements have destroyed their livelihood, plunged them into poverty, and robbed them of stability. The feeling of powerlessness also comes from knowing that "*war has its own rules*" (Andik) and spares no one.

The Pikit respondents described many ways by which their healing process helped them to reclaim their power. One way is by **normalizing** in order to free oneself from the paralyzing effects of war. This means restoring their family routine and finding some diversion, to keep busy (the men working in the farm and attempting to find a livelihood, the women turning to their gardens for the soothing effect of their flowers).

The Pikit survivors also needed a **safe release** of feelings through talking to friends, disclosing and telling their stories,

the art therapy in the BALAY seminar, and the debriefing and counseling sessions with the BALAY staff, which helped them to bring out their heaviness and to breathe. Mike took to journal writing. Fr. Bert releases by writing stories and articles which he compiled in a book.

The survivors use their **natural coping ability and inner resources** (courage, determination, resourcefulness, assertiveness, and acceptance) to restore their sense of power. They learn to **handle or manage war**. Individually and collectively, they developed a degree of preparedness for the war through their committees. The women resorted to self-care and self-talk. "*Ngayon, kinakalma ko ang sarili ko. Sabi ko ganun, a, tingnan ko muna iyong mga kapitbahay ko kung magtakbo sila, takbo rin ako.*" (Merlie) "*Tapos pinipilit kong huwag masyado isipin. Sabi ko, kung magpatalo ako sa emosyon baka kung mapaano pa ako. Kawawa yung mga anak ko.*" (Lee) Through these methods, the men and women experienced healing in the form of increasing capacity to handle their fear and anger. "*Menos-menos na ang nerbyos.*" (Merlie) "*Nakontrol ko na.*" (Lumen) "*Hindi na ako na traumatize kasi marunong na ako kung paano. Hindi na ako masyado nagalit.*" (Butch) Butch calls this "*self-control*". Fr. Bert experienced liberation and transcended his fear of death. Thus, healing involves the process of regaining control over their bodies and their feelings and developing an increasing ability to handle their reactions towards war trauma. Dialogues with the other side are also very helpful in working out issues and conflicts and dealing with their anger in a constructive way.

There are other forms of **standing up to war**. Adel and Andik fought back by standing up to the military. Lee and Fr. Bert resorted to questioning and fighting God. The members of the Peace Team and Fr. Bert resorted to undertaking study and research to find answers to these questions. This is reinforced on the collective level by the research and advocacy programs of the Mindanao People's Caucus.

The Pikit respondents also regained their power by **reclaiming their space** (their farms, their gardens and their communities). It is especially significant to note how the women continuously planted flowers in their gardens as an act of holding on to life. Although they initially saw it as a diversion to keep their minds busy, the act of planting can be seen as a silent protest over the destruction and death that war brings. It is a declaration of the power of life over death. It is also an act of owning their home space. If they could not stop war, at least they could declare ownership over their homes. The men took to armed struggle or community work. It was their way of reclaiming power over their lives, the power to protect themselves, their families and communities, the power to right the wrong being done to their people. Getting involved with peace work and community development work allowed them to respond and find solutions to the problems caused by war. This action and movement freed them from the grip of helplessness and powerlessness.

The **Space for Peace Program** is a powerful example of a people's declaration to reclaim their power and own back their community. Here the people of Pikit, under the leadership of Fr. Bert and the Peace Team found a creative way to restore peace in their communities. The community leaders demanded that the combatants (the MILF and the military) respect their living space and stop using it as their war zone. The experience of Nalapaan has proven effective and the program has grown and now includes seven barangays as Spaces for Peace.

Healing also includes the **restoration of the balance of power** and a sense of fairness. This is important because the loss of power also has social and structural roots. Andik believes that as long as there are guns in society, there would always be war. From the perspective of the respondents, one root of war is the imbalance of power or the abuse of power by some, which leads to disempowerment, injury, even death for masses of civilians. Andik takes special issue about the unjust discrimination against Muslims. The Pikit survivors under the leadership of Fr. Bert

and the Peace team attempt to regain this balance of power through dialogues, sharing groups and the formation of cooperatives and inter-religious committees. These structures uphold the value of equality and egalitarian sharing, by giving equal space to different sides and by allowing perceived protagonists to meet and share a common space.

Healing is a process of restoring rational understanding.

The loss of rational understanding as another impact of war is related to the loss of power. As children, Fr. Bert, Bibot, and Andik were powerless amidst their endless questions about war that nobody could answer. The narratives show that understanding aids the survivors' healing process. "*Kasi naunawaan ko na sila rin ay biktima tulad ko.*" (Bibot) Fr. Bert undertakes zealous **research and study** to acquire understanding of the real dynamics and causes of war. This base of understanding healed the confusion and turbulence in his mind that war has created during his childhood. In this context, we can appreciate the great importance Fr. Bert later gives to seminars in his healing work with the community. Andik is propelled by a passion to **search for truth**. This zest for answers ran a parallel course in the healing process of Butch, Mike, Adel and Bibot. Their parallel search brought them together to form a common analysis and common approach to build peace. Rational understanding leads to **rational action**. Their rational approaches to peace and healing causes a radical **change in perspective** and defeat war's irrational violence and divisiveness. "*Nagbabago ang sarili ko. Meron palang pamamaraan na mailabas mo din yung katotohanan, yung gusto mo sa hindi marahas na paraan.*" (Butch)

Healing is a process of redeeming dignity and self-esteem.

War dehumanizes and undermines people's sense of dignity. Thus, another important element of healing is the redeeming of people's dignity. This includes the healing of the dehumanizing effects of war—the indignities of living in evacuation centers, the inhuman treatment of civilians, the loss of status because of disrupted studies, the cycle of discrimination and disrespect.

The Culture of Peace seminars and inter-religious dialogues allow war survivors the chance to see once more the personhood of the other side. Fr. Bert's mother is his model of unconditional love that excludes no one and respects everyone. The years of discrimination and disrespect produced layers of resentment and hatred that form the ground for the continuing wars in Pikit. Aware of how this makes the healing process very sensitive and fragile, Fr. Bert and his colleagues underline the importance of giving equal value to the different tribes and religions. Thus, all projects are inter-religious and include what they call the 'tri-people'—Muslims, Christians and Lumads.

In the process of regaining respect for the dignity of the other groups, a person experiences redemption of his/her own personhood. Mike uses the metaphor of mirror in this dual process of redeeming. Fr. Bert also describes his healing process as a process of self-redemption. "*Naredeem ang sarili ko. Yung mga dati kong perception, biases sa Muslim, mga judgement, nawala.*" It is important for some respondents to rebuild their broken self-esteem. Bibot finds affirmation in the acceptance given by his church circle who welcomed him as a "*kaabag*" (lay minister) despite his lack of education. Mike claims that one fruit of his healing process is his bigger value for himself. "*Noon, sa tingin ko maliit masyado ako. Pero sa ngayon, palagay ko sa isang centavo, ngayon nagiging dalawang centavo na ako ngayon.*" The Muslim respondents, Andik, Butch and Mike highlight the need for a collective self-redemption, for the healing of the image of the Muslims. They participate in the interview to redeem the image of the Moro people. "*Para malaman ng lahat na hindi kami masamang tao.*"

The interview turned out to have an equalizing effect since the respondents were chosen from different economic classes and different religions. The chance to be interviewed and to tell their story gives the respondents a boost in their self-image. Andik voices this out. "*Kahit pobre, may halaga ako.*"

Healing is a process of coming home. An important dimension of healing war trauma is the process of rebuilding the home or simply going home. Like other war survivors, the first step of the respondents was finding a safe shelter (in evacuation centers or relatives' homes) during the initial shock of war, and then rebuilding the physical home of the family. It took much courage to take this painful step especially for Lumen, Butch, Adel, Mike, Bibot, and Lee, whose homes were burned down, made unlivable or forcibly taken away. Another important step is rebuilding their livelihood, working on the land and reviving the animals. All of these are part of the home which is the source of their life, the symbol of survival, family security, and stability. By working on their farms and gardens, the respondents also make efforts to rebuild their connection with their mother home, the earth that they have tilled and cared for and who has nurtured them back. They work as if to repair the great destruction created by war on creation. Refusing to be defeated by war's destruction, they work hard to turn their home once more into a beautiful sanctuary.

Healing is possible because despite the destruction and damage to the physical home, the emotional home remains intact. Home means family togetherness and joy. It is the sanctuary of their shared memories and dreams. It is also, the "*pamana*" (legacy), a symbol of the parents' care for the family. Thus, Adel mourns the loss of her father's tableau, his legacy for his children. Andik strives to preserve his home for his children. The family becomes the locus of healing that provides nourishment, protection and consolation and enables the individual to go through the different dimensions of the healing process. Many families resort to a new reconfiguration of roles in order to support the healing process. The narratives in this study bring out the important role of women in this theme of healing. They take over the management of the family livelihood and act as teacher, supporter and counselor. Andik's wife provides the balance in the family, encouraging objectivity and cautioning against blanket judgements. "*Hindi naman lahat.*"

For Fr. Bert, Adel, Butch, Mike, and Andik, home was also the paradise that they remember from childhood—the virgin beauty of their place and the joyful and peaceful co-existence between neighbors from different tribes and religions. Luckily, they have a chance to rebuild this bigger home through their rehabilitation programs in Pikit.

The respondents underline the importance of finding a sanctuary, a safe healing place. The miracle of healing is made possible by the presence of a widening circle of healing and protective love which makes up the person's healing space which he knows as home. When the resources of the family become inadequate, they get support from the extended family, the expanded family and the community, which make up their support network. Andik adds to these, his long list of NGO's, LGU's and volunteers which he calls "*sympathizers*". The Mindanao People's Caucus serves as a common home from where the people of Pikit and other peace advocates and movements can walk together with their common longing for peace. The circle of healing and protection also includes their fore parents and elders who built their communities on a solid foundation of peace.

Healing is a spiral process. The respondents' stories demonstrate the spiral process of healing. Lee, Merlie, and Lumen admit that they still carry some of the pain but reveal a marked improvement in the way they handle their trauma. Butch marks a change in his reaction to succeeding wars. Fr. Bert believes that "*trauma cannot be cured but can definitely be healed.*" A total cure is not possible because tyrannical memories remain. However, the Pikit stories show that healing is possible. Fr. Bert calls this healing as a process of cleansing and transformation. He gives as an example the transformation of his hatred towards Muslims into compassion. He believes that "*war brings out the beast and the best in people.*" These two metaphors, "beast" and "best", describe the positive and negative effects of war and allude to the ongoing spiral process of healing where pain and healing, anger and compassion can exist side by side.

The Pikit respondents experienced several layers of trauma from repeated wars and displacements in two waves, as young children or teenagers from 1970 to 1977 and again from 1997 to 2003. Nevertheless, at each crisis, they rise up and rebuild and even go further to become instruments of healing for their people. In this spiral healing process, the element of time is very important. Lumen affirms time as a great healer. When the anchors of home and routine daily life have been destroyed by severe trauma, the process of recovery and healing is slow and gradual and occurs over months and years. Because healing takes time, one should let nature and God work. Fr. Bert describes his enlightenment as a step by step process. *"Sa umpisa, letra-letra unti-unti nagiging word."* He is proud of the slow but definite success they are reaping in their peace work in Pikit. *"Pakonti-konti."* Andik agrees. *"Dahan-dahang nagagamot."* Butch describes healing as a *"leisurely process, like a certified seed of peace and goodness that grows in a leisurely way."*

Healing is a complementary and cyclical process. The healing process connects the family and individual in a complementary fashion. The family serves as the seedbed for the individual's healing process and the source of models and mentors of compassion and peace. Fr. Bert has his mother; Adel has her grandmother and Mike, his uncle and granduncle. Likewise, the individual's healing benefits the whole family. Lumen's healing brings back peace and security to her family. Mike, Butch, and Andik influence their families through their healing steps. This results in their families joining them in their common cause as advocates for peace. The family systems approach used by BALAY is seen as effective in counseling and psychosocial intervention for trauma survivors.

The cyclical nature of healing includes not only the family but also the community at large. The Pikit stories provide us with a description of the vastness of healing. The ripple effect creates a series of widening circles of healing starting from the person. The person becomes a seed and symbol of healing and

then, later, sending healing waves to his family, his immediate group and the community as a whole. Fr. Bert and his Peace Team are such symbols. Nalapaan becomes a model space for peace which influences other barangays of Pikit and inspires other towns and even other countries, as groups of people trek to Pikit to learn and duplicate their peace program.

The cycle of healing is also intergenerational. This facilitates the healing of war trauma that is transferred from generation to generation. The Andik family is a classic example. Andik inherits the trauma from his father who worried about his sons' safety because of the blanket suspicion of the military against Muslim men. Taya inherits Andik's trauma of aborted schooling. Taya's child cries, signaling another layer of war wounds in the youngest generation. In the same manner, the Andik family goes through a cyclical process of healing. Andik rises above his personal trauma and becomes the shepherd and Moses of Nalapaan. His shining example touches Taya who becomes a healer herself through her work in BALAY. Together, Andik and Taya are leading their people to the path of safety and healing. The three Muslim fathers, Andik, Butch, and Mike have influenced their families to join their path of healing and become families for peace. They give active support and participation to the Pikit Parish's Culture of Peace seminars and the Space for Peace program.

The importance of children and youth is underlined. They are the most vulnerable victims of war. On the other hand, they are also the foundation of healing for the family and the community, the source of hope that sustains the long, arduous process of healing. Just a little dance step from her youngest child sends healing sparks inside Taya. Lumen, Merlie, and Lee likewise regard their children as their stars of inspiration. Adel dedicates all her efforts to the next generation. Fr. Bert draws inspiration from his dedicated Muslim volunteer, Normina, and his committee of youth.

Healing has a spiritual and divine dimension. The spiritual dimension, first of all, is drawn from the respondents' religious traditions. All respondents, Christians and Muslims alike, held on to prayer in their most difficult moments. Ironically, the respondents' deep faith has pushed them to find a common ground, a meeting point that heals the division between their two religions. "*Yang ginagawa ni Fr. Bert is Islam.*" (Andik) "*Yung pananaw ng Islam sa peace, sa political, social, economic, walang pagkakaiba sa Christianity.*" (Butch) They discover that both their Christian and Muslim faiths uphold the prime value of peace and the common virtues of love for enemy, neighborly sharing, truth, goodness, and respect for creation.

But the spiritual healing also goes beyond religion, entering a mysterious sacred space, the undefined realm of the spirit. In unlikely moments, Fr. Bert and the other respondents confess that they feel drawn to a higher force, a higher authority. Lee, overcome by panic, when her husband was being shot, still found herself praying. The narratives attest to the great contribution that human intervention had in their healing. But they also talk of a silent healing, a deeper source of healing beyond human efforts. Andik and Taya are examples of the double dimension of healing. On the human level, their wounds remain. However, on a deeper level, at their core, they observably have become purer in spirit, embodiments of love and compassion. This is paralleled by Fr. Bert and his peace team. The threat of war continues in Pikit and is too enormous to be stopped or defeated by the small steps they have begun. But they plod on holding only to their belief in the power of healing and their faith in God's steadfast love.

The respondents use metaphorical descriptions of their healing experience that are full of spiritual connotation: "*conversion experience*", "*transformation of heart and soul*", a "*rebirth*". Fr. Bert's two metaphors are especially powerful. The first one, "*baptism of fire*" connotes intense renewal and cleansing not only on the physical and emotional level but also on the level

of the soul. The second, "*word became flesh wanting to be born*" is a picture of God's love becoming flesh in Fr. Bert and in Pikit.

A Theology of goodness. A surprise insight emerges. The Pikit respondents allude to acts of divine intervention or moments of serendipity to explain how healing is possible from trauma with such magnitude and monstrosity. Several of them describe a chain of kindness and goodness. From the respondents' experiences of healing, we discover that at every crisis and blow, somebody comes out and extends a helping hand, protecting the victims, cradling them and nourishing them back to wholeness and healing. The texts are replete with examples—the neighbors who give warning, the media van that helps Taya, the government vehicle that fetched the people, the Mayor and Barangay Captain who negotiated for their lives, Taya's neighbor who gives her food, the inter-religious committee that nourishes the community to recovery. To these we add the wide circle of sympathizers who have come to their village unannounced and provide unconditional love and care just when the survivors need it.

A powerful healing insight comes out. Despite the monstrosity of war, **healing is possible because of the abundance of goodness in the world—much, much more than evil.** Goodness is the stuff of which humanity is made of – plain, simple goodness that comes in ordinary and extraordinary forms, catching, shielding, and healing victims of trauma in their moments of loss and helplessness. We can visualize a net of interlocking goodness surrounding the world and humanity. This circle of healing and protecting love is an expression of Gods' unwavering presence that carries survivors of war trauma and shields them with the truth that healing is indeed possible.

This insight affirms Andik's credo of goodness ("*Kahit ano ang mangyari, kabutihan pa din.*") and his unshakable belief in the abundant stored help from God ("*Maraming baon ang tulong ng Panginoon sa atin.*"). God's presence is seen and felt through this force of human goodness that would not allow life to be defeated

by the destruction of war. *"Basta nandiyan yung Panginoon, nandiyan din yung tao na tutulong sa iyo."* Merlie and Taya, speaking for the women, affirm this. *"Hindi kami pinababayaan ng Diyos."*

Healing is peace come to life. The study reveals a strong interrelation between healing and peace. The respondents emphasize that their healing process is dependent on the presence and growth of peace in their community and in the whole world. The healing of trauma in individuals and families serves as a foundation for peace. The fruits of peace work in communities likewise facilitate the healing of war wounds among the village people. Their healing is enhanced as they see the slowly emerging reconciliation in their community. Adel talks about the children's camp that BALAY conducted in Dalingaoen. Fr. Bert fondly recalls the convergence of Muslims, Christians and Lumads during a memorable ordination in 2003. The members of the Peace Team and the Andik family all talk about the Space for Peace Program and the Culture of Peace seminars that slowly but effectively heal the layers of bias and mistrust between the once opposing sectors of their communities. Adel is excited about how this culture of peace is catching even the military. Butch adds to the list the successful peaceful actions like the Bantay Ceasefire and the Bakwet Power initiated by the Mindanao People's Caucus. These little successes and pockets of peace accumulate and convince the respondents that peace is possible. Butch proudly calls all these steps as *"peace alive"*.

DISCUSSION

Healing as a Process of Repairing and Making Whole Again

Healing is a process of restoring a damage or injury to a sound or healthy state, to its original integrity. The English word 'healing' comes from the words, 'helen', 'heelen', and 'heilen', which mean 'whole'. Healing, then, is the process of making whole again by repairing the damages of war. The study also

reveals that healing should affect both the material and the psychological levels since war harms and causes injury on these two levels.

Peters (1996) described war as "the great traumatizer." War destroys people's lives, homes, and villages; it separates loved ones; it takes away material properties, bonds of friendship, and feelings of security. These descriptions of the different forms of trauma caused by war are similar to three of the sub-themes that emerged from the study—connectedness, sense of power, sense of dignity. The fourth subtheme, rational understanding, is similar to *disorientation*, which is mentioned by Yocum (1999) together with other effects of trauma—depression, feelings of lack of safety and vulnerability, fears and anxieties, grief and aggression.

War and armed conflict shatters hope through the destruction of social relations (Peters, 1996). The study showed the importance of connecting with people, including those from the other side. This supports Garcia's (1993) statement that reconnecting, healing and reconciliation are necessary and possible in post-conflict societies. However, this study's results differ from the observation by Straub (1999) and Errante (1999). From their study of communities like Rwanda, they say that trauma work is difficult in places with on-going conflict, where many groups are geographically intertwined. People have difficulty walking in their communities and cannot pretend that the enemy lives in another country. The Pikit stories show that reconnecting between opposing sides and the healing of war trauma is possible even while the war continues. Both Rwanda and Pikit have a history of co-existence and inter-marriage between its peoples before the war began. It has to be noted of course, that the genocide in Rwanda was more widespread, causing indiscriminate killing of civilians. The difference between the two communities may also lie in the fact that the Pikit people were able to take steps to regain their power and reclaim their community through their Space for Peace approach.

War destroys and also corrupts people's sense of power. For the victims, the experience of overwhelming fear and anxiety produces a profound sense of powerlessness that causes paralysis in many forms. A hallmark characteristic of trauma, for both child and adult victims, is the extreme feeling of helplessness aroused (Monahon, 1993). The suddenness, unpredictability, and overwhelming nature of the experience combine to create terror. The study is replete with forms of powerlessness experienced by the war survivors. Peters (1996) described the radical alteration of identity. Victims of trauma find themselves in a state of shock and bewilderment caused by their new and frightening circumstances. This captures the state of physical and emotional paralysis described by the respondents in the study.

Monahon (1993) stated that victims of trauma need a safe release of feelings, the recovery of a sense of mastery and control in life, and restoration of a sense of trust in themselves and the future. Corollary to this, the Pikit respondents narrate different ways by which they regain their sense of power and control over their lives.

Like the other survivors, Lee is left with a heavy burden but takes hold of her new situation. She is learning how to manage their livelihood. Lee's empowerment is consonant with McCarthy's (1988) observation of family members grieving the death of a loved one. He noted that death places family members in a situation where they are forced to leap or be pushed head-on into the unknown. The death of one's spouse brings up issues of self-definition and prompts the need for developing a new identity (Murray, 1994). The narratives are examples of how the members of a family rally and gather their inner resources in order to rise from the crisis caused by war. Burr and Klien (1994) described this process in terms of a family's "regenerative power", denoting a family's ability to recover from stress or crisis. At times when the family's resources were inadequate due to losses from war, the presence of community support systems was very helpful.

The self-talk used by the women in the study is similar to what McCarthy (1988) called *auto-suggestion*, which is the practice of changing one's behavior through giving directions to one's mind in the form of silently verbalized orders. It is a way to learn to consciously program your subconscious mind by telling it how to react. Lee's method of setting aside her thoughts is mentioned by Reidhart, Weinstein, and Conry (1985) as the method of thought stopping, which is a way of stopping the internal voices that keep us anxious.

War also destroys rational systems of thinking and forms its own rules—an eye for an eye. It creates a cycle of irrational actions, counter actions, and counter reactions. The recurrence of war comes from ignorance, from wrong perceptions, judgments, and biases. People are grouped into oppressive labels, causing blanket hatred, hostility, and discrimination of the perceived enemy or weaker groups. The stories show how war throws victims into chaos and confusion, disrupting basic feelings of safety and turning their sense of reason and order upside down.

Healing, then, means the restoration of rational understanding. Rev. Thich Nhat Hanh (1992), a noted Buddhist monk and peacemaker teaches that violence and conflict come from wrong perceptions. Understanding comes from right perceptions, from a sense of knowing and seeing the bigger, broader picture. Love and peace are borne of understanding. To reach this level of understanding, Thich Nhat Hanh encourages the practice of looking deeply and mindful listening.

Fr. Bert and his Peace Team demonstrate how they heal the irrationality of war through their research and study that led to a change in their perceptions. Through their peace seminars and conferences and together with their partner organizations in the Mindanao People's Caucus, they try to spread this new perspective to as many groups and communities as possible. In this way, they widen the base of rational understanding that can slowly neutralize the chaos and irrationality of war.

It can be said that the findings confirm the elements of the healing process gathered from the review of literature—telling the story, grieving the loss, repentance and forgiveness, connecting with others' pain, and building trust. This study makes a contribution by bringing out examples of other elements of healing that have not been or have sparsely been covered by previous work—reconnecting with nature and creation, research and study to restore understanding and sense of order, reclaiming space (family and community), restoring balance of power through inter-religious tri-people structures, role of elders and memories as early seeds for peace, and the deeper, silent dimension of spiritual healing.

Healing as a Process of Coming Home

In war, one of the strongest hit is the family and the home. War causes family stress, which refers to any pressure exerted on the family system, a disturbance of the family's stable state (Burr and Klien (1994). War threatens both the physical and the emotional home which refers to the family bond and unity. The family plays an important role as the locus of healing from war trauma. In times of crisis, the Pikit families draw support from the extended family and the bigger community and society. This circle of healing validates the findings of Peters (1996), who, in describing her Health and Peace projects in different areas of conflict, underlines the need for traditional support systems for healing grief and trauma. The extended family networks emerged as the primary source of support. With the help of many supporters and sympathizers, the people of Pikit transform what were once ghost barangays into vibrant spaces for peace. This base of support is widened by the Mindanao People's Caucus which connects and offers a refuge for all peace advocates and organizations. "Connection with others is clearly a universal source of help and hope" (Monahon, 1993).

Healing as a Spiral Process

In one sense, healing is a chronological process that follows certain stages. Macnab (1993) describes the stages that are common to the healing process of all survivors of trauma (initial impact, recoil, reorganization). The study reveals, on the other hand, that healing is not a fixed state of perfect wholeness and does not follow a straight line of clearly defined phases. Rather, it is a spiral process, because of the recurring nature of trauma, which subjects people to a series of repeated ups and downs. There is a unique ebb and flow to the process of recovery for each child or adult. Progress can be uneven, occurring in fits and starts (Monahan, 1993). McKenry and Price (1994) revealed that more recently, family stress research has moved beyond the linear relationship of stressor, mediator, and response to look at the process of coping and adaptation over time.

Healing as a Complementary and Cyclical Process

While the trauma of war affects the individual and family in a complementary pattern, the healing process also connects the family and individual in a complementary, cyclical fashion. This follows the family system theory. Goldenberg and Goldenberg (1991) called this "circular causality."

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of the family discusses the interplay between the micro, meso and macro systems. The family's ecosystem consists of historical, cultural, and economic influences (Lefrancois, 1990). Thus, the family's response to a stressor event is influenced by living in a particular historical period, its cultural identification, and the economic conditions of society. The experience of the Pikit families shows that poverty is a powerful mediator that increases war's impact on families. The integration of personal healing with collective healing also follows Bronfenbrenner's theory.

Goldenberg and Goldenberg (1991) described the family as a natural social system extending over at least three generations. A recurring pattern of interactional sequences is observed in families and all members participate in these sequences. The Andik family and the other respondents demonstrate that healing follows an intergenerational cycle.

The Spiritual and Divine Dimension of Healing

The narratives reveal that aside from the human dimension, which involves a logical, deliberate process, there is a divine dimension in healing. The Pikit stories show us the magnitude of war trauma that exceeds human limits. These are layer upon layer of war wounds in different dimensions, recurring repeatedly and transferred from generation to generation. The respondents' survival and healing can challenge established theories of stress management and recovery. At certain points, it was more logical that they break down or lose their mental and emotional faculties or retaliate and become walking bombs of hatred. The study revealed that healing is possible because of the respondents' unwavering faith in a force bigger than themselves. This faith acts as a spiritual home, a refuge, an invisible shield and ground that sustain them even when their physical home and everything else falls apart.

The study validates the earlier findings by Monahon (1993) that faith and religion help victims of trauma to heal and rediscover the good in beauty of creation. The current study, however, goes beyond religion and describes a deeper spiritual dimension, the silent healing that enters the undefined realm of the spirit. The study reveals that the inner resource of a person makes self-healing possible. However, it also reveals a deeper source beyond our grasp as humans. There is a space in the healing process where only the person and God can enter. Because of this mysterious, ambiguous space, the unexplainable happens. Fr. Bert talks of his dramatic transformation from a shy priest to a perennial speaker for big groups and his leap of faith when he took the job of Inter-religious Coordinator, despite all the evident dangers it would bring.

Furthermore, an extra insight comes out of the study—the presence of an interlocking net of goodness that carries and shields survivors of war trauma. Healing is possible because of the abundance of goodness in the world. This is perhaps the most important insight from this study—the belief in the definite power of goodness, as an expression of God’s love, which might just emerge as the plain, simple antidote to war. It is significant to note that this special insight comes from Andik, who, at first felt unworthy to be interviewed because of his lack of educational attainment.

Healing as Peace Come to Life

The survivors’ experience of shared pain unleashes universal love that enable people to cross borders. Bronfenbrenner’s theory of the interplay between the micro, meso and macro systems is combined with the Pikit experience of the deeper dimension of faith and compassion. The process of healing from the wounds of war brings out the definite reality of humanity being connected as one whole, one healing circle of love. Pia Gyger and Thich Nhat Hanh, two modern visionaries for peace, described this new vision of humanity. Gyger (1996) believed that people are evolving into one humanity. Thich Nhat Hanh (1992) explained the principle of interbeing. He stressed that it is only from the insight of non-duality that non-violence can be born. Adel’s grandmother and Mike’s brother knew it from their heart. *“Lahat kayo magkakapatid.”* When we can realize this, then we can really heal the wounds of war. Bronfenbrenner, Gyger, Thich Nhat Hanh and the respondents say the same thing—“one world, one body”, “the supra system”, “the interconnected web of life”. It is a hope, a vision and a necessity. The Pikit narratives are powerful testimonies of this vision slowly becoming real in the communities of Nalapaan, Dalingaoen and the whole of Pikit. It is their prayer that their vision of peace will grow and connect with the efforts in other places so that the whole of humanity can regain the peaceful paradise they once knew.

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