RESTORYING AS GIVING A VOICE TO MINORITY WOMEN

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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As a development communication practitioner, she has worked on the themes of maternal and child health, reproductive health, adolescent health, infectious diseases (i.e., HIV/AIDS, TB), emergency health, sustainable agriculture, population-health-environment (PHE), renewable energy, governance, climte change and conflict and disaster response with the following organizations: Asian Development Bank, United Sates Agency for International Development, Helen Keller International, ACDI/VOCA, Manoff Group, Management Sciences for Health, Canadian International Development Agency, and others.

In between her full-time job and creative writing projects, she metamorphoses into a potter / terracotta and ceramic artist, backpacker, cyclist, yoga practitioner and an activist for the environment, and women's, children's and indigenous peoples' rights.

Dedicated to:

Sky Luna Eda Serafica who had given me crazy love from the time she was born,

and for whose future I risk "troubling" the problem of gender violence

because it must be solved

Dr. John Raymund Wesley Dulawan whose serenity is tested every time

I trouble problems that must be solved and whose patience will continue to be

tested in so many more lifetimes

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Ethical considerations

This inquiry removed specific references to locale to protect the security of the women, the researcher and the university from possible repercussions given the sensitive nature of the topic and the fragile environment of the region under study.

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Introduction and Rationale of Study

"Know that no one is silent though many are not heard.
Work to change this."
(Excerpted from a longer piece from the Syracuse collective)

"Stories matter. Many stories matter.
Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign,
but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize.
Stories can break the dignity of a people,
but stories can also repair that broken dignity."
(Chamamanda Ngozi Adichie)

This inquiry covers women belonging to indigenous groups that identified themselves as minorities in their practice of another religion and their geographic isolation from the political and economic axis of the country. Being women and indigenous, their lack of agency in the public sphere prompted Angeles (1998) to describe them further as a "minority within a minority." This distinction added extra dimensions to their status particularly in their exposure to religious interpretations and cultural practices that challenge women's rights. This minority status defines and influences the way they communicate and tell their stories about gender violence in the context of religious interpretations, legal (state) laws, customs and cultural practices.

The gender violence referred to in this research pertains to early, forced and arranged marriages, and polygamy – which cut across discussions on patriarchy and gender relations, sex and sexuality, morality and marriage – erstwhile public-private tensions in intimate relationships that characterize the women's storytelling as minorities.

"Gender violence" is defined by the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) as "any act of gender-based violence that results

in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." Article 2 of the Declaration lists gender violence as encompassing the physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including dowry-related violence, marital rape, and other traditional practices harmful to women.

The is a dearth in the communication scholarship about gender violence in the context of religious interpretations, legal laws, customs and practices from the point of view of women as minorities. This dearth may be rooted in the prevalence of the dominant view which the Asian Muslim Action Network in the Philippines (2004) identifies as the "monotony of male voices among Moro academics and the religious learned" that "appropriate (religious) worldview and worldly knowledge." With most stories told from the point of view of the ruling interests and the normative order (Richardson, 1990 as cited by Miller & Glassner, 2004), women – who are *political, demographic and religious minorities* – are reduced as holders of *minority views* particularly for delicate, morally-laden issues. Gender violence in early, forced and arranged marriages, and polygamy perpetuated in the context of religious interpretations, legal laws and customs are morally-laden and sensitive. An inquiry then is merited – into whether communication spaces are reduced, expanded or created when minority women are positioned as storytellers of their own complicated and sensitive narratives, and how collaborating with development communicators in the restorying or retelling of the stories can give minority women a voice.

To contribute to the development communication scholarship, this research puzzles over how the women, as minorities holding minority views, actually make sense of and construct their own narrative interpretations of gender violence in early,

forced and arranged marriages, and polygamy. This research inquires further whether this sense-making carves out communication spaces in intimate and private areas where they may have been silenced or have chosen to be silent, and rendered invisible or have preferred invisibility for safety. The themes of silence and voice refer to the possibility of women's access to communication platforms, the conditions and obstacles to their being heard including the systems and process through which women are being silenced (Rakow and Wackwitz, 2004). This research also explores how minority women through their own narratives, confronted themes of silence and misrepresentation to exercise control over a story and the storytelling process and convey their minority voices over the dominant frames and structures.

Development communication and its various evolutions, particularly communication for development, are based on a principle that reality is socially constructed but more often, specific realities – such as development issues, agenda and directions – are imposed by dominant power structures. Development communication, according to Nora Quebral (1971), is an art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfillment of the human potential (Ongkiko and Flor, 1998). The World Congress on Communication for Development (2006) defined Communication for Development as "a social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods. It is also about seeking change at different levels including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating and learning for sustained and meaningful change."

Development communication is about people and processes, mediating the strengthening of minority voices to remove impediments that inhibit their full and

genuine participation in development initiatives. Storytelling is among the two-way horizontal approaches that the World Congress on Communication for Development (2006) identified to give voice to the most affected by development initiatives so they can define their situation, and identify and implement solutions to issues that affect their lives.

This paper uses narrative inquiry, a study of experience as narratives (Clandinin and Huber, 2010), as a qualitative research method to inquire into the construction and reconstruction of the women's personal and social stories, and into minority women as both storytellers and characters in their own and others' stories. Using narrative inquiry as a methodology is a development communication response to gender violence issues as it allows development communicators access to a plethora of perspectives that have been traditionally marginalized. Narrative inquiry as methodology for communication research gives development communicators a rich understanding that might be inaccessible by other means (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) particularly for morally-laden and sensitive inquiries.

This inquiry puzzles how "restorying," as a narrative inquiry technique of retelling and rewriting the minority women's stories through collaboration – with the development communicator as inquirer – can give the minority women a voice. Through restorying, narrative inquiry allows development communicators to describe the process of personal change rooted in the minority women's stories of how they live the inconsistencies or consistencies of gender violence done in the name of religion, culture and practices. Stories have what Galloway (2012) described as unrestrained power, value and message, and narrative inquiry is "a means to communicative action" for all involved in the storytelling processes, the minority women as well as the inquirer. For women with difficult stories, narrative inquiry

carves what can start out as personal communication spaces, and with the development communicators as inquirers and co-authors of the stories, "creat(e) space in a new direction towards new possibilities" (*ibid*).

Feminist communication theories deal with the themes of difference, voice and representation (Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004). For this inquiry, "restorying" is treated in consideration of those themes: (1) as a narrative device pointing out conditions and obstacles to minority women's being heard and the systems through which they are rendered silent *(ibid)* or have chosen to be silent at the same time positioning the stories within a chronological sequence (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990) for readability, practical use and resonance or disturbance for a wider public; (2) a participatory method of collecting stories and documenting them within the context of political and economic systems that establish dominant-minority relationships and points of view; (3) a collaborative strategy to contribute to co-authored narratives among women across borders which Razack (2013) described as mobilizing experience to "write against relations of power that produce social violence, and to imagine and enact their own visions and ethics of social change."

This research posits that minority women's very act of storytelling their difficult stories challenged the dominant narrative. This research further posits that in restorying the minority women's stories, both the inquirer and the women, in the process of collaboration, not just carved out public communication spaces with the doubling of their voices but also created narratives of resistance.

Survivors of violence, particularly sexual violence, are told implicitly or explicitly not to talk about their experiences, "and when they do are either not believed in or are belittled or blamed for what happened" (Fivush, 2010, citing Enns, McNeilly, Corkery & Gilbert, 1995). Women, however, are not condemned to follow or

continue disempowering storylines passed on through traditional institutions but can, in fact, use stories to frame tensions and illustrate struggles.

Narrative inquiry as a research method can be considered as what Galloway (2012) described as a communicative strategy to describe the minority women's risk-taking exploration to illuminate a voyage that can be personal at first but which carries societal implications with potential for transformation. As Bochner (2002) pointed out, "if our stories never thwarted or contested....we would have no expectation of change, no account of conflict, no real demand to account...." Using narrative inquiry as a development communication methodology, this paper provides minority women with the communication platform to work through their own experiences to facilitate sense-making and help them "organize lived events – many of which are messy, multivocal, complicated or confusing – into more manageable packages that make sense of the context of their lives and relationships" (Koenig Kellas, 2008).

It is not only the minority women who create communication spaces through narratives because restorying, as a development communication approach, essentially necessitates listening and building trust to identify impediments to communication and full participation in development processes. These are values which Ongkiko and Flor (1998) and signatories to the Rome Consensus asserted as essential for development communicators. The Rome Consensus is a document that emerged from the World Congress on Communication for Development which builds the case for the role of communication for development as a strategy and a major pillar for development and change. Practitioners of development communication are not neutral, detached or passive observers. Any agent enacting sustained and genuine social change is obligated to forge inclusion, diversity, participation and self-

determination. Using narrative inquiry in communication research, development communicators collaborate in co-authoring stories as Clandinin (2013) described it, "we become part of participants' lives and they part of ours.... We are not objective inquirers."

The relational and dialogic nature of narrative inquiry allows minority women the choice to go beyond the closeted discussions of their immediate environment and tell their stories to a slowly widening circle of public to encourage wider participation and change. In the process of dialogue, development communication practitioners are behooved to pay attention to, ask the hard questions from research participants and themselves, and evolve approaches in treating sensitive and morally-laden social issues that have not been adequately documented or addressed.

Stories around gender violence involve numerous perspectives from the points of view of the perpetuator and survivor, direct witnesses and members of immediate circles whose lives are affected by the conflict. In the restorying, the perspective of the inquirer joins the many layers of voices and in these cases, there will always be what Fivush (2010) described as "multiple narratives in tension" and it is this plurality, multiplicity and difference (Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004) of voices that feminists use to help identify minority voices that poke holes in the dominant narratives.

As development communicators are not disinterested and non-aligned researchers, it is important to clarify their own voices and not just state biases or limitations in any development communication research. Part of the process of mapping this inquiry is the documentation and articulation of a crucial question: for minorities with issues of voice and representation at stake especially for a morally-laden and sensitive topic as gender violence in the context of religion, laws and

customs, how can the inquirer delineate her own voice and interpretations with that of the minority women's?

Development communicators cannot and should not hide themselves in the observations and conclusions as if, as Bochner (2002) contended, research reports represent authorship with a "voice of nobody (in particular), from nowhere (in particular)." Connelly & Clandinin (1990) clarified that narrative inquiry is not just about collecting stories as data but a "process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying as the story proceeds." This opportunity for collaboration through restorying is consistent with the principles of participation and inclusivity that development communication espouses to open communication spaces especially for minority voices.

This inquiry used creative non-fiction for the inquirer to co-author the stories with the minority women, not just to chronicle and report facts but deliver them in ways that will move end-users and readers toward a deeper understanding (Leavy, 1975) of gender violence in the context of religion, culture and practices. Creative non-fiction is "true stories, well told" (Gutkind, no date indicated). The use of stories and storytelling as end products of this communication research is not just practical but also clarifies issues of representation and voice.

Writing the outputs of the minority women's stories using creative non-fiction is a way of putting forward the researcher's own authentic voice and where she comes from in her own observations of process, time, space and context. This way, the author is seen, felt and respected (Bochner, 2002). Chapter 4 of this paper, "Restorying the minority women's stories on gender violence" depicts true events but written creatively, using a genre which Blair (2006) citing Gutkind (1998) described as employing techniques normally associated with fiction writing such as dialogue,

scene and detailed description of character and place. Researchers such as Beattie (1997) as cited by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) have also urged inquirers to experiment with literary forms.

The *hijab* (headscarf or veil) is used as a restorying technique, symbol and metaphor in Chapter 4 for three purposes: (1) it clarified the inquirer's voice in her co-authorship of the women's stories; (2) its use as a literary technique allowed the inquirer to observe narrative tensions in the women's carving of communication spaces, as they veil and unveil, and their process of sense-making, looking backward or forward, inward or outward; and, (3) being primarily a women's garb, it showed the multitudes of voices surrounding its use and meaning, and the contradicting interpretations about women's covering – as a religious requirement, a cultural heritage, a political statement and symbol of pride or practical gear. The use of the *hijab* as a restorying technique, symbol and metaphor is discussed at length in Chapter 1 under the section sub-heading, "Of veiling and identity: the hijab as symbolism for contradictions."

The outputs of this research have medium- and long-term applications. First, this research sought to enrich the development communication discourse by exploring how minority and marginalized sectors can create communication spaces by collaborating with development communicators in the restorying of sensitive narratives to strengthen their voice and representation. Second, applications of the research results have already been negotiated with an NGO based in the general locale close to where the women live – to contribute in the design of its Violence against Women and Children (VAWC) communication program (particularly on counseling and advocacy) aimed specifically for minority women and children. There

is yet no dedicated VAWC program ran by government, private or civil society institutions which is accessible and focused on the needs of these minority women.

It is the practical application for establishing VAWC communication program for minority women and children that partly directed this paper's use of narrative inquiry as a mode of communication research. Bochner (2002) contended that many communication studies have been done from the position of neutrality and distance, oriented mostly towards facts and not much over meanings, and gripped by certain disciplinary norms that "idealize the significance of subtractions over details, stability over change, graphs over stories." Narrative inquiry invites immediate end users (i.e., minority women themselves and designers of VAWC programs in their locale) of development communication studies to think with stories – but this research stretches it further. If the results are to be practically used, and used well, they have to be reader- and user-friendly, meaning, the process of minority women's creation of communication spaces by telling their difficult stories – should use storytelling approaches as well.

As gender violence and the women's experiences are complex and multifaceted, this inquiry did not attempt to define or draw the conceptual boundaries between religion, religious law and gender or categorize whether violence as experienced or as told by the minority women was perpetuated in the context of religion and religious interpretations or custom or tradition. Rather, it is the women who are positioned to be in control as storytellers as they carved out communication spaces and socially constructed meaning (Bauman, 1986) from the impact of political and social structures to their storied experiences. In the act of communicating their difficult stories, the minority women have possibly carved new ways of communicating or created new narratives which Fivush (2010) called as narratives of

resistance. These narratives, developed within groups, challenge the explanations and moral imperatives imposed by the dominant narrative (Fivush, 2010).

The structure of the thesis was thought out for the practical use of the designers and implementers of VAWC communication programs for minority women at the same time balancing the requirements of academic rigor. Chapter 1, "Mapping the story of gender violence in religious interpretations, legal laws, customs and practices," provides a blueprint on why minority women are minorities holding minority views, and traces the details of gender violence perpetuated in the name of religious interpretations, legal laws and practices – and how these create or shrink communication spaces. Chapter 1 also goes through the merging of religion, laws and customs, contradictions and inconsistencies raised by feminist scholars and human rights advocates to equip program planners with lenses by which to see how and why minority women tell stories the way they do.

Chapter 2, "Shaping the telling of morally-laden narratives by minorities," outlines the dominant-minority views on gender violence and how these shape minority women's creation of communication spaces. The chapter also raises the development communication conundrum in handling sensitive issues and how practitioners' collaboration with minorities in the restorying processes can locate gaps and possible approaches in VAWC counseling and advocacy.

Narrative inquiry as a methodology to expand communication spaces is discussed in Chapter 3, along with procedural details the inquirer went through to collaborate with the minority women in telling and building the stories. Chapter 3 also details the merits of using creative non-fiction in the process of restorying and ensuring that the research outputs are end-user- and reader-friendly.

Chapter 4, "Restorying the minority women's stories on gender violence" captures the stories written in the creative non-fiction genre. This chapter shows the chronicling and sense-making of the minority women's experience on gender violence, and reveals how storytelling and their expansion of communication spaces contributed to struggles for self-acceptance, resistance, rejection or transcendence. The stories will comprise the development communication toolkit for VAWC advocacy in the women's locale.

The researcher's summary reflections are covered in Chapter 5. The inquiry's recommendations on possible development communication approaches for VAWC program planners as well as practitioners faced with morally-laden and sensitive social issues are also outlined in this chapter.

My interest in exploring how minorities carve communication spaces particularly when telling morally-laden, difficult and sensitive stories was fertilized, conceived and birthed in family planning clinics in the region where the minority women live. As Behavior Change Communication Advisor for a maternal and child health, and reproductive health project in the women's locale, I led a team to test a group counseling and communication tool baptized as *Tumpukan Na!* (group action sessions developed under a United States Agency for International Development maternal and child health project) among pregnant and lactating minority women. The tool optimized the women's penchant for gathering together to tell stories, but this time, the storytelling was carefully structured to negotiate behavioral messages on safe pregnancies and delivery, and child care through interactive exercises and games.

In between the jibbing on early pregnancies and yearly deliveries, and mournings on stillbirths and children dying before they could reach their fifth birthdays, the

minority women also offered tidbits of their stories on beatings, abuses and rape in intimate relationships. To me, they carved out even the tiniest communication spaces in a possible platform to tentatively blur the border between private and public discourses. The dominant narrative familiar to me then was that gender violence did not exist in their communities or if they do, only very isolated cases happen in rural villages.

Everywhere my team tested and implemented *Tumpukan Na!* among the other ethnolinguistic groups in the region covered by this inquiry – women managed to tell a bit of their side of the story albeit warily, often self-censoring and fearful. And with their brave tellings of delicate stories that challenge the dominant narrative, I am compelled to ask: how do minority women who have experienced gender violence disclose their individual stories against the dominant narrative that this violence does not exist or if they do, there is safety in individual and collective silence? How can their own storytelling processes create and expand communication spaces for other women?

I do not belong to a minority group but I wear a similar *hijab* (veil) of my own shaping. I enter this inquiry as a narrative inquirer with my own stories and storytelling practices as a feminist and development communication practitioner confronting structured silences, invisibility, voice and representation when faced with sensitive, morally-laden issues. I enter this inquiry with friends' warnings in my head to take care, to tread cautiously because as the women risked their communication spaces, already limited as they are, to tell me their stories, I may also be risking my own space to retell their stories. Or with them, we can create narratives of resistance.

I enter this inquiry also as a creative writer who acknowledges the power generated when sidelined voices gain control over their stories, and a social activist who uses narratives to "trouble" a problem that must be solved (Fivush, 2010 citing Bruner, 1990).

CHAPTER 1

Mapping the Story of Gender Violence in Religious Interpretations, Legal Laws, Customs and Practices

The women as "minority inside a minority"

The minority women covered in this inquiry belong to several ethnolinguistic groups comprising approximately 3.8 million (2012, National Statistics Office) of the country's 98 million population (2010 census). According to Angeles (1998), the women are members of the largest minority group in the country. Their minority status is anchored not just on religious distinction as they practice another religion but also on their geographical location being isolated from the political and economic centers of the country. Aside from identifying themselves as practitioners of another religion, the people in the region occupy various ancestral territories, each with different languages and cultures – their indigenous identities adding to another layer of their minority status.

Sixty percent of this minority group in the country are women but although they are a demographic majority, they do not exercise decision-making particularly in the public sphere and this constitutes their being "a minority within a minority" (Angeles, 1998). This minority group practices cultural norms and traditions which are manifested in social relations which include the position and role of women. The roles of women and men were demarcated between the public and private spheres, with the women's decision-making process mostly confined to the domestic arena (*ibid*).

The minority women are governed by *adat* (custom), religious law as well as legal laws such as the Code of Muslim Personal Laws (CMPL or Muslim Code) promulgated through Presidential Decree 1083 in 1977. According to the Policy

Brief, Code of Muslim Personal Laws in the Philippines, the "CMPL recognizes the legal system of Muslims.... as part of the law of the land, codifies Muslim personal laws, and provides for the administration and enforcement of the Code through the establishment of (courts covering religious law)." The CMPL promulgation closely followed the signing of the first peace agreement in 1976 that provided a respite in the war between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) which led the armed resistance against heightening discrimination and marginalization waged on the indigenous population (Abubakar, 2004). For the over three million people displaced by the war (*ibid*), the observance of a ceasefire and temporary cessation of hostilities that came with the signing of the 1976 peace agreement, provided an almost decade-long pause, albeit with several minor skirmishes, to the struggle against discrimination and marginalization.

The peace agreement repositioned the war for self-determination in the legal and policy spheres. More than 35 years later, the spirit of that struggle took on gender dimensions as finally, the most recent preliminary peace agreement (2012) recognized that violence against women did not just result from contexts where there is external conflict but that violence took on many shapes in many spheres, and women's basic rights included protection from all forms of violence. But for the minority women, the war within continued, as no peace agreements or ceasefires were ever forged in the private sphere.

The map of gender violence in religious interpretations, legal laws, customs and practices

Gender is an important social exclusion principle, resulting in gender-based discrimination. The gendered nature of violence is highlighted to depict the

historically unequal power relations between men and women which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men, forcing women's subordinate status in society (UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993). The exclusion and discrimination from formal institutions such as the legal system as well as informal institutions, customary practices and traditions, add to the minority women's minority status. The UN Declaration acknowledged that though men and boys can also be victims of gender-based violence, they are less likely to be victims of physical violence from within the family or the couple. Psaila et al. (2016), citing a 2010 French report, *Rapport d'information sur les actes du colloque sur les mariages forces et les crimes dits d'honneur*, argued that being forced into marriage does not impact on the men's and boys' full societal inclusion, as they know they can have a life alongside and even outside of the forced marriage without honor-related consequences.

Gender violence exists in forced marriages, early and child marriages and polygamy. Country reports (5^{th} and 6^{th}) to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) have documented discriminatory provisions in the Muslim Code and in customary practices on polygamy, early and forced marriages. These provisions as well as customary practices are interpreted as religious, and have been used to discriminate against women and perpetuate gender violence (Asian Muslim Action Network in the Philippines, 2004). The blurring of the border between what is legally sanctioned versus what is currently practiced versus interpretations of religious texts, separately and in combination – have been used to justify early, arranged or forced marriages and polygamy (Cayanan, 2013).

Among the many external wars faced and survived by the minority women, their private wars on early, arranged and forced marriages, and polygamy have not been thoroughly documented, and thus, the dearth in communication scholarship. There will be no police reports, said Muti-Mapandi (2015), with community leaders adamant that there are no cases of violence against women in these communities. The stories on gender violence experienced by the women are dismissed as "no longer relevant for social discourse," according to the Asian Muslim Action Network in the Philippines (2004) citing Rasul (1994), elucidating the dearth of material on survivor-rooted narratives.

Forced Marriages. A marriage is described as "forced" when it takes place without the free or valid consent of one or both of the partners and involves either physical or emotional duress (Thomas, 2009). The Annual Report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2014) stated that "forced marriage is any marriage which occurs without the full and free consent of one or both of the parties and/or where one or both of the parties is/are unable to end or leave the marriage, including as a result of duress or intense social or family pressure."

Forced marriage can refer to both formal and informal unions, including marriages under customary law or traditions or mere cohabitation (*ibid*). Citing the European Parliament's (2008) more holistic definition of forced marriage, Psaila et al., (2016) included situations where individuals are not just coerced into marriage but forced to remain married due to cultural or religious patterns and even administrative reasons (such as immigration).

Article 16 (1) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1980) referred to forced marriage as a form of discrimination and gender violence against women. In its General Recommendation

No. 19 (1992), the CEDAW Committee referred to forced marriage as a practice resulting from "traditional attitudes by which women are regarded as subordinate to men or as having stereotyped roles." The UN General Assembly also passed the 2014 Resolution on Child, Early and Forced Marriage which declared that "forced marriage is a harmful practice that violates, abuses and impairs human rights and is linked to and perpetuates other harmful practices and human rights violations and that such violations have a disproportionately negative impact on women and girls."

Arranged marriages. Forced marriages, however, are different from arranged marriages in that the latter involves the parents and families of both parties playing a leading role in arranging the marriage but the ultimate decision on whether to marry or not lies with the individuals actually getting married (Huda, 2007). Many countries and communities consider arranged marriages as an established cultural tradition. However, in many cases, the difference between a forced and arranged marriage may just be semantics (*ibid*).

Early or child marriages. The CEDAW Committee defined "child marriage" (also referred to as "early marriage") in its General Recommendation (GR) No. 31, as "any marriage where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age," occurring when one or both parties have not expressed their full, free and informed consent. The CEDAW Committee in its General Comment No. 21 (1994) established that 18 is the minimum age for marriage. The United Nations Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (adopted in November 7, 1962) and CEDAW, 1980) mandate the consent of both parties and the registration of the marriage to ensure that both partners receive equal rights and protections.

The United Nations (UN) Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (adopted in November 7, 1962) considers "early marriage" as forced since minors, or children under the age of 18, are not capable of giving their valid consent to enter into marriage.

According to Psaila et al. (2016), forced and early marriages are a violation of human rights in that there is absence of meaningful consent from individuals entering into the marriages. Forced and early marriages are forms of gender-based violence highlighting the specific vulnerability of women and girls and the emotional, physical and sexual violence they suffer due to the practice (*ibid*).

Polygamy. Jonas (2012) referred to Koktevdgaard's (2008) definition of polygamy as a marriage which includes more than one partner. Relligious scholars agree that the there is only one verse that explicitly mentions polygamy in the sacred book (Jones, 2006), specifically referring to its "restorative function" for the protection of orphans and widows in a post-war context when a substantial number of male populations has exterminated or wiped out during warfare (Jonas, 2012, citing Yusuf, 1983). The technical term is actually "polygyny" (whereas "polyandry" refers to an arrangement where a woman is married to more than one husband). The notional occurrence of polyandry may possibly have driven the use of the more general term of polygamy to refer to a man marrying more than one wife (Jonas, 2012).

Country reports where the practice exists have documented gender violence in polygamous arrangements and presented these in successive United Nations general assemblies. In 1994, the CEDAW's General Recommendation No. 21 (13th session) on Equality in Marriage and Family Relations noted that while polygamy is practiced in a number of countries in accordance with personal or customary law

even if their constitutions guaranteed equal rights, in effect violating the constitutional rights of women. The CEDAW declared that "polygamous marriage contravenes a woman's right to equality with men, and can have such serious emotional and financial consequences for her and her dependents that such marriages ought to be discouraged and prohibited."

Contradictions in legal laws and religious interpretation

As they are governed by customs, legal laws such as the CMPL and religious law, minority women face contradictions on a daily basis on what is upheld as religious, what is legally sanctioned versus what is currently practiced. This clash among traditions, realities and religious teachings has spurred culturally-justified violence and inequality (Muti-Mapandi, 2015).

A review of literature shows that academics, religious scholars and NGOs advocating for reform have identified aspects where these inconsistencies exist, and it is in the blurring and gray areas where gender violence happens and is condoned. Downes (2004) supported this view, writing that in this minority group's world, personal status codes vary greatly, and "appear to support the notion that the ambiguities of religious texts can be exploited." It merits asking, however: in the narratives of minority women who have experienced gender violence, did they demarcate the fine lines between culture, practices and religious interpretations? Are there implications for development communication practitioners whether they do or they don't?

Women's groups have delineated specific legal provisions that are discriminatory to minority women and do not just condone gender violence but may actually abet it.

Legal laws. This differentiates legislation with customary law which is the unofficial law based on long-established customs of particular places and communities. The Muslim Code or CMPL coupled with other government concessions had the immediate effect of reducing violence that engulfed the country throughout the 70s (Chiarella, 2012). Women's groups, however, have pointed to its opposite effect on minority women, with the CMPL's discriminatory provisions contributing to violence against women.

Early marriage or child marriage is one of the contentious provisions (Art. 16) in the CMPL that caught the attention of feminists and human rights advocates. Puberty is viewed as a license for marriage even if the parties concerned are not ready to marry (Rasul, 2003). Only a guardian's (called "*wali*") consent is needed for adolescent girls to be married off (*ibid*). According to Nisa Ul-Haqq fi Bangsamoro (no date indicated), in some cases, girls between 12 and 15 years old can be married off upon approval by the District Court. Early marriages are either arranged, especially among political families making alliances with each other, or enforced on girls. The CMPL's legal sanction for early marriage effectively endorses the cultural tolerance for child marriages causing majority of girls in the region under study to marry before they reach 18 (*ibid*).

Forced marriages and bride abductions are seen as unfortunate but culturally accepted practices. Women are abducted by men and then forced to marry under threat of danger to life and limb (*ibid*). Once married either by forced or parental arrangements, there is "no preventive provision in the CMPL that outrightly declares as unlawful the practices of forcing women into contracting marriage through coercion or violent means" (Asian Muslim Action Network in the Philippines, 2004).

Instead of criminalizing the perpetrators of victims of sexual violence in bride abductions, the CMPL enforces marriage instead.

The CMPL provides for subsequent marriages (Art. 162) or polygamy requiring husbands to give prior notice to the Clerk of the Circuit Court, who shall, in turn, notify the wife or wives. Should any of them object, an Agama Arbitration Council can decide whether or not to sustain the objections (Nisa Ul-Haqq fi Minority, no date indicated). The marriage, however, is still valid even if the husband fails to follow the required procedure (*ibid*).

The Muslim Code did not only have discriminatory provisions, it also fails to protect women from violence and abuse. According to Busran-Lao (2005), the Muslim Code has no provisions that would "protect women from the abuse of certain rights by their husbands, particularly those pertaining to divorce and polygamy...a husband may divorce the wife without any reason."

It is the Muslim Code's (CMPL) ambiguity in stipulations on marriage that opens it to narrow, conservative interpretations (Asian Muslim Action Network in the Philippines, 2004). The Code's silence about offensive customary practices gives out the message that the country's religious law cannot satisfactorily protect the rights of (the) women (*ibid*).

The practice of early and forced marriages, and polygamy particularly among communities like these, has reached international attention (Cayanan, 2013). The 5th and 6th Country Report of the Philippine Government on the implementation of the UN CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) stated that provisions in the CMPL and Customary Law were discriminatory to women and inconsistent with the Family Code, Civil Code and other national laws.

Cayanan (2013) also quoted Atty. Evelyn Dunuan, then Commissioner of the Philippine Commission on Women during the UN CEDAW Convention reporting that the CMPL's provisions on polygamy, marriage under 18 and arranged marriages were discriminatory, and they should be in line with the CEDAW. Dunuan, however, also recognized the need to balance legislation with cultural sensitivities.

The sacred book is believed by the minority group covered by this inquiry to be the word of God, and the primary source of religious law (Ali, 1998). This religious law, however, does not form a single coherent body of law but is rather a collection of individual juristic opinions (Ali, 1998). In fact, "considerable differences continue to exist among jurists as to its requirements; hence the multiplicity of formulations on, among other subjects, women's human rights in (the religion)" (*ibid*).

It must be noted that various countries (where the minority group is dominant), formally expressed reservations to the CEDAW but on varied grounds and in varying degrees (Cayanan, 2013). The U.N. noted that these countries were not consistent in invoking religious law due to the absence of a unified interpretation of religious law (*ibid*). The countries, in fact, invoked different justifications for expressing their reservations showing the vast scope of judgments as to the nature and extent of conflict between the religious law and CEDAW requirements (Ali, 1998). Most of the reserved articles of the CEDAW pertained to or are related to family laws which have "always been jealously guarded by these states as being regulated by (religious) law" (*ibid*). The various interpretations of religious law and "divergent views on what constitute (religious) values and norms, thus pav(e) the way for national governments to use religion as an escape route from domestic and international legal obligations" (*ibid*).

It is apparent in the review of literature that substantial efforts are ongoing on the legal sphere to address the contradictions that exist among the minorities' customs (*adat*), legal laws (the Muslim Code) as well as practices that are often confused with religious dogma or culture. This inquiry attended to the question of whether these efforts have reached the minority women such that when they recount their stories of gender violence, the contradictions and confusion will show in their storytelling. Will storying these contradictions and confusion expand the carving of their communication space because they will seek to find meaning in their experiences? Or will the opposite occur – will they simply shut out the confusion by not talking about it?

The dominant-minority views on gender violence and how they shape narrative tensions

For the minority group covered by this inquiry, the adoption of an idea or practice is measured against whether it is compatible with or allowed in the religion and through the reading of the sacred book, scholars have deducted general religious principles that serve as guidelines to lead their daily lives (Devos, 2015).

While they may be many others, this paper covered two dominant narratives that exist in gender violence committed in the name of religious interpretations, legal laws and customs. Female scholars working on the agency and autonomy of minority women have resisted the meta-narrative, the universal story and blanket depiction of religion as oppressive to women, and instead frame gender violence in the interpretation and contextualization of religious texts (Salem, 2013).

Aside from delineating the legal provisions that are discriminatory to minority women and the CPML's failure to protect them from gender violence (discussed in

the previous section), women's groups and human rights advocates have also pointed to religious texts – their possible misinterpretations and ambiguities. Is gender violence inherent in religious texts? Is gender violence built into the customs and practices of the minorities? Do dominant power structures use religious texts, customs and practices to communicate their justification of gender violence?

The "prior text" of a reader of the sacred book, that is, the "cultural context in which the text is read" is influential in the interpretation of the reading (Wahud, 2000). A member of the minority community then will read the religious texts based on their cultural contexts, and will be most likely influenced by the dominant narratives about women and gender relations. The community's social construction of gender, even that held by minority women themselves, is part of their "prior text" and this historically and culturally determined views on gender according to Hidayatullah (2014), inevitably guides them in reading and understanding the sacred book.

Barlas (2002) argued that patriarchy has been read into the sacred book by classical scholars and interpreters to justify existing thoughts about women in an early era out of historical and social contexts. The interpretations of the sacred book are then contingent on who is reading it and in the context by which it is read.

Religious leaders have chided minority women who have objected to gender violence "for going against the (sacred book)" according to the Asian Muslim Action Network in the Philippines (2004). Using their interpretations of the religious text, these leaders questioned the women's attempts to communicate their experiences of gender violence committed in the name of religious interpretations, legal laws and customs.

This "going against the (sacred book)" has shaped the dominant narrative directing how the interpretations of the sacred book are shaped and communicated, and how, in turn, minority women tell their stories and make sense of them. Reading patriarchy into the sacred book is a function of the gatekeepers of the dominant narrative as "norms in the religious tradition that are discriminatory to women are a result of the fact that historically, it was solely in the hands of 'men' who acted as commentators and interpreters of the religious text as well as legislators, jurists and judges and people in power" (Ali, 1998).

The other dominant view shaping minority women's narratives and the way the communicate violence is the perception that gender violence, incidences of kidnapping for marriage, forced marriage and sexual molestation are isolated and rare. And if they do happen, these cases are un-religious and should be downplayed as mere procedural slips and breaches in social protocol (Asian Muslim Action Network in the Philippines, 2004).

Ali (1998) observed that "cultural practices discriminatory to women have been shrouded in religious belief whereas religious norms favouring women (are) conveniently ignored." Polygamy is a perfect example of this religious shrouding. According to Jones (2006), religious scholars concur that only one verse in the sacred book refers explicitly to polygamy – and this is often used to justify men's multiple marriages to satiate their sexual desires for more than one partner (Hidayatullah, 2014).

> And if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; But if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess. That will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice. (Ali: Sura 4, verse 3)

"Polygyny is an institution that has been misinterpreted, misunderstood, and misused" (Jones, 2006). Jurists have also used a second verse to further interpret the meaning of the more overt verse emphasizing that the sacred book does not exactly encourage it, and that restrictions are firmly put on the practice to prevent abuse particularly as polygyny is not for individual pleasure or indulgence (*ibid*).

As earlier discussed, social and historical contextualization are critical to frame the verse according to Hidayatullah (2014) citing Wadud (2000) and put restrictions on practices such as polygamy to specific conditions and situations. The verse is concerned with addressing a historical situation in which war orphaned many children in communities in the 7th century, the context being that male guardians were allowed to marry up to four female orphans to protect their wealth within the legal structure of marriage (*ibid*). The limitation to four wives showed the verse's condition for equitable treatment of orphans. This dated context, Wadud (2000) argued, requires that the verses be reevaluated since the situation does not exist in the present (*ibid*).

Male religious scholars and other gatekeepers invoke verses to sanction practices such as wife-beating (verse 4:34 of the sacred book) and sexual advances (verse 2:223 of the sacred book) adopting what Ali (1998) called as a "literalist" interpretation of the sources of religious law.

> Men are the maintainers of women according to what God has favored for some of them over others and according to what they provide from their means. Righteous women are devout and guard the unseen according to what God has guarded. As for these women on whose part you fear marital discord, admonish them, abandon their beds, and strike them. But if they yield to you, then do not pursue a path against them. God is great and above all. (Hiddayatullah: 4:34)

> Your wives are (like) a field for you, so approach your field as you wish, and make provisions for yourselves and be conscious of God and be aware that you will meet [God]. And give good news to the believers. (*ibid*: 2:223)

Scholars propose wife-beating as one of the solutions for marital disharmony (Devos, 2015). The interpretations of the verse on sexual advances imply that "women are the sexual property of men and may be used to authorize forceful or violent treatment of women" (Hiddayatullah, 2014).

Religious female scholars have directed their attention to "challenging the patriarchal interpretations of the text" (Devos, 2015) with arguments about the "silencing of the more egalitarian aspect of (the religion) by patriarchy." For instance, Barlas (2002) speculated that in 2:223, the sacred book is referring to "the cultivation of love and mercy, since these themes are central to its teachings on marriage and female-male relationships." In living these patriarchal reading of the sacred book, Wadud (1999) correctly observed that, "the goal of such men [who strike their wives] is harm, not harmony...they cannot refer to verse 4:34 to justify their action."

With the religious leaders and intellectuals branding their opposition to gender violence done in the context of religious interpretations, legal and accepted practices as "going against religion," the minority women who have communicated their objections fell short of criticizing their religion. Instead of going against the dominant narrative, they "safely (put) the blame solely on undesirable indigenous values and a set of customary practices that perpetuate a tradition of violence" (Asian Muslim Action Network in the Philippines, 2004).

The women have spoken about their experiences of sexual violence in the context of traditional practices, "invoking virtues of *sabar* (patience) and *rahmat* (forgiveness with compassion) as ideal attributes of being women and practitioners of another religion (in comparison to the dominant religion) yet, there is a "chorus of silence in unspoken disappointments and disillusionments that remain to be said" *(ibid.)* Even with the women's direct experience of violence, rather than questioning

whose narrative authority counts, their self-silencing occurs defensively when individuals, particularly minorities with a minority view, couldn't even tell these stories to themselves (Fivush, 2010).

The "willingness to self-censor" can be partly explained by the spiral of silence, a political and mass communication theory originally proposed in 1974 by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, a professor of communication research and political scientist. Spiral of silence refers to the tendency of groups or individuals to be silent when they perceive that their views oppose the majority's positions on a subject. Fearing isolation and rejection, minority opinions are kept quiet and in the silence, appear to have lesser and lesser support causing others to be more hesitant in expressing their support for those opinions (*ibid*), thus the spiraling, and thus the eventual burying of the views altogether.

In the minorities' context, the women regard the views of religious intellectuals and spiritual and moral authorities as dominant (Asian Muslim Action Network in the Philippines, 2004). According to Noelle-Neumann (1974), people carefully observe their environment to see whether their views predominate and this encourages them to express themselves freely in public. This "quasi-statistical picture of the distribution of opinions" of individuals and groups determines how far they are willing to go in terms of saying their opinions vis-a-vis their perception of the risks (*ibid*). The willingness of minority women as individuals or as a group to expose their views publicly depends on their assessment of the political and social environments.

The difference that may exist between the assessment of social environment versus the actual one "...is because the opinion whose strength is overestimated is displayed more in public" (*ibid*). One group may express themselves more confidently while the others remain silent. The spiraling happens when the individual

(or group) "may find that the views he holds are losing ground; the more this appears to be so, the more uncertain he will become of himself, and the less he will be inclined to express his opinion" (*ibid*). The public display gives the impression of strength even if this is not necessarily accurate. The group that stays silent appears to be weaker than their real numbers.

While the minority women are the demographic majority within their group's population, they seem to be weaker because of their silence. Minority women who have undergone trauma therapy from their experience in gender violence, thought it "wise to proceed with a caveat – a back glance, in defense of (religion), or perhaps more precisely, to appease the mainstream voices that speak for (the religion)" (Asian Muslim Action Network in the Philippines, 2004).

This bred a culture that made women desist from telling their stories for fear of rebuke not just from religious leaders but also from rejection from their own communities. Because these were institutions that governed their lives and shaped their worldviews, the minority women have felt a "betrayal by supposed divinely-inspired institutions and social systems, purporting to establish gender-fairness and equitability in society yet failed to protect them from inflicted violence" *(ibid).* Cultural and religious reasons often sanction acts of violence, and result in silence and complicity (Women Living Under Muslim Laws, 2011).

In Chapter 2 of this inquiry, minority women tried to map whether it is only the fear of repercussions that characterize their storytelling, and if this is so, should development communication practitioners evolve strategies to address this fear? Also in Chapter 2, this research asked whether it is just the minority women who face this fear or do development communication practitioners also contend with this fear

when confronted with morally-laden and sensitive issues? Are development communicators party to the gatekeeping of the dominant narratives?

Of veiling and identity: the hijab as symbolism for contradictions

As discussed earlier, minority women contend with incongruities surrounding legal sanctions, religious interpretations and current practices – and these ambiguities have impelled and sanctioned gender violence (Muti-Mapandi, 2015). To demonstrate these contradictions in simple terms, this study will use the *hijab* (headscarf or veil) as symbolism and metaphor in the narrative analysis and restorying – the overt representation most associated with the minority women.

It is naturally assumed that the minority women must wear a *hijab* because media images show them everywhere as veiled since this is the most obvious visual representation. But therein lies the contradiction: the wearing of the *hijab* is often mistaken to be a religious edict but no provisions in the sacred book or sayings of the Prophet require women to cover their heads or bodies. In fact, the term, *"hijab"* is missing from religious texts (Syed, no date indicated).

Female scholars have used historical contextualization to interpret verse 33:59 of the sacred book which is attributed as the overt text requiring women's veiling and seclusion.

> O prophet, tell your wives and daughters and believing women that they should draw over themselves their outer garments (jalabib). That is more suitable, that they should be recognized and not harmed. God is forgiving and not harmed. (Hidayatullah, 33:59)

Barlas (2002) argued that the ambiguous directive of using "outer garments" does not specify the parts of the body that should be covered and more importantly, should be read in light of the historical context in which the verse was revealed: "the

social structure of a slave-owning society in which sexual abuse, especially of slaves, was rampant...at a time when women had no legal recourse against such abuse."

According to M. Salih (2009), "The women's dress code in (the religion), just like anything else in (the religion), is open to many interpretations. It is possible to argue that women's dress can be anything, or almost anything, that appeals to the mind, and still be able to support the argument from the (sacred book)...."

The *hijab*, while superficially treated as a simple garb about modesty, is striking in that it gives subjective meanings to how minority women behave based on what they believe in and not just on what is objectively true (H. Blumer, 1969). This "symbolic interactionism" shows the importance of meaning attributed by minority women in veiling as well as how other members of society regard these women and how they behave towards them.

The minority women, however, are hardly a homogenous group and their experiences wearing the *hijab* are fractured (Bullock, 2002) and vary greatly across cultures, countries and even within the same communities. Some women may have experienced *hijab*-wearing as forced and oppressive, particularly when Western pop culture, mass media, mass market lenses and liberal categories are applied (*ibid*). There are minority women, however, who have embraced the ideology and practice of veiling as an expression of identity and as resistance to a colonialist Western culture (*ibid*).

Majority of the minority women, however grew up with the construct that veiling is either culturally dictated or religious and automatically non-negotiable. Because the issues facing them – early, arranged or forced marriages, and polygamy – are inextricably bound to culture and religion, they are treated the same way:

unquestioned and not openly challenged or talked about. Bullock (2012) agreed though that often, "restrictions on women are based on a local community's way of 'being (part of the religious minority group) that has little reference to the (sacred book)...or juristic teachings, or result from women's own understanding of their role, which they then impose on others."

In cautioning against the danger of a single story and how they are created, Chamamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) alerted writers and researchers in "showing people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become." The *hijab* and its symbolic meanings of veiling, seclusion, choice, identity and even its practical use for the minority women will be used as a literary technique to weave the women's and inquirer's stories into the creative non-fiction platform that this study will use.

CHAPTER 2

Shaping the Telling of Morally-laden Narratives by Minorities

Development communication and restorying dangerous, delicate narratives

According to the country's National Demographic Health Survey or NDHS (2013), 20 percent or one in five women experienced physical violence since the age of 15. The highest percentage of physical violence (42%) and sexual violence (15%) since age 15 were experienced by divorced, separated or widowed women. Around 22 percent of women who are married or are in live-in arrangements have experienced physical violence and 7 percent have experienced sexual violence since age 15. There are also 13 percent of women who have never been married who have also experienced physical violence and sexual violence (3%) since age 15.

NDHS analyses showed that women who have been to college are less likely to have ever experienced physical violence than those who have less or no education. The survey results also showed that women in the lowest three wealth quintiles have a higher prevalence of physical violence than women in the upper two quintiles.

And yet, NDHS 2013 results showed that women in the region being studied are the least likely to have experienced physical violence (15 percent) and sexual violence (3 percent) compared to other regions. This minimal figure is also reflected in the results of a 2013 study by the Association for Progressive Communicators (APC) which culled through the 2011 reports of government agencies and civil society organizations mandated to document and report cases on violence against women (VAW). The region, according to the APC report, posted the lowest reported VAW cases (81) in 2011.

The low reported VAW figures in the region is inconsistent with the NDHS' analyses that women with low educational status and poverty incidences are most likely to experience physical and sexual violence. According to the National Statistical Coordination Board (2012), the region has consistently figured in the bottom poorest regions with a poverty incidence at 46.9% in 2012 which means that 47 out of 100 families are poor. The country's poverty incidence among families was 22.3% in 2012. The region's literacy rate is similarly lowest at 71.8% in 2008 compared to the national rate of 86.4% (Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey, 2008).

What is curious here is that despite the counter-intuitive character of the analyses and reports of increasing number of displacements in the region being studied, no researches have delved deeper to unearth discrepancies and disaggregate the inconsistent figures. The United Nations Report of the Special Rapporteur (2001) had already tracked the direct relationship between incidents of gender-based violence in intimate relationships and conflict particularly the increased tolerance of violence within a society. It should already be a red flag then when the U.N.'s 2011 Humanitarian Dashboard documented 159,465 people affected by armed conflict in the central part of the region under study, 95,698 of which are women, and 33,200 internally displaced (in 2012) – and yet, physical violence experienced by women in the region is reported to be among the lowest in the country at 15 percent and sexual violence, at 3 percent in the same period (NDHS, 2013).

Research have been largely directed toward VAW in protracted conflict situations – armed encounters among religious forces and government, *rido* (periodic clashes of retaliatory violence between families and clans), localized conflicts, kidnapping and abductions, etc. – and the gendered impact of conflict on women's

health, safety and mobility and economic status (Dwyer and Cagoco-Guiam, no date indicated). Correspondingly, policy advocacy and development communication strategies informed by these researches have focused on putting letter to peace talks instruments to recognize that VAW exists in conflict situations, and women and girls needed to be protected from all forms of violence, particularly during and after armed conflicts.

Policy advocacy has succeeded in putting women's basic rights, which included protection from all forms of violence, in the current preliminary peace agreement (2012) but it still fell short of specifications. Although this peace instrument recognizes that gender violence do not just result from the contexts of external conflict, no approaches, much more communication, ever specified that VAW also included gender violence perpetuated in the name of religious interpretations and customs. Literature showed the dearth of sustained development communication campaigns to understand the variables surrounding survivor and perpetrator behavior in those contexts or ever evolved targeted approaches to raise the minority women's awareness about gender violence, and negotiate for new behavior to stop the abuse.

Researchers like Dwyer and Cagoco-Guiam (no date indicated) were transparent and humble enough to admit that while they were careful to attend to issues of voice and power in their scholarship, they were "careful not to ask inflammatory questions about who people thought was to blame for particular acts of violence" and instead "respected participants' reluctance to detail the forms of violence that had occurred in their communities, instead discussing the social, psychological and economic needs communities identified as crucial for their own re-building." Other researchers

have not been as candid or outright but simply omit stating what they were afraid of treading on, for their own sake or for a larger agenda at stake.

Development communication takes off from social justice movements in the thorough examination and reexamination of power dynamics in any given social issue, and in this manner, as Leavy (1975) wrote, stereotypes are unsettled and dominant views are challenged. If development communication enables people, particularly the marginalized groups and minorities, to participate, to integrate their own local knowledge and voice, then why are practitioners not asking the inflammatory questions that are crucial to shifting minds and changing behaviors? Or are they? Are development communicators afraid, unprepared or ill equipped to tackle contentious issues on gender violence in the context of religious interpretations and customs?

The region is in an atmosphere "defined by extreme fragility," (Dwyer and Cagoco-Guiam, no date indicated) and any inquiries on clan or ethnic identity, religion and practices perceived to be an attack can tip the balance toward more violence. While social researchers and development communication practitioners recognize the "scripts for appropriate womanhood," they also struggle to address the "complex questions of female identity and their deep religious, historical and cultural roots (*ibid*)." There is identification with the "profound struggle taking place within communities and among external agents about whether and how transforming gender roles can be maintained or even nurtured" (*ibid*).

Chin Saik Yoon (2010) may also have been referring to communicating gender violence in the context of religious interpretations and customs when she mentioned gender and conflict as one of the upheavals of current development communication

practice. Communicating gender violence in this context will be tedious and contentious (*ibid*).

Practitioners will find that the answers will not be readily available but they must still pose systemic questions (*ibid*). Yoon concluded that, "the severity of the challenge to communication practitioners comes from the complexity of the problems posed by these 'new' issues, many of which have no ready solutions for communication and action, and are without precedence. They will be the big challenges of practice in the generations to come." Despite the current positioning, development communication practitioners will still need to answer what they will do with the emerging stories of gender violence in the context of religious interpretations, customs and practices; how they will approach the women's storytelling as minorities when they attempt to carve their own communication spaces and challenge dominant narratives?

The carving of communication spaces and voice in restorying to create narratives of resistance

How can storytelling carve communication spaces? People will always tell stories, however difficult the stories are, however trying the storytelling environment is. Narrative inquirers assert that people are narrative creatures, and they will always package their lives in story form to make sense of the complexities and struggles in human life (Kranstuber Horstman, 2012 citing Konig Kellas, 2008). These complexities include challenging and difficult experiences, and because humans live in and through stories, telling stories about their resistance helps them process the events (*ibid*).

Storytelling has the traditional function of communicating and passing on relevant value systems, norms and customary practices within a group of people for survival. Bochner (2002) emphasized that people are not condemned to live out the stories passed on through cultural productions and institutional traditions particularly if these stories promote, tolerate and condone gender violence. Taken in the context of development communication, storytelling then has the other function of questioning, changing and overthrowing dominant value systems to enable a marginalized group of people not just to survive but live better lives.

If storytelling carves communication spaces, how can development communicators catalyze the process to build knowledge on sensitive and morally-laden issues and help effect change? Rakow (1992) emphasized that scholarship in the field of communication theory should incorporate the communication processes of non-dominant women into the research agenda, making them "active participants in naming the world and making sense of it." The process of sense-making is built into the act of storytelling and critical for minority women to recognize which narratives are dominant and why they hold the minority view.

Narrative inquiry as a development communication research methodology invokes storytelling's second function because it aspires to the ideal of participation and involvement, promoting the inclusion of multiple voices, encouraging dialogue and keeps conversations going (Bochner, 2002). Development communicators, in the process of the women's storytelling, become collaborators in the sense-making, and in the restorying, find approaches to expand communication spaces beyond the women's immediate circle. Life stories are communal or cultural products, according to Sandelowski (1991), and minorities holding minority views are often constrained

by the storylines, and perhaps even the channels, available to communicate them. And here is where development communication can step in.

Earlier sections in this inquiry raised the conundrum faced by development communicators working in fragile environments or confronted by sensitive and morally-laden issues such as gender violence done in the name of religious interpretations, legal laws and practices. The thin ice development communicators find themselves in especially in fragile environments such as the region under study often inhibit the asking of inflammatory questions that cut through the heart of social and political issues. Dwyer and Cagoco-Guiam (no date indicated) in the section preceding this intuited their fears for tipping the balance toward more violence directed at the people they work with and even themselves. Another conundrum earlier raised is how development communicators may be the unwitting gatekeepers of dominant stories because their ideas and values can structure and alter narratives.

Stories of gender violence are never neutral and inquirers enter the study with a narrative inquiry of their own not as detached, objective observers. In this instance, development communicators are people deeply connected to the topic (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). The question then begged to be asked that for minority women, as minorities, to gain control over their stories, whose voice will dominate the restorying as misrepresentation, being silenced and the lack of voice – the very elements that characterize the minority women's communication status – can reoccur.

How can restorying then give minority women a voice? For a story to be told, it requires a storyteller and an audience, the latter being a critical element in narrative inquiry. In the context of communication research, the quality and depth of the stories are dependent on the interpersonal quality of the interaction between the

women and the inquirer, with corresponding assumptions of intersubjectivity and reciprocality that feminists encourage in methodologies. Feminists using narrative inquiry methods contend that the stories or "conversations bounded by context" (Messias and DeJoseph, 2004) are the direct results of shared moments and experiences between the minority women and the inquirer. Without a receptive audience, sensitive stories about gender violence will remain shadowed by dominant narratives that deny these stories so the minority women's collaboration with the inquirer legitimizes their told experience.

This process of collaboration occurs from the beginning to the end of the storytelling (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990), most manifested in the restorying. From the point when the minority women agreed to tell their stories to the inquirer who is transparent with the purpose of her research, they begin the mutual storytelling as all participants carve out their own voices in the process of participation in the telling, listening, questioning and restorying. Voice, after all, "suggests relationships," and the "struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else" (Britzman, as cited by Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

Although the minority women and the inquirer mutually construct a research relationship in which both voices are heard (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) in the storytelling processes, part of the inquirer's multiple tensions as a development communication practitioner is the balancing of voice and signature (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000) which are key considerations in the restorying of the minorities' morally-laden narratives. There will always be consideration to "foreground the voice of the participant in a narrative that bears our own signature" (*ibid*).

What should be marked out more distinctly is the innate principle for development communicators to invoke the principle of mutuality (Messias and DeJoseph, 2004) in

restorying, where there is clear acknowledgement and identification of power inequalities and take pains to reduce them. Part of this mutuality is the recognition that the entanglements will be acute as there will be a multiplicity of voices and values (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000) and the inquirer will inevitably be a character in her restorying.

In guarding against the power structure of storytelling, Clandinin (2013) clarified what narrative inquirers do, and what the narrative inquiry does to their lives: "who we are and are becoming on our and participants' landscapes are also under study. We are not objective inquirers. We are relational inquirers, attentive to the intersubjective, relational, embedded spaces in which lives are lived out." In engagement with stories and storytellers, Adichie (2009) said that, "it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all the stories of that place and that person."

Development communicators can neutralize their fears for themselves in handling sensitive narratives of minorities in fragile environments such as the region being studied because "storytelling emboldens the hearer" (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2006) as stories open up the moral and political imagination of the inquirer. In turn, restorying validates the voices of the marginal and silenced individual and groups (Bochner, 2002). Attending to the narratives of minority women, however difficult, puts development communicators in the raw position where they will continually question whether they are acting as gatekeepers of dominant narratives, conscious that who controls the story and the storytelling wields power.

As Chamamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) wrote, "how they are told, who tells them, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power." Control of a story and the storytelling process can mean that the women, as minorities, will always exercise the

option to weigh and measure "what must be voiced, what must be silenced" (Fivush 2010). Control can also mean that the women, in their sense-making, can change their stories with every retelling. Control can also mean that being minorities experiencing gender violence, and whose stories do not conform to the dominant script will evolve their own explanations, justifications and understanding, and these will thicken the narrative plots and tensions (*ibid*).

The stories that minority women tell, according to Bochner (2002) are not maps or mirrors of the experiences they depict. What development communicators must do is to pay attention to how stories get assembled, for whom they are constructed, how they were made, what cultural discourses they drew on, what they took for granted, for what purpose and what they will accomplish (Reissman & Speedy, 2007).

As a research methodology, narrative inquiry is concerned with knowledge, and is not meant to depict an objective truth. What it does, according to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), is to render personal and social life experiences in relevant and meaningful ways. Chapter 1 of this inquiry shows the various perspectives that have led to equally varied interpretations and applications of religious texts, legal laws and practices that no one can proclaim as pointing to an objective truth. What is happening is that minority women are in the thick of many narratives, which Fivush (2010) described as existing in "multiple levels of accepted and contested narratives that co-exist and mutually influence each other at all points."

These competing demands of communication and representation do not just shrink communication spaces but can actually close down communication. Through restorying, development communicators can show how the women cope with

extreme difficulties, transform crises and ultimately, invent new ways of communicating when old ways fail them (Bochner, 2002).

Minorities and marginalized groups may be silenced at one level by the dominant narrative but they can develop narratives within their group, and challenge the explanations and moral imperatives imposed by the dominant narrative (Fivush, 2010). The concept of silence is multi-dimensional, and so silence or *being silenced* in this context is conceptualized as negative as "silencing occurs at the cultural level for experiences that do not fit the dominant narrative" (*ibid*).

Fivush (2010) agreed that silence is not just a deficit in voice, but a loss of power and particularly for minority women, can lead to a loss of coherent identity. This element is a particular concern for development communicators, and in narrative inquiry, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) pointed to paying attention to silence. That is, being alert to stories not told as to those that are.

Silences in storytelling can mean pauses for self-reflection or for inner despair or happiness. Self-silencing can be defensive at moments when gender violence is experienced. Silences when imposed by the self may be an act of active forgetting of painful experiences or because of inability to voice these stories even when a sympathetic listener is present (*ibid*).

This inquiry uses creative non-fiction to describe elements like silences, pauses, weeping, laughing and other non-verbals that are crucial to the minority women's storytelling process because they are part of meaning-making. Creative non-fiction allows for burrowing, a restorying process described by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as concentrating on the event's moral, emotional and aesthetic qualities and then asking for meanings of the event, and how the inquirer "might create a new

story of self which changes the meaning of the event, its description, and its significance for the larger life story the person may be trying to live."

Advocates for the elimination of gender violence acknowledge the power of stories, the processes of telling these stories and co-authoring the stories. Creative non-fiction taken in the development communication context is "storying for change," which, according to Cameron (2012), is a means to challenge larger discourses and "build an oppositional politics through alternative narratives of marginalized groups."

By themselves, the storytelling processes of minority women about gender violence show that they are taking risks and in constantly negotiating with the dominant narratives, carve communication spaces. The dominant narratives are, as discussed in Chapter 2, (1) the branding that minority women are "going against the (sacred book)" when they communication opposition to gender violence, and (2) the view that forced marriages, incidences of kidnapping for marriage, sexual molestation and rape are isolated and rare, and if they do happen, are un-religious and should be downplayed as procedural slips and breaches in social protocol.

With development communicators stepping in and also taking risks as co-authors through restorying using creative non-fiction, minority voices are validated and amplified, communication spaces are expanded to a larger public who, in reading the stories, are turned into witnesses. This way, stories are not translated into data to test a theory, but as Bochner (2002) described it, theories are linked to stories by thinking *with* a story. Sensitive inquiries like these maximize creative-non-fiction to let readers "resonate with the moral dilemmas (stories) may pose, recognize (their) ambiguities, examine (their) contradictions, feel (their) nuances...." (*ibid*).

Storytelling is essentially about resistance as the dominant narrative cannot absorb the stories (Fivush, 2010) on gender violence in the context of religious

interpretations, legal laws and customs. For minorities especially, storytelling is a method that goes beyond challenging prevailing discourses because in bringing their stories outside of their immediate communication circles, they may even be confronting social structures "through asserting non-dominant cultural constructions, personal identities and world views in the public sphere" (Williams, et al., 2003). Thus, if minority women are able to create and maintain narratives of resistance "that provide them with a sense of shared history," (Fivush, 2010) they do not just carve individual communication spaces but create cracks in the dominant narrative.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology: Narrative Inquiry, Restorying and Creative Non-Fiction

As discussed in the preceding chapters, the study applied narrative inquiry, a form of qualitative research involving the study of experience as narratives (Clandinin and Huber, 2010). Researchers still have ongoing disagreements with its precise definition but most agree with Clandinin and Connelly (2000) that narrative inquiry is most aptly framed as an approach taken by a researcher who understands the world in terms of story and narrative.

In going through the research design, narrative inquiry emerged as the best fit not just for articulating the research purpose and "research puzzle(s)" (Clandinin, 2013) but also the personal justification why I embarked in this inquiry in the first place. Early on, I had to situate the central questions of, "who am I in this research?" and where do I enter it?" I myself had experiences where minority women were already telling me stories about suffering from gender violence and carving little communication spaces in every venue they could – but I did not know what to do with the stories concretely as a feminist, writer and practitioner of development communication.

As discussed in the introduction, it was also the practical application for establishing a communication program on Violence Against Women and Children for the minority community that directed this paper's use of narrative inquiry as a mode of communication research. In designing the research, I looked to Creswell (2007) to figure out whether the inquiry could be framed from what researchers refer to as "off the shelf" theories and try to fit existing propositions with the minority women's storytelling processes, or I could generate a theory grounded from data.

After much literature review, it was finally Bochner's (2002) arguments that I resonated with, particularly that theory meets story in narrative inquiry because I would be thinking *with* a story rather than about it. He contested that researchers need not turn stories into data to test existing theories. I did not want to reduce the minority women's stories as simply abstract content or data, I needed this inquiry to resonate with readers and end-users not just as a method of knowing but also of telling, and ultimately, getting incremental changes in how gender violence is seen and treated.

Aside from expressing the personal and practical justifications for this study, I also found that narrative inquiry covered the social justification as I sought to answer the questions of "so what?" and "who'd care if I did this research?" Narrative inquiry, particularly restorying, is essentially a development communication approach and a primary aspect of narrative research. This process allows participants to narrativize their stories through the interplay between cultural frames and individual meaning (which changes over time) (Harvey, et al., 2000).

Summarizing the discussion in earlier sections, restorying: (1) allowed access to minority perspectives on a sensitive and morally-laden topic that may not have been as easily accessible by other means; (2) aspired to the ideals of participation and inclusion as minority women were positioned as storytellers in control of their stories and the processes of telling them, to inquire into their own reconstruction and sense-making of their experiences of gender violence in their own political and cultural milieu; (3) clarified issues of representation and voice as it acknowledged the development communicator's authentic voice as a visible participant in the research landscape; (4) provided a platform for restorying, co-authoring of stories on gender

violence and collaboration in giving voice to minority groups and carving of communication spaces.

Entering into the inquiry. Like other qualitative methods, narrative does not rely on validity, reliability and generalizability (Connelly & Cladinin, 2011). Narratives will always have multiple voices and perspectives, and the minority women's storytelling processes will go through gray lines of religious and legal interpretations, and practices. Arriving at an objective truth or even reflections of reality is not the object of narrative inquiry.

Creswell (2007) cautioned about the need for narrative inquirers to follow a rigid process of designing and thinking through research like this because it is not just about the informal gathering of data. As intimate conversations are critical for the stories to come through, the selection and building of relationships with participants are crucial, as well as negotiations for and attention to the three-dimensional narrative space (which will be discussed in the latter paragraphs).

Sampling was purposive and criterion-based. The participants were three (3) minority women based in three municipalities in the region being studied. The women have survived gender violence in early, forced and arranged marriages, and polygamy perpetuated in the context of customary practices and religion and were specifically either of the following, or a combination of having been:

(1) married off as a child (between 12 to 15 years old)

(2) forced into marriage / thrust into an arranged marriage (as payment for familial debt, for political alliances, etc.)

(3) exposed to a polygamous arrangement

The participants were recruited through an NGO, selected for its direct experience in working with minority villages in the region, and its plans to design a communication program on Violence against Women and Children (VAWC) focused on minority women which does not currently exist in the region. The women's group took the first pass at screening potential participants based on the criterion and elicited willingness to participate.

Three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, namely, temporality (past, present and future), sociality (the relationship between the personal and the social), and place (the context by which, or within which, lived experiences are shaped). In the negotiations with the NGO, I attended to the dimension of place or sequences of places, because for sensitive and morally-laden narratives, the storytelling had the potential to endanger the lives of the inquirer and participants, and shift the directions of stories. Aside from context by which experiences are shaped, the dimension of place also refers to the concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place where the inquiry and events occur Clandinin and Connelly (2000). I first discussed the venues where the inquiries would take place with the NGO before flying to the research locale, and again renegotiated with the participants during the actual meetings.

Initially, upon the advice of the NGO management and the participants themselves, I agreed to meet them at my hotel in capital city for the safety of all involved. The participants, who were still living in their story locales, believed that it would change the tone of the storytelling if an outsider were to enter their communities as I would be noticeable even if I wore a *hijab*. Villagers, as is the wont

of rural communities in the region, according to the participants, would be curious on the purposes of the visits, and would most likely even elect to sit in the conversations. While it would have added to the dimensions of place and allowed for other data gathering methods (i.e., participant observation, showing of pictures, personal emblems and symbols, etc.), conducting the narrative inquiry in a safe, neutral venue – such as a hotel room away from the village, would contribute more to the women's comfort in full storytelling.

When I arrived in the capital, however, one participant felt threatened that her prolonged absence from the community might not be taken well by her husband, and requested that I instead meet her in the town center rather than travel to the city, about 52 kilometers away. The *poblacion*, where the NGO has contacts and where the interview could be conducted, is only less than five kilometers from the participant's village which is still a conflict-affected zone with armed encounters occurring among various groups and the government's military. The NGO management advised that an interpreter as well as a driver would go with me as security back-ups. While the NGO did not anticipate a kidnapping threat, the Director felt that a security arrangement needed to be in place should armed skirmishes erupt while the interview was ongoing.

In narrative inquiry, attention is given to sociality in terms of the personal and social. This study considered the "feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006) of the inquirer and participants, as well as the social milieu – environment, factors and forces and other existential conditions) under which the experiences and events are unfolding. Although they could understand the country's *lingua franca*, two of the women spoke only their native language requiring interpreters to assist in the inquiry. I negotiated the terms

of the interpretation with the translator, a male volunteer of the NGO, who agreed to translate only the verbatim responses of the participants to prod the storytelling forward.

In the engagement with the participant from the conflict-affected community, however, the interpreter and I were also joined by the NGO's male contact in the area who happened to be the son of the owner of the land where the participant and her husband lived as farmer-tenants. This contact also plays a prominent role in the peacekeeping dynamics (international and local) of the area, a point pursued by the NGO to press the importance of keeping the inquirer safe. I attended to the power relations present during the interview and noted possibilities that this sociality dimension may have affected the participant's story, storytelling process and carving of communication spaces.

This inquiry also considered the temporal transition of narratives in that, "we are composing and constantly revising our autobiographies as we go along" (Carr, 1986), and considered the temporality of places, objects and events as well as the temporality of the researcher's and participants' own lives. I took into account notions of continuity or lack of it as the minority women's storylines changed and often conflicted particularly in their reflections on how it should have been. Clandinin & Rosiek (2006) explained that every experience takes up something from the present into the past, and carries it into the future. In the retelling of the experience, minority women changed some details from an earlier memory, and when they referred to these again, the elements varied. I also considered the "illusion of causality" as the minority women jumped from one memory to another without the need for explaining timelines so I paid attention to nuances in how stories are narrated as-lived versus events-as-told (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990).

Narrative interviewing. I followed the basic phases of narrative interviewing (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000): preparation, initiation, main narration, questioning phase and concluding talk. I first initiated contact with the participants to explain the context of the study and obtained voluntary informed consent and permission to record the interview. With a delicate and charged topic such as gender violence in the context of religious interpretations and customs, it was necessary that I establish a relationship of trust with the participants. I did this by asking about the women's family background, particularly their children (if any), and in turn, introduced myself and shared my own family background.

I then proceeded to the main narration where the participants were encouraged to tell their account: "can you share your story to me?" prodded only with non-verbal cues. In this phase, I only actively listened and observed the non-verbal language and tone of the participant until the conversation reached a natural ebb. I thought through the recommendation of feminist researchers, Messias and Dejoseph (2004), whether I should migrate from a more traditional interview format to a style akin to a conversation, because this would pave a more trusting environment as women are naturally drawn to exchanges where there are mutual disclosures. In the end though, I decided to put the women in full control over their stories and storytelling processes, so as not to insinuate myself in this stage by imposing on a pre-conceived structure or form through my questions and own narrative lines.

I took note of whether and how the participants used silence or pauses in the storytelling, as well as the dynamics of when the interpreter (as well as the NGO contact) filled in the silences; when I myself determined that the silence was due to the participants' need for questioning or prodding or because the silence was becoming uncomfortable.

For the purposes of this research, unstructured interviews with participants were primarily used to elicit the stories. I used field notes and a journal to manage my interpretation and after the interviews, I immediately sat down to design a narrative sketch – one column to map the women's stories as I understood them and another column to document my own insights (using stream of thought, without the benefit of reflection) based on the story details, and observations on space, temporality and sociality.

Identification of research text, narrative plot, and narrative analysis. I transcribed the recorded interview (in the *lingua franca*) and requested for the interpreter's transcription of the interviews in the women's native language. Taking account of the nuances of memory and its effect on narrative smoothing, I then revisited the initial narrative sketch to document the differences in my first interpretation of the story details versus what the women actually said, and also traced shifts in my insights after a period of reflection. As narrative inquirers cannot be separated from the inquiry relationship (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006), I used a journal to constantly define who I was in the inquiry, and who I was in relation to the participants – from the initiation to negotiation before going into the actual inquiry to the research instruments, and onwards to the restorying.

I read and reread all the transcripts, and listened to the recordings. Using the narrative sketch drawn after immediately after the interviews with the minority women, I created another column, this time to chronicle my insights after a period of reflection and rereading the transcripts again.

I went through these field texts (i.e., transcripts and narrative sketches) to identify the primary narratives or research texts guided by the suggestion of Clandinin and

Connelly (2000) to keep in mind the intended audiences. This was crucial as the field texts sported numerous sub-stories that provided contexts and insights to the minority women's storytelling processes but veered away from topic of gender violence done in the name of religious and legal interpretations, and practices. This stage was crucial because this was when I selected particular stories to foreground, and where the primary story elements of characters and plot were built, and where I went back to ascertaining the political and social purpose of the inquiry.

Leavy (1975) cautioned narrative inquirers about the range of disconnected research elements that will emerge from the fullness of lived experience presented in the how minority women told their stories. In this vein, I extracted three themes that surfaced from the participants' storytelling to prioritize the story elements that would achieve the purposes of the inquiry, present coherence to the story flow and enrich the narrative analysis so they can "appeal to the reader's understanding and imagination (*ibid*)." These themes became the map for restorying each of the minority women's narratives in Chapter 4:

- *Storying the war within as with the war without*
- *Storying silence, being silenced, being silent, choosing to be silent*
- *Storying becomes voice*

I subscribe to what feminists have long observed that human experiences tended to be dichotomized and compartmentalized into neat, simple categories. In my review of literature, I carefully considered and discarded multiple approaches to analyzing narratives until I came across Clandinin's and Connelly's (2000) urging that inquirers need to continue thinking narratively from research design to narrative

analysis. They cautioned against the analytical method of deconstructing stories into coded piles which directs attention away from thinking narratively about experience and could even undermine the purpose of the inquiry. Sandelowski (1991) agreed that most analytical approaches emphasize content, being preoccupied with information rather than meaning. I focused the narrative analysis for this inquiry in the development communication context that is, inquiring into the communication processes – the storytelling of minorities situated within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space; voice, representation and the carving of communication spaces; and attention to silences, pauses and other features of storytelling that are not told.

Restorying. This narrative device of retelling the stories is among the ethics-fraught steps in narrative inquiry because it is here where "concerns about ethics, reflexivity, emotions, positionality, polyvocality, collaboration, identification with participants, intersubjectivity" (Bloom, 1998 as cited by Messias and Dejoseph, 2004) meet full tilt, and the authority of inquirers as interpreters come into play. It is in the restorying where the feminist communication themes of difference, voice and representation are most manifested as clearly, the "prior text" (Hidayatullah (2014), values and lenses of the inquirer will figure and can change the direction of the retelling.

Restorying, however, is also an approach that development communication can well maximize, and which human rights advocates and feminist communication theorists consider as the legitimization of marginalized voices. Sarikakis, et. al. (2009) urged inquirers to reject theory and methodologies that privilege objectivity and anonymity, and "actively refus(e) to continue the silencing, drawing out instead

and making visible those who have been silenced, revealing their voices in social and historical contexts."

As a feminist, I constantly grappled with the issues of voice and representation, wary that my fingerprints will be all over the minority women's stories in the restorying using creative-non-fiction, but also constantly mindful that my voice, as woman and development practitioner was also legitimate and crucial to the storytelling processes. I found resonance in Rakow and Wackwitz (2004) in the description that methodologies which are "political, polyvocal and transformative" are consistent with feminist communication theories because I have charged myself not only to undergo an intellectual task but in the very choice of inquiring into sensitive issues, I had the social responsibility to add my voice to the women's to increase the mileage of marginalized stories.

All narrative inquirers come into their inquiries with their own views, attitudes and ways of thinking (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). I took careful notes of my own lenses – my "veils" of biases, anxieties of misrepresentation and presenting the single story – and the process of unveiling as I pondered my own silences – being silenced or wielding silence as weapon – in my own intimate relationships. I took into account the sociality (personal) dimension that I will be "forever struggling with personal tensions" (*ibid*) in the pursuit of narrative inquiry, particularly of this nature.

I took note of the multiple voices that manifested in the narrative analysis, mine included, as well as the multiple I's (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990) and possible questions and entanglements that I knew would emerge at the point of writing about the women's stories. I found myself in what Clandinin and Rosiek (2006) described as "frequently...crossing cultural discourses, ideologies and institutional boundaries"

as I listened and transcribed the minority women's experiences of suffering from gender violence.

I was already toying with the idea that the concrete product of this inquiry would be a story or a series of stories but it is in finding myself crisscrossing these "borderlands" (*ibid*) and juggling the multiple I's that I fully decided to use creative non-fiction as a restorying technique. My reasons were two-fold: I needed to situate my authentic voice in the minority women's stories but also I essentially wanted the readers and end-users of this inquiry to resonate with the stories just as much as I have. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) cited Eisner (1982) who urged narrative inquirers to experiment with "forms of representation" just as minority women sought to blaze new ways of telling stories because the old ones did not fulfill their purpose.

Creative non-fiction is narrative that is truthful and factual but takes advantage of all the literary techniques available to fiction writers and poets (Gutkind, no date indicated). It is concerned not just about the way a story is told because at its core is the adherence to facts. This approach fulfills what Creswell (2007) had suggested about using experimentation and flexibility to embed the rhetorical structure of the three-dimensional inquiry space into the narrative report – but this time, in a way that is reader- and user-friendly. Creative non-fiction allows researchers to collaborate in the restorying of participants' stories using scenes, description, dialogue, characterization so readers can understand and relate to the stories. For development communicators, creative non-fiction is a way to make meaning by marrying substance with style to connect facts from academic texts to their intended audiences.

Development communicators presented with sensitive and morally-laden stories in fragile environments such as the research locale are in a similar position as

creative non-fiction writers which Gutkind (no date indicated) described as "poised to present reality in such a way that it cannot be avoided." Creative non-fiction also posted a practical solution to the conundrum faced by development communicators who fear for their lives and that of the participants'. As described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), "fictionalization in research texts can enable these stories to be hold without harming participants' lives."

"True stories, well told" (Gutkind, no date indicated) can change lives and shape opinion in ways that academic texts cannot. Inquirers writing creative non-fiction "appeal to a particular kind of authority, truth, and trust that goes with their being present as witnesses, as opposed to making up their stories purely from imagination (Sparkes, 2002). Ultimately, when done well, creative non-fiction makes connections and open up communication spaces.

As discussed in previous sections, the *hijab* figured in the creative non-fiction pieces as restorying and literary technique and symbol because they mostly pertain to women, and shows the political and cultural context that influence how women told their stories specifically the contradictions and gray areas in gender violence conducted in the name of religious and legal interpretations and practices. The use of the *hijab* also helped delineate the multiple voices and perspectives in the narratives vis-à-vis my own voice as co-author of the women's stories. Aside from these, the *hijab* was a technique used also for the following: as metaphor and transition (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), to emphasize key events and epiphanies (Denzin, 1989) that mark my life and those of the participants', as "telescoping" approach (Czarniawska, 2004) or zooming in and zooming out to describe the micro and larger contexts of the women's narratives, as "burrowing," as opposed to generalizing, where stories of the events – their emotional, moral and aesthetic

qualities – are focused on from the point of view of the person at the time the event occurred (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

Limitations

I was hampered by the low literacy levels of the participants and preference for oral storytelling as well as confirmation of the co-authorship outputs. While I originally planned to write the narrative sketch and show each of the participants her take on the stories, the minority women instead asked me to recount back the stories as I understood them right after they were told. The sketch, then, had to be limited to bullet points as I took down clarificatory notes instead of the whole story that I originally planned to show to the participants.

CHAPTER 4

Restorying the Minority Women's Stories on Gender Violence

This chapter took on the shape of several restructurings in my bid to experiment with narrative forms that allowed collaboration, at the same time, clarify whose voice is speaking where and when. The final structure followed the unfolding of themes (i.e., *Storying the war within as with the war without; Storying silence, being silenced, being silent, choosing to be silent; Storying becomes voice)* identified earlier in the chapter on methodology. Each of the themes will have the following sections:

I. ***We, in the thick of wars; The sound of our silences; Restorying our voices*** – These incorporate the primary narrative or research text which includes excerpts from my own journal and narrative sketches to set the dimensions of sociality, temporality and place. These are where I describe and their immediate circumstances, and identify the political, social and cultural discourses surrounding each of the women's stories and how they impact on their storytelling. This section also positions me early in the storytelling, narratively inquiring on the minority women's storytelling process at the same time, struggling with my personal tensions, my multiple I's and voices as feminist, writer, development communication practitioner, partner and mother.

II. ***Taya, Alma and Aminah: Storying war, silence and voice*** – This section contains the co-authored stories of the participants written in inductive mode, based on their told experience of gender violence using

creative non-fiction. The stories follow the themes I extracted as they emerged in the storytelling as well as in the narrative analysis. The themes served dual purposes: to aid in storytelling flow and coherence, and enrich the narrative analysis.

III. Narrative analysis

I looked through Bochner's (2002) careful delineation between traditional social research writing and the stories associated with narrative inquiry, particularly in restorying minority voices, because going through the primary texts of the women's stories, I knew that the classic type of format for narrative analysis would not adequately cover what this inquiry intended.

Writing traditional social research privileges the types of events and data that can be subjected to conceptual analysis and theoretical explanation (*ibid*), but restorying sensitive narratives require a format different from the classic structure of culling a chunk of quotation and dissecting the contents and patterns of thought and speech to form the analyses, and then going through the same routine in the succeeding paragraphs. The stories, morally-laden and sensitive, simply could not be restoried this way because of the women's multiple narratives that were always in tension, and when I attempted to take elements out of the flow of the story themes for analysis, they appeared inconsistent, often contradictory.

The women's narratives had to be taken *en toto* and read in a natural stream for readers to appreciate the various political and social contexts at play and the sheer complexity of the three dimensional narrative inquiry space of temporality-sociality-place that flowed through and within the stories. After I

decided to go with this track, I came across Clandinin's and Rosiek's (2006) caution about severing narratives from the relational, temporal and continuous features of experience that gave it meaning. Traditional modes that deconstruct the story following a structure of quotation-analysis and repeats this pattern "(rip) stories from the personal history of the one living it" (*ibid*).

I avoided what Bochner, citing Denzin (1997) called as the penchant of social researchers to hear and read stories only from within a set of determined structural categories, and lose what makes the story a story. Restorying what makes a minority story a story requires what feminist theorists, Messias & Dejoseph (2004), describe as the "unfolding" of its full context, not chunks of dialogue, and the interpretative interaction that follows between the women and myself to make sense of narrative tensions; the actual act of storytelling; the pauses, voicing and silences that women use for sense-making which will not be evident if the texts are chopped up against the natural tide of stories.

Structurally, the narrative analyses directly followed each of the co-authored stories. This segment analyzed the minority women's storytelling processes and induced insights to the questions earlier raised by this inquiry:

- How did the minority women, as minorities, disclose their individual stories against the dominant narratives?
- How did the minority women's storytelling processes create and expand communication spaces for themselves and other women?
- What are the implications of minorities' disclosure of morally-laden and sensitive stories that challenge dominant narratives – to the women themselves, and to development communication

practitioners wanting to be involved in or already involved in creating narratives of resistance to enable social change?

TAYA'S STORY

I. Storying the war within as with the war without

1. *We, in the thick of wars*

I saw Taya sitting on a long table near the end of the yard. Her peach *hijab* of thin, flowy material slipped on the shoulders of a tangerine long-sleeved blouse reaching below the knee, the piping, dark. Hands grasped the veil from the sides of the neck to hitch the *hijab* back to cover hair and ears. Her gesture is unconscious.

A bit of her jugular notch peeked between the *hijab* and her blouse's neckline that made me think of wings. Taya smiled with missing lower front teeth, and when she gestured, a gold ring glints on a middle finger of her left hand, her nails painted with traditional red-brown polish. Her face is bronze and shiny. She is unadorned, but her lips are also reddish brown perhaps from betel nut, perhaps from lipstick.

She smelled of the sun having walked some kilometers to meet me. She rose as we are introduced, her *hijab* sliding down to her shoulders again. She kept it there. Her dark brown hair is tied in a bun, there were no white strands so I wondered how old she really is. I asked that she tell her story, and as if she had been on a long, bated paused breath, she spoke, and talked and talked. She drew back the *hijab* on her head, and talked.

I brought my own *hijab* but I did not wear it; it was on my lap, ready to be put on if needed. Unlike Taya, bringing my *hijab* was calculated. Deliberate.

The NGO's Director, sent a text message asking if I was all right to go the "area" because the participant was afraid her husband would ask too many questions if she left for the capital. I agreed with a bit of apprehension since I

knew that tension erupts suddenly in the locale. The danger there really is getting caught in between many layers of conflicts – among the armed groups, between each of the armed groups and the military, between police and drug lords and users, between warring clans, or perhaps, between angry husband and a wife with a story.

Taya's village is close to the area where scores of elite police forces, civilians and armed fighters died in an operation to neutralize alleged terrorists, putting peace talks in peril. I lost count of the several checkpoints along the highway where the NGO's vehicle I was in, stopped for visual searches by armed military with some seven to eight men inside a 3-foot rock fort of sorts, and tanks nearby. I was in a white donated vehicle with "UNHCR" block-printed on the driver and passenger doors, and somehow this spared the driver, the interpreter and me from having to go down for physical searches. There is no doubt that this place is at war.

The driver animated the highway pointing at landmarks but his guided tour was about ambushes and raids, who died when and where, hardly tourist talk. He knew my work brought me there several times before so he dispelled the requisite small talk. To my right and left were signs of small entrepreneurship, tiny businesses mired in marshlands, many with footpaths under water. The shoulders of the highway are strewn with drying *palay* (unmilled, unshelled rice grains). And if there is anything I learned in conflict-affected towns, it is that safety comes with hope attached to drying *palay*. The vehicle turned into small streets and parks inside a backyard with more drying *palay* and a tarpaulin that said "Joint Monitoring Committee of the Peace Process."

With me are two people, both men, Wawi, the interpreter, and Piang, the son of the estate owner where Taya's family squats and works as tenant-peasants. Piang is also a key actor in the peace agreement panel for the province. The NGO's driver slowly makes his way to the side to listen midway to Taya's storytelling, I did not request him earlier not to engage, at least, Taya did not notice him. Wawi and Piang are not their real names.

The table where I saw Taya sitting is where peace is negotiated and sometimes, won.

2. *Storying the war within as with the war without*

She lived in the middle of a lake with her husband and a very young daughter. Their shack stood on shaky stilts. They had just fled from an armed encounter, MILF maybe, fighting with the government, maybe, she didn't care to know exactly. She couldn't count and only knew that there were some days when her husband was around, but increasingly, he did not come home for longer and longer periods.

She didn't mind leaving her daughter on her own inside the shack to gather *kangkong* (water spinach) as there were no people for miles and chances were, they would not evacuate again. So she and her child could eat, Taya waded chest-deep and heavily pregnant into the lake, gathered *kangkong*, tied them together and heaved them all on her head to walk the many kilometers to town. She then sold them for a peso per bundle so she could buy "*kalahating ligkot*" (half a cup) of the cheapest, smallest grained rice. All, while nearing her term. All, while her toddler is left alone in the middle of a lake inside a shack on shaky stilts.

"Iniwan ko pa ang anak ko doon sa napakaliit na bahay...nandoon sa sa kangkongan. Doon sa nauna kong asawa, yung....mag-isa ko lang binubuhay anak ko. Dinanas ko, kangkong! Binebenta ko ang kangkong, nilalagay ko sa ulo ko. Binuhay ko mag-isa ang anak ko." (I left my child in the small hut in the middle of the lake full of kangkong. This was during my marriage with my first husband...I raised my child alone. I experienced, kangkong! I put the kangkong on my head and sold them. I raised my child alone.)

There was no courtship, she was not wooed. She knew the man because they were from the same village, and he was always there visiting. The elders arranged the marriage. Whatever her parents wanted, she just followed:

"Di na ko nagsalita pa.... Syempre, gusto ko rin hahahaha! Mmm, ako kung ano ang gusto ng mga magulang ko, sinusunod ko na lang. Hindi na ko nagsalita pa. Subukan lang. Madali man akong kausap na tao." (I just kept quiet. Of course, I also wanted it hahaha! Me, I follow whatever my parents want. I just kept quiet. Why not try it, I thought. I'm easy.)

She revealed quickly that the man she was talking about was her first husband and she married again because she had had a bad relationship with him.

"Ang totoo, dalawang beses na ako nagkaasawa. Pagalawa na tong ngayon..... Nag-asawa ako ulit kasi pangit ang naging pagsasama namin nung nauna. Tapos mas lalong pangit ang kasalukuyan! Kung di dapat sana gumanda ang pagsasama namin pero mas masahol pa pala. Nagpagsasampal na ako, kung alam nyo lang. 'Di totoo talaga! Mmmm, dalawang beses ako nag-asawa. Pero pangit pala." (In truth, I married twice already. This is the second.... I married again because my relationship with the first one was bad. But this current one is worse! I had wanted the second one to be better but it's worse. He slapped me many times, if you only knew. It's true! Mmmm, I married twice. But both are bad.)

The first husband married another woman and Taya didn't even know it, *"napaiyak na lang ako, sabi ko lah, di ko man lang nalaman"* (I just cried. I told myself, lah, I didn't even know.). She knew they could divorce, and she knew, too, that he could take on another wife. They were married, she said, perplexed – so how could she be left just like that? She repeated it again and

again to assure her audience or convince herself, they were married, she was certain of it – they signed papers, after all, and had a ceremony with the *imam* and *ulama*[1] all present. "*Pero kapag nagkahiwalay kami, mmmm....wala*!" (But when we separated, it was just like that, no ceremonies, just nothing.) She repeated it again, thrice, *"wala!"* (nothing), hands on her head possibly to keep *hijab* from slipping, possibly, to emphasize all that she meant by "nothing."

Taya gave birth by herself to another girl in that little shack standing on shaky stilts in the middle of a lake.

> *"Mmmm, isipin mo na lang dinanas ko nung pinanganak ko yung panganay ko, wala akong kasama sa bahay. Wala talaga akong kasama. Di ko alam na nag-asawa yun ng iba. Yung pangalawa, wala rin akong kasama."* (Mmmm, just imagine when I went through when I delivered my first child, no one was in the house with me. I was alone. I didn't know he already married another woman. During my second delivery, I was also alone.)

She couldn't remember whether she left both toddler and newborn by themselves for a full day or maybe overnight to gather *kangkong* and sell them in town for rice. She couldn't forget the harsh winds at the lake side when she finally returned with food to find the waters so deep, "*hanggang dito,*" (until here) extending her arms and standing up to the full height of her willowy frame.

She also couldn't forget her despair that she didn't even have a boat to reach and feed her babies. After that, she opted to gather *panda* leaves to weave into mats, only shifting to selling *kangkong* again when her back hurt too much from the weaving. But she made it clear, *"hindi ako sinasaktan*

[1] *Imam* is a religious priest while *ulama* is a learned scholar

nung nauna....di nya ako sinaktan" (I was not beaten up by the first one. He didn't lay a hand on me.).

The second marriage was arranged, and like the first, there were no courtships, no wooing. Partners changed but nothing else did:

> *"Nung nagpalit ako ng asawa, nahirapan ako....pangit ang naging takbo ng relasyon namin. Palagi na lang ako sinasaktan"* (When I changed spouses, I had a hard time...our relationship was not well. He always hurt me.).

She couldn't remember the first time the violence to her began, but she remembered circumstances, she remembered wars – the most recent one, a month or so ago. She was at her mother's house seeking help for the beatings but her husband followed to fetch her back. The night was shot with multiple wars: the arguments and fighting within only stopped when volleys of gunfire shattered the village's evening. It was close enough that her parents rushed out to flee, and husband and wife, a temporary truce reached, evacuated.

> *"Nung pagbakwit, ay! Nung pag-away namin kina Inay, nagbarilan dun sa may crossing. Ang lakas ng putukan pag gabi! Nakadapa na 'ko. Sabi ko, mamamatay na tayo dito, mmmm! Dumanas ako ng hirap buong gabi. Hahahaha! Nagpagulong-gulong na 'ko!"* (When we evacuated, ay! We were fighting at my mother's when there were shootings near the crossing. The shootings were so loud that night. I hit the ground. I said, we are all going to die here, mmmm! I suffered that whole night. Hahahaha! I rolled and rolled!).

Taya laughed as she told this war story, still bewildered, still incredulous.

> *"Di ako makatayo kasi, ay sobrang putukan! Bago lang yung barilan. Palagi na lang ako gumaganito"* (I couldn't stand up because the gunfire was intense. The fighting just happened recently. I always like this.),

Taya pantomimed a practiced position, covering her head and curling up her body to be as little a target as possible.

She related, words tumbling out, spilling over one another, machine gun-like with the safety lock off:

> *"Minsan, gumagapang ako. Sa sobrang takot ko, nagpagulong-gulong na ko sa takot ko....kahit saan na para lang makapagtago. Di kami makatayo dahil sa barilan. Napahiga na 'ko, dumapa na 'ko."* (Sometimes, I crawl. I was so afraid that I rolled and rolled...I went anywhere just so I could hide. We couldn't stand because of the gunfire. I laid down again, I crawled again.).

They found the evacuation center at first light. For her though, the war continued. She evacuated from one but found herself still a target, at dead center of the crosshairs of a private war. Inside a makeshift shelter, her husband blamed her for their plight and hit her again. She escaped the tent only to be told to go back by the military as there were still armed skirmishes outside.

> *"Makapagtago sana! Dahilan para umalis. Yung pag-aaway namin tapos ng bakwit gusto ko umalis, umuwi nung oras na yun, Datu (refers to Piang, her landlord), naisip ko wala naman bubuhay sa kin. Daming sundalo sa labas ng eskuwelahan, sabi wag daw kasi may labanan pa."* (I wanted to hide. I had reason to go. When he hurt me again after the evacuation, I wanted to leave, to go home, Datu. I thought nobody was keeping me alive, anyway. But there were many soldiers outside the school who said I couldn't leave because there were still fightings.)

Wars and tremors are how Taya marked days and milestones. She apologized early for not being educated and knowing numbers, dates, the ages of her three children and even her own. Taya remembered being a young girl when a big earthquake hit Maguindanao; remembered, too, marrying shortly after her first menses. When our sharing ended, she whispered that she had stopped menstruating – so I could put two and three together for the math. A quick Google search showed that a massive 8.2-magnitude earthquake hit the Moro Gulf in August

1976, with some coastal areas in Maguindanao drowned by tsunami. Taya then must be in her early 50s.

Wars must have been, for her, not just a marker of events but essentially blurred what is public and what is private. I lost track of the number of times that Taya had been displaced and the distance of places where she rooted and uprooted herself again with almost nothing to start or end with. War and conflict permeated her life and she wove her storytelling within this dimension of sociality. Taya's restorying her told experience fit with what Harvey et al. (2000) called narrative coherence or in this case, her own making of timelines as she flitted from talking about her first husband to second husband, one war to another war in one long breath. Individuals who faced traumatic, sensitive life incidences may not recount their narratives in a coherent narrative because the "depth of the horror is so potent that for them the event stands outside of time" (*ibid*).

Many times I struggled not to interrupt, to ask about which man she was talking about for a particular scene. She talked as if I am in the know, as if assuming that I was already part of her immediate public and it was my responsibility to understand who she was referring to. The timelines of war and evacuation are so interconnected in Taya's storylines that everything seemed to happen just recently. As narrative analysts have noted, people do not necessarily tell their stories in a thematic or chronological order within narrative texts (Messias & Dejoseph, 2004) and very rarely are there temporal sequence of plots. Taya had several storylines all of which were not bound by indications of a beginning, middle and end.

In the restorying, to give Taya a clear voice, I had to take careful note not to impose my pre-existing notion of structure but instead picked up key storylines from which she herself built her stories.

I am swept by unstoppable flow of her storytelling as it was almost stream-of-thought. There was no editing, no mulling or hesitation. Her reflections came not from pauses or silences but from repeated words which for her were obviously, loaded. The earlier fear that her husband would question her absence from farm work was not visible in her narratives. My earlier concern of my not having enough time to connect and build trust because of the security arrangements hardly mattered. Even when the interpreter stopped her to get me onboard her story flow, she kept on talking. There were no pauses, no silences but there were barks of laughter, even in most opportune of places (i.e., laughing at her husband rejecting her sexually now when he used to assault her before) and "na-na-na!" which to me seemed to be a cross between a sigh, a cry of frustration and "I don't care anymore."

II. Storying silence, being silenced, being silent, choosing to be silent

1. The sound of our silences

It was Taya's talking about her silences that I realized that there were their many nuances to their construction: "*pinabayaan ko na lang*" (I just let it pass), "*pinagtiisan ko na lang*" (I just suffered through it), "*umiyak ako nang umiyak*" (I just cried and cried), "*maraming beses kaming pinulong pero ako—di na ko nagsasalita*" (they asked us several times to stop the fighting—but I stayed quiet). She may have been silenced or opted to be silent at the moments of her lived stories, I thought listening to her voice, but now that she is in that moment of storying that lived experience, Taya went on, without

pauses, without hesitation or filtering. *It was as if she broke her dam*, I wrote in my journal later when I returned to the hotel.

The literature I reviewed stated as much, that there would be a marked distinction between stories as told versus stories as lived (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). I didn't really understand what this meant until Taya's storytelling and our restorying. Her *hijab* spoke, too, and I looked at it for signs of what she was not overtly saying and yet still trying to tell — and there they were: the covering of her ears to impose silence on her husband who kept berating her; the unsconscious sliding off of the veil from her head and shoulders, and keeping her uncovered as she transitioned from chronicling to reflection; the wringing and whipping of the veil when she was agitated.

Riding home from the area where I met her, the NGO vehicle's driver and Wawi, the interpreter, both male, attempted to make sense of Taya's story. I found myself holding my own views, content to listen to theirs and I wondered, how often have I structured silence when faced with traumatic, sensitive experiences perhaps to survive, perhaps to keep peace, perhaps to protect mself from any more intrusions?

When I was a younger feminist, a literature professor I admired told me that I was "young and angry" which I took to mean that I used my voice aggressively to tell my own take on things, to put people in their places, to position myself. For me then, silence was a loss of voice and was a direct platform for a coherent identity, so I had to assert my voice. Growing up later, I proved over and over that silence itself, when waged, is power. I would be able to control what I will voice and what I will withhold.

Taya's minority voice, I wrote in my journal, remains so perhaps because *she identified more to being silenced than being silent*. But many reflections later after reading through her transcripts and my notes in the narrative sketch, I wrote in the journal again: *in hindsight I wouldn't really know — in fact, Taya is the only one who knows whether she imposed her own silences or negotiated them with herself and her husband. What I do know is that in our restorying, she reconstructed this silence because she was in control of her story and her storytelling the whole time.*

2. *Restorying Taya' silence*

She had a child, a girl again, by her second husband and this pregnancy was the only thing that spared her from assault, but not from accusations. He insisted she had other men. He would wake her up in the middle of the night to berate:

> *"Yan! Lahaaa—t nalang. Ikaw talaga na babae mahilig manlalaki. Lahat ng pagiging malandi mo, inuubos mo sa iba. Wala! Wala talaga akong ginagawa. Nagseselos sa wala. Wala naman akong ginagagawa. Sinusumpa ko. Sa totoo lang, sumpa man sa Diyos, wala taaga akong naging lalaki dyan. Kahit pagsabihin nya 'ko palagi, nanlalaki daw ako. Palagi, wala akong ginagawa"* (He blames me for everything. You woman, you have other men. You spend your femininity on other men. But I did nothing, I was doing nothing of that sort. He was jealous of nothing. I was doing nothing. I swear. I swear to God I did not have other men.).

When she gave birth, the jealousy and battering began again, this time in earnest, day and night.

There was a time when she still asked the why's and who's from sympathetic neighbors but any man she came into contact with would be suspect. If she defended one or two, he'd pounce on her details, *"sabi ko tatahimik na lang ako"* (so I told myself that I would just remain silent). Taya

took to wearing her *hijab* even inside the house, even at night to turn off the husband's incessant scolding. When she attempted to cover her ears from the constant rebuke, he punched her left ear so hard she couldn't quite hear from it anymore. From headscarf, she wore the *hijab* as disguised earmuffs.

> *"Minsan nagtatakip na lang ako ng tainga—ganito. Kasi ayoko nang pakinggan mga sinasabi nya. Marami na! Kahit ano na. Di naman ako pinakikinggan. Tinatakpan ko na lang tainga ko. Kasi ayoko nang makipagbangayan sa kanya. Kapag natutulog ako, mmmm. Tainga ko, tinatakpan ko. Nagtatakip na lang ako ng tainga para lang di sya marinig. Dun talaga ako nahirapan, sa pag-aasawa...."* (Often I just close my ears like this. I don't want to listen to what he is saying anymore. It was too much. It was about everything blamed on me. He didn't listen to me at all. So I just cover my ears so I won't hear what he is saying. I really had a hard time with this in marriage.)

Taya lowered her *hijab* to point exactly to the places that still hurt, to this day:

> *"Yung ulo ko na sinuntok nya, di na ko masyado makarinig....Na-na-na! Naalog ang ulo ko. Totoo talaga itong nangyari sa akin. Masuntok ka pa dito. Umiyak ako nang umiyak, parang, ano na kaya naging kasalanan ko? Totoo sa Diyos, wala akong alam na ginawa ko. Kung bakit ginaganito ako ng asawa ko palagi...sumakit man ang ulo ko. Pumutok man ang ulo ko,"* (He punched me in the head, now I can't hear very well. Na-na-na! My head got shaken. All these are true, they really happened to me. I cried and cried, what wrong did I do? I swear to God that I did not know what I did wrong. Why does he always hurt me? My head hurt so much from the cuts he inflicted).

"Eto" (Here), she rolls the long sleeves up to point to a long-ago scar, *"kapag nakikita ko yung peklat ko rito....ayoko na"* (whenever I see my scar here...I do not like this anymore.). She details the major hurts and leaves the daily, minor ones unnarrated: broken left ring finger, clobbered left ear, the sexual advances – the last one only told in passing.

> *"Sinaksak ako. Nanlalaban na ako ngayon. Kahit di ko makaya. Dadaganan ko! Sasapakin ako. Kahit sabi ko hindi ako makakaya. Hahahaha! Wala, di rin ako na-ospital. Kasi naalis din yung...hahaha! Namaga itong kamay ko. Mmm, dito sa ano. Hanggang sa ulo ko*

sumasakit. Sumasakit parati." (He'd stab me. I fight back now. Even if I know I cannot really fend it off. I put my weight on him and he'd beat me. Even if I plead sometimes that I cannot take it anymore. Hahahaha! No, I wasn't brought to the hospital despite my injuries. After a while, the pain stopped...hahahaha! My hand got swollen. Mmmm, here, too. My head is painful all the time.)

On the times that her husband didn't touch her, he would sharpen his *bolo* (long knife), and she mused, poker-faced, that she could have been and still could be stabbed during the night. When she did fight in those rare moments, her self-doubts would attack first and it would weaken her more than her husband's punches and kicks. Despite her injuries, she had never been brought to any hospital. Taya knew she could die any time in the hands of her husband.

"Grabe man. Naghahasa ng bolo! Mmmm, tuwing gabi. Sabi ko, baka tagain nya 'ko nung itak. Naaa! Kapag gabi, di ko alam gagawin ko. Baka mamatay ako, sabi ko." (It was terrible. He'd sharpen his bolo. Mmmm, every night. I thought that he'd probably stab me with the knife. Naaa! I didn't know what to do every night he'd do that. I'd probably die, I thought.)

She turns the ring on the finger that her husband broke long ago and unabashed, she revealed a private detail that he rarely sleeps with her now, and when he does, his back is turned away. *"Baliktaran...hirap"* (our backs face each other, it is hard), she volunteered and then laughed.

"Madalang na lang na tatabi sa 'kin. Pero pinababayaan ko na lang. Kung ano ang gusto nya, pinababayaan ko na lang. Di kami nagtatabi. Minsan tumatabi rin." (He rarely makes love to me now. But I just let him be. Whatever he wants to do, I just let him. We barely touch each other intimately now. Although sometimes now, he has sex with me.)

The *hijab* does the real talking and slips. She hitched it back, and laughed again. The laughter is full blown now, bordering on hysterical. Again, the *hijab* slipped but she did not notice it.

"Hahaha! Nakakahiya. Hahahaha! Nakakahiyang pangyayari... hahaha! Naikukuwento ko. Kasi yun ang totoo, na dapat ikuwento. Hahahaha!" (Hahaha! It is so embarrassing. Hahahaha! This was a very embarrassing incident... hahaha! And I am telling it. Because that's the truth that needs to be shared...hahaha!).

Taya lost count of the many instances that she ran away to escape, often to her parents' house, but every time, either she came back home herself or her husband fetched her back. Her third kid, still in school, is her default reason. She cannot get the child but doesn't reveal why, only that she had no way of fending for the girl. She remembered wanting to leave and separate but was afraid of not being able to get custody of her youngest kid, and more afraid of not being able to provide for them both.

"Maraming beses na 'ko umalis pero bumabalik pa rin ako. Di pa rin kami talaga makapaghiwalay. Kahit ganyan. Di ako makaalis kasi 'pano na kabuhayan? Sige na lang ako sa paggawa ng banig. Kaya naisip kong umuwi na lang kasi baka magbago rin ang asawa ko. Minsan pa kinuha ng asawa ko anak ko. Di ko kayang kunin. Naga—iba-iba na naiisip ko kasi di ko nakikita mga anak ko. Nakababaliw na 'to. (I left many times but I still go back. We haven't really separated. If I leave how do I take care of myself and my kid? I just weave and weave mats. I thought of going back because my husband could still change. One time he took my kid and I couldn't get her back. I went crazy not seeing my child, thinking of all possibilities.)

Her parents are old, she says, and weaving mats is their only way to survive and already, the leaves of the *panda* are getting *scarcer and scarcer.*

"Mmmm, ako parang—kung ako lang din bubuhay sa sarili ko. Gumagawa ako ng banig. Yun lang binubuhay ko sa sarili ko, gumagawa ng banig. Hinahanap pa ang panda. Nahihirapan ako, mmm, ang hirap buhatin. Binubuhay ko pa. Ibinibilad ko pa yun. Ganun lang paraan para kumain, kung di maigawa ang banig, walang pambili ng bigas. Minsan tumatakas ako sa kanila tatay ko. Pero matatanda na sila nanay. Matatanda na." (Mmmm, I'm the only one who takes care of myself. I weave mats to survive. But I have to look harder for the panda. It is difficult. I still have to carry the leaves and dry them out in the sun. It the only way to eat. If I do not weave mats, we would not have anything to buy rice with. I escape to my parents sometimes but they are getting old. My parents are getting old.)

She shifted from reflecting that there is really no certainty in family life, and if she stayed, she would still have to survive anyway; in another breath, she is proud that she is patient and tolerant of suffering.

> *"Kasi gusto ko di na ko makapagpalit ng asawa. Mmmm, ang sa akin hanggat kaya pa pagtiisan ko lahat ng dinaranas ko. Kasi ayoko nang magpali-palit ng asawa. Una, yung mga anak ko madadamay. Baka magbago rin, sabi ko. Hahahaha! Kasi yun, kahit maglayas ako, susunduin pa rin ako. Hah! Pagtiisan na lang."* (I don't want to change husbands anymore. Mmmm, so as long as I can, I try to just accept it. I don't want to change husbands. First, my kids will be affected. He might change, I tell myself. Hahahaha! When I left, he fetched me back. Hah! I'll just suffer in silence.)

Taya knew that the neighbors knew, the whole community knew. She did not seek for their help but various *kamal* (i.e., influential people in her village – traditional and religious leaders, MILF commanders, elected village officials) in different times would come to tell her to return when she escaped, to fix the marriage, to stop the fighting.

> *"Kahit ano pa man, sabi nila, magbalikan na kayo. Ang gusto nila magkaayos din ang mag-asawa. Konti-konti lang naman yan, baka puwedeng tigilan na 'yan. Pinagsasabihan lang sya sa mga ginagawa nya pero wala rin, di naman titigil. Kahit mga kapatid nya nagsasabing, 'Taya! Hindi na 'yan titigil pa kasi sanay na daw sila sa gawain nya.' Mga kapatid na nya ang nagsabi. Mmm, kasi gusto ko mapagsabihan din sya sa ginagawa nya. Para di na ko napapagalitan, sinasaktan, nagpatulong ako."* (Whatever happens, you have to get back together. They wanted to fix our relationship. They said, that's minor, just stop fighting. They told my husband to stop the beating but nothing happened, he did not stop. Even his siblings told me, 'Taya! He won't stop because he had always done this.' Mmmm, I liked that they told him to stop so he would stop berating, hurting me. I asked for help).

She stayed silent every time a *kamal* came so not one of them ever heard her story which she gave full rein to now:

> *"Maraming beses na kami pinulong. Hindi ko makaya! Pero ako, di na ko nagsasalita! Nahihiya na ako. Araw-araw na lang"* (they met with me and my husband many times. I couldn't stand the abuse any long but I did not speak. I was so ashamed. He beat me up every day.).

But she couldn't stay silent with her family with whom she shared four walls. Like the *kamal* though, they marked down the battering as couple's conflicts, however violent, however abusive, and however broken Taya ended up with every combat. A couple of times, one of her older daughters tried to step in, Taya recalled:

> *"Sabi nya, 'ina! Ay, ama! Tama na yang pag-aaway nyo. Nakakahiya na yan! Ang naririnig lang ng mga tao si ina, umiiyak na lang parati tuwing gabi"* (She said, 'mother! Ay, father! Stop fighting. It is getting very embarrassing. All the neighbors are hearing is mother crying the whole night).

Oh she did cry, Taya admitted, but these where the moments when she couldn't fight back. Despite her silence, neighbors did mark her testimonies in the nightly cries and abuse such that some *kamal* hammered an agreement that her husband would stop the battering or face penalties. This did not stop the cycle though as the violence continued and she would merely leave and he would come fetch her, and she'd forgive him. The *"talik"* (fines for damages) then were never instituted. She knew this, she knew she protected he husband. She knew the cost of her silence and tacit tolerance of the abuse – nobody would believe her now.

> *"Ang ibig sabihin ng talik, kung uulitin nya ung ginagawa nya sa akin ay may kasamang danyos. Pedtaliken tawag. Mmmm, ang ibig sabihin pag may talik, may sala. Wala, di sya natalik kasi magaling din pinupuntahan muna nya 'ko sa amin. Sumasama naman ako kasi akala ko, magbabago na. Tsaka s'an namin kukunin pambayad? Baka magbago din sabi ko. Tsaka wala namang bumubuhay sa 'kin, baka mag-iba na isip nya. Mmmm, sumasama naman ako sa kanya. Pinapagalitan ako ng mga magulang ko. Ngayon, wala nang naniniwala sa amin"* ("Talik" means he would be penalized if he continued beating me. We call it pedtaliken. Mmmm,if there is a talik, somebody did someone wrong. But no, he was never penalized because he was scheming. He'd go to my parents' house where I escaped to. I'd go back with him thinking he'd change. Plus where would we get money to pay for the penalty? There was no one else helping me with our livelihood. I went back with him because I thought he

was going to change. He still might. But now, no one believes me anymore).

Taya had learned to use structured silences to survive. She chose silence – as opposed to being silenced – during and right after the abuses. She thought she could hide in this silence to keep a sensitive issue closeted inside her marital home but she was wrong. Her plight was actually known to the community and had gone on too long and extreme enough that required several visits of the *kamal* (influential people) to impress upon her that while the act of gender violence was un-relligious, her response had to be religious (a dominant narrative) – preserve the marriage, comply with the agreements that husband and wife stop the fighting or pay the penalties. Taya chose again to be silent when the *kamal* returned to asked whether the husband actually complied with the agreements. He actually violated these by beating her numerous times after the agreements. But with Taya's silence, the husband was saved from the responsibility of paying compensation because, she reasoned, the economic burden of the fine will rebound on her.

While Taya chose silence during her lived experience of gender violence, that silence is absent in her first-time telling of that experience. Taya is a minority telling her story – her way – for the first time. Given a platform to speak, she challenged two dominant narratives put forward by this inquiry: one, Taya resisted that her act of communicating gender violence goes against the sacred book; and second, publicly communicating that she, as well as members of her family, are survivors of chronic abuse and battering affirms that gender violence exist in minority communities.

But why did Taya communicate her story only now when she had several opportunities to do so before, prospects presented by institutions, individuals and

circumstances? It must be pointed out that Taya's prolonged silences, despite seemingly of her choosing, can be regarded as constituting a loss of voice, power and coherent identity (Fivush, 2010), and for a large part of her current storytelling, it is also these accumulated losses that prompted her to tell her story outside of her immediate group, to a slightly bigger public. Her public, until the moment of this first storytelling consisted of her family and the village that know of her experience of gender violence.

I paid particular attention to the dynamics of the bigger public – myself, Wawi (interpreter), the driver, and most importantly, Piang – as well as the power relations that existed between Taya and the members of this public because they clearly characterized her storytelling of a private, sensitive issue. The inquiry did not extend to how she regarded me and my positioning in her storytelling, so I can only speculate that in her story plotting, I am simply framed as "not a minority woman" and an outsider interested in how she told her story.

The transcript is dotted with references to "Datu," a title traditionally given to monarchs in the communities of the minority women, and now used to refer to village chiefs and wealthy individuals. For Taya, "Datu" is Piang, and although he did not speak as I requested him to, his presence while silent, is an active one for Taya, and formed a crux in her choice to finally tell her side of a story already known to Taya's public. Taya's storytelling is replete with justifications, invoking God to state her innocence – mostly directed at Piang:

> *"Wala akong ginagawa, Datu, parati na lang siya nagagalit."* (I did not do anything, Datu, but he is always furious with me.)

> *"Wala! Wala talaga akong ginagawa. Sinusumpa ko man sa Diyos, kahit pagsabihan nya ako palagi, nanlalalaki daw palagi, wala akong ginagawa."* (Nothing. I really did not do anything. Even as I swear to God, even if he tells me that I have many men, I did not do anything.)

"Wala akong alam na ginagawa ko. Sumusumpa ako sa Diyos." (I don't know anything that I've done. I swear to God.)

"Totoo sa Diyos, Datu, wala ako alam na ginagawa ko. Kung ba't ginaganito ako ng asawa ko palagi." (In truth to God, Datu, I don't know anything that I am doing which merited why he's treating me this way.)

This interplay among cultural frames of feudal relations (tenant-landowner), gender roles in Minority society and religion-custom – and the meaning-making that Taya has processed over the years – are obvious in Taya's restorying. This time, Taya repositioned herself differently with a significant figure in her life, Piang, first as the son of her landlord and second, as a key figure in the MILF-government peace-building efforts.

Did Taya's silence spiral because of her fear of isolation and rebuke from her community? Taya, as a minority – as a minority woman and one experiencing gender violence in a community that claimed abuses of this kind didn't exist – clearly ascertained the general pulse of her public and withheld her opinion because it did not fit the dominant narrative. However, she continued to withhold her story even when her very experience cracked that dominant narrative wide open enough that critical influentials (i.e., *kamal*) in her community already came with the opportunity for a communication platform.

Consistent with the spiral of silence of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), Taya started to carve her communication space when she perceived that an influential belonging to the majority (a male) and holding a dominant view, Piang, seemed to support her story and storytelling process – outside of her limited public. While development communication practitioners and social researchers are conscious of the dynamics of power relations in minorities' communication

processes, this more often meant physical disaggregation to distinguish minority voices: thus, women are separated from men; management, from rank and file; landowners, from peasants. With Piang, I came in as a development communication practitioner whom Taya must have perceived as an outsider, albeit being female, who held neither the dominant nor minority view but presented an opportunity for a bigger public communication platform possibly to break the spiral of silence.

Did Taya's silence spiral because she did not communicate her lived experience of gender violence? The spiraling of Taya's silence has worked over time, and because she did not speak out, her daughter and other female members of her family had also experienced and still experiencing gender violence almost in the same contexts as Taya's. She is painfully aware of the cruel patterns as she attached meanings to her experience, drawing some cause-and-effect relationships on her sense of self:

> *"Nagagaya na nila ang uri ng pag-aasawa ko. Walang kwenta 'to."* (They are copying the narrative of my marriage. This is very bad.)
>
> *"Bakit dito lang sa pamilya namin ang pangit?"* (Why is it that the bad things only happen to our family?).
>
> *"Wala ka naman pinagmanahan, Bai, kundi kay Babo mo, si Taya!"* *(You are just like your Babo, Taya!).*

III. Storying becomes Voice

1. *Restorying our voices*

Of the three women, it is Taya who is still in her locale, still exposed to the violence of a husband she could not leave. Many times in Taya's storytelling, I curbed my impatience at the cycle of vulnerabilities she acknowledged

having, but couldn't manage. I wrote in my journal, *I waited for a transformation, a transcendence that could allow me to say, she claimed and told particular stories, she sought credibility in the storytelling of her difficult narratives, she restoried voice and said enough.* Except Taya didn't.

On the way back from interviewing Taya in the agreed place, I groped and found a printout of Hopkins' (2001) work in my bag, who cited a warning from feminists who may be trapped in binary tussle, in my case, the need to beware the "frozen identity.... to suspect the binary, to worry the clear distinction." I was waiting for that delienating line where she would reach some kind of emancipation and not just sense-making of past and possible futures. On Taya's narrative text, I had three columns – the first one were my notes of her story as she told it, scribbled as I rode that 50-plus kilometers to the hotel; the second column showed where I separated my voice and insights based on her story details, written in the hotel after I arrived; and the third column anchored my reflections after reading the transcript and even later, in the restorying. My dilemma at restorying her voice was already in the second column, *How to restory Taya?* And then in the third column, months later, *Taya, how to restory??? How do we restory our voices?*

I read and instinctively knew that restorying should also avoid the suggestion of complete metamorphosis (*ibid*), but still I struggled and instead of shrugging it, documented that tension. And in that tension, I located our voices in the complex relationship between her knowledge and mine, her experiences and mine, and our learning processes as we both went about the storying and restorying. In restorying our voices, I realized my compliance with how her voice is being reconstructed all throughout, and recalibrated as

she sought to reconstruct her identity through many lenses. I realized her compliance as my voice, too, and how we reconstructed and recalibrated personal tensions in restorying our voices.

There are milestones that show how and when Taya's voice peaked. She had been shifting from one state to another in her many escapes from violence – from husband and war – but it was only upon learning of her daughter's and niece's own abuse and their husbands' justification of her indirect but still active blame for the maltreatment that her voice reached a crescendo. Seen from the perspectives of other women, also minorities close to her, must have brought the narratives out, the narratives, home. She found an angry voice which lashed out at the women, family members and fellow survivors of gender violence. I tried to hear the voice that sought accountability from the perpetrator and there it was – but that voice was quieter, less angry.

I see her still in my mind's eye sitting on one side of the table where peace between armed groups is negotiated. Tall, willowy with a voice that did not want to stop her storying as she went on without pause. Her *hijab* is an accomplice to silence her husband's jealousies, to hide the scars and to remove because she temporarily found a safe place, and her story and voice have found traction.

2. *Restorying Taya's voice*

And then it happened. Her son-in-law, Badz, pushed her eldest daughter, Radia, home, asking Taya to take her back. He hurt me, Radia cried to her mother, he punched me. Taya recounted, distressed:

"Inuwi, inuwi nya ang anak ko. Ananana! Kaya nga nagkaganyan kay sinasaktan nya ko, Inay, sabi nya. Anong nangyari, sabi ko. Sinuntok ako ni Badz. Anana! Yung anak ko din!" (He brought me home my daughter. Ananana! She said, why did this happen that he would hurt me? I asked, what happened. Badz hit me, she said. Anana! Not my daughter, too!).

She recalled Badz shouting at her:

"Kunin nyo na na anak n'yo, Babu! Inuuwi ko na sya. Di ako nagsalita. Kahit isa, di ako nagsalita ng oo" ('Take her back, Babu! I am returning her to you.' But I stayed silent. I did not utter a word, I did not say, yes.). She put such a premium to her yes and her silence.

The order of battle did not stop at her daughter's name. There is Bai, too, her niece, who, like Taya, was married off right after her menarche. She is pregnant, and sought shelter at Taya's thinking that she would recognize abuse and would know how to teach her to survive. Bai's hands bled while she told Taya her story, how her husband twisted and bit them. Bit them, Taya repeated, and then laughed.

"Sinuntok daw sya sa ulo, pinilipit daw ang kamay. Kinukuha nya raw yung light. Hinablot daw ang light. Pinagkakagat daw ng asawa dito. Pinipilipit ang kamay nya. hahahaha! Napatawa ako. Nagpula-pula man ang dugo nya. Nagdugo. Totoo talaga. Namaga yung dito. Sabi ko, laaaa! Nahihirapan na. Naglilihi yung pamangkin ko." (He hit her in the head and twisted her arm. She was trying to get the light. She seized the light. Her husband bit her. Twisted her arm, hahahaha! This made me laugh. Her blood was so red. She bled. It's true. And her arm got swollen. I said, laaaa! She is having a hard time. My niece was pregnant at that time.)

She adjusted her *hijab* and giggled – in a frenzy, eyes wet, wild when she recounted that she wept after the hysterical laughter,

"Napaiyak na lang ako kasi lahat na lang tayo. Sabi ko, nauubos na tayo. Nakakahiya na 'tong nangyayari sa atin. Bata, matanda, sinasaktan ng asawa." (I cried when Bai told me what happened to her because it seemed to happen to all of us. I told her, we are getting decimated. What's happening to us is embarrassing. Young women, old women, we are all being hurt by our husbands.)

Bai's husband would refuse to eat the food she cooked and soon separated his own stash, and Bai, uneducated and unemployed, found herself starving.

> *"Madalas nandoon sa bahay namin. Di nya ako binibigyan ng pera, sabi nya. Di ako makabili ng pagkain kasi pinagdadamutan nya ko. Humihiwalay daw ng pagluluto ng pagkain. Sabi ko, mamulot ka na lang ng palay.' Hahahaha! Ang bata nag-asawa!"* (She is always in our house. He doesn't give me money, she said. I couldn't buy food because he withheld everything. He'd even cook his food separately. I said, why don't you just pick rice grains. Hahahaha! She married so very young.)

Bai did as Taya advised. She waited near ricefields and in the shoulders of highways to painstakingly pick rice grains that weren't swept back into sacks after they've been dried, looking through cracks, poking at the soil.

> *"Nanguha ng palay kasi para may makain din daw sya. Naglilihi. Namulot sa palayan, sa kalye ng tirang palay kasi para naman daw may makain din sya. Mmm! Wala na daw syang makain. Naglilihi pa naman. Ah, nakakaawa."* (She picked rice grains so she could eat. She was pregnant. She picked rice grains that weren't swept by owners into sacks near the rice fields, in the highway . Mmmm! She didn't have to eat and she was pregnant. I pitied her.)

She heard people telling her daughter and niece that they were just like her, that they were the same. Taya whips off her *hijab* in a quick, angry movement. The patterns did not escape her:

> *"Ang sabi pa ng mga tao, pareho na kayo ni Babu mo Taya. Pareho kami ng dinaranas. Bakit dito lang sa pamilya namin ang pangit? Nagagaya na nila ang uri ng pag-aasawa ko. Walang kwenta 'to"* (People are saying, you are the same as your Babu, Taya. We are all experiencing the same pain. Why is it that the bad things only happen to our family? They are copying the narrative of my marriage. This is very bad.)

She lashed back, not caring who she whipped. The *hijab*, on her hands, is a swept back and forth, also whipped. Taya made Bai leave her house, telling her your father would have to pay your husband penalties for abandonment of

the marital home, and where will he get the money? She made Bai desperate, asking her not to involve her, Taya, in a private issue that should just be between husband and wife. Taya's pity though did not translate to help or rescue. Perhaps it was meant for herself, perhaps it was meant to pressure her niece and daughter to brave up, perhaps it was meant to show them how she, herself, made sense of what was happening.

> *"Pinangaralan ko sila. Sabi ko, mananagot kayo. Sa pamangkin ko, kung hihingi ka ng danyos, saan kukunin ng tatay mo yun? Yung tatay nya kuya ko. Sabi ko, saan kukunin ng tatay mo ipambabayad nya sa danyos. Gusto nya sa bahay kasi parehas daw kami. Sabi ko, wag ka—sabi ko umuwi ka na. Pinagtabuyan ko. Wag kang pupunta dito kasi madadamay ako. Pero kasi, pag umuwi naman sya, hindi ko alam kung saan sya kukuha ng pambayad. Nahihirapan sya sa asawa nya."* (I gave them sermons. I said, take responsibility for what's going on. I told my niece, if you will ask for compensation where will your father get the money? My brother is her dad. Where will your father get what surely would be asked as compensation. She'd always go to my house because our situation is the same, she said. But I told her, don't—go home. I pushed her away. Do not ever come back here because I would be swept into your business. But you know, if she goes home, where will she get money? She is having a difficult time with her husband.)

And Bai, still half a child, bawled that she sought shelter at Taya's because her husband screamed:

> *"Wala ka naman pinagmanahan, Bai, kundi kay Babo mo, si Taya!"* (You are just like your Babo, Taya!).

Taya recounted the confrontation, how she had broken down, how she had finally recognized who was perpetrator and who was survivor. *"'Hindi naman ako masamang asawa'"* (I am not a bad wife), I told Bai, *'ang lalaki ang may diperensya'"* (It is the man who has a problem.)

I looked at Taya, head bare even when men were around, and clasped her hands. Across that table where political peace is forged, we didn't say anything, sharing our silences that only we could hear.

Just as the Taya's account as she told them challenges causality, I also noted many inconsistencies as she processed, accepted and rejected possible narratives of resistance, revising her many autobiographies as she went along (Carr, 1986). She is at once defensive: *"Ano na kaya naging kasalanan ko?"* (What sin have I done?), in the next breath, resigned: *"lumalaban ako pero di ako makalaban kasi ang mga lalaki malalakas, di ka makakaya syempre"* (I struggle against it but sometimes I cannot fight because men are stronger and I cannot win the combat), and then defiant: *"Kung di lang ako nanghihinayang, mas mabuti umalis na 'ko dito.....Di na ko makatuloy, pagod na pagod na ako"* (If I did not regret the things I will lose, it is better that I leave.....I cannot go on, I am so, so tired.).

As a feminist, I came out of Taya's interview desperately looking for a turning point[2] (Harvey et al., 2000) trying to reinterpret her struggles as part of her self-empowerment process. This is part of my continuing personal tensions as I co-authored her stories in this inquiry. At the individual level, according to Kranstuber (2012), the content of difficult stories — including coherence, linguistic content, narrative tone and frame — offer insights, a window into how storytellers cope. The fact that Taya struggled and kept on struggling through the telling and retelling of her narratives showed a psychology that has not given up. As a development communication practitioner, I told myself to temper my impatience and respect this process of consultation that can lead to mind shifts or even behavior change.

Taya was providing structure to her past and present lives, making sense of where she had been through the similar experiences of her daughter and niece. She

[2] Turning points are vital to the informants restructuring of their experiences to which they attest. Turning points may represent time or shifts in experience or interpretation.

tentatively imagined a future through their lenses although there is anger generally at herself but externally directed at the other women through her refusal to be involved, her stories show that through them, Taya was already naming her experience (McCormack and Milne, 2003). She used her stories and with me, the restorying, to "elucidate the subjective level of the relationship between individual action and the wide social and cultural contexts" (*ibid*).

Taya's narrative brought me back to why I chose stories and storytelling as the methodology to trouble gender violence as a problem that must be solved. Stories begin by trying to explain things from the minority women's point of view and they did, trying on different lenses to understand where they stood and are standing now vis-à-vis their difficult experiences. The restorying, however, is not about tying these little plots together in neat packages and providing solutions. Some stories can remain as puzzling in the end as how they started, or perhaps even more mind-boggling, but this does not mean they lose their resonance and relevance. Fullford (1999) said it best, stories "turn an incident this way and that,throw several kinds of light on it, surround it with a certain mood – and then put I back in its place, still unexplained."

Riding back from Taya's village, the NGO driver tunes in to a news broadcast about more wars: felled drug addicts with a five-year old collateral damage, the former dictator's imminent burial wth his son's political return, the circus of a senate inquiry that used sex stories of a senator and her boyfriend as an aid to legislation, and current president's quip on spanking female cops. I do a Taya and unroll my *hijab*, and then I put it on again to cover my ears to burrow deep in my silences, turning the veil into protective gear.

ALMA'S STORY

I. Storying the war within as with the war without

1. We, in the thick of wars

The pink *masjid* (mosque) at the corner of a main highway in the province shifted the NGO driver's story. He stopped the vehicle in front of the mosque at *Dhuhr*, one of the five times that the minority group prays when the sun is at its highest. It is Friday so that pink intersection was busy with the religious faithful and tourists with their selfies taking in the various carnation hues of the *masjid*, government buildings and the town mayor's house. When a group of men crosses the intersection for Friday prayers, the driver pointed to one of them as a drug pusher whom an armed group got to first before the police and military enforcers of the government's drug war. That's why he is alive, the driver said, local commanders identified him, his dealings and addiction, and he got rounded up and surrendered to the armed group.

So the province has not been spared of this other war, too, I observed. The driver looked at me in the rear view mirror, silent at my naivete. We always have had this war, the driver said, and I decided to unveil with my answer: it's tangled with everything that made the region under study what it is, neglected, exploited and feudal, at once religious and tribal, and where private is public, I remarked. The driver nodded, my earlier quip, forgiven.

The drug war entered my hotel room, too, when the interpreter knocked and entered with Alma. Her grip as she shook my hand was strong, the gaze, unwavering and not shy. The dainty lace piping the edge of her

beige *hijab* swiveled as she tilted her head to one side to take me in. My baseball shirt with its three-fourths sleeves. I smiled and let her be comfortable with her checking; I, too, tilted my head to the right. Her burgundy cotton top long-sleeved and round-necked. My anti-skinny jeans with the hole on the right knee. Her brown low-heeled pumps. My beige chuck taylors.

She looked at my hair last, paused, I had no covering. I left the *hijab* on top of the bed, still folded, the shape of my bag smoothed off. There was a reckoning there I sensed, I am not a a member of the minority group. In my mind's eye, I unveil: removed my feminist lens, shorn the academic head, and pinched the communicator's nose for a good story.

When she sat down on the hotel chair I readied, her *hijab* slid off to rest on her shoulders, the right side of the veil longer almost reaching her waist. Alma has wavy dyed light brown hair of medium length. Her lips are stained bright red from lipstick. At 40 years old, she has an adult male child, now 21, and a daughter, 16, still in high school. It was her first time to tell this story, she remarked, hands holding on to the sides of the chair, buckling down perhaps knowing that it would hurt. She did not hitch her *hijab* back on, it stayed on her shoulders the whole time.

2. *Storying the war within as with the war without*

It mattered that their marriage wasn't arranged, that she was his choice of partner and he, hers. It mattered that they had a courtship that was frowned on because the village knew him, his addiction to drugs and his numerous women, but she dismissed the extent of his drinking and

drugging. It mattered that she was thrown out and disowned by her parents because she married for love to the man who fathered her children but who would later choose to abandon them.

> *"Magkasintahan pa kami, nung magkasintahan pa kami meron akong karanasan na di maganda. Syempre sinabi nya sa akin, sya nagsabi na kapag nakasal na kami, iiwas na sya. May bisyo sya pero tinanggap ko pa rin kasi nangako syang iiwan niya. Shabu. Tsaka naglalasing. Pero nung nakasal na kami, sinsaktan na nya ako."* (We were not yet married when I already had a bad experience. He told me though, he said that we are married, he would avoid drugs. I knew he had vices but I accepted him all the same. He was doing shabu and he drank. When we married, I was already being battered).

Alma touched her belly, quite flat now, as if remembering the first hurt. She was heavily pregnant with their first child when she finally understood the root of her parents' warnings. Her husband was not coming home for longer periods, but one day he did – drunk and high. When she confronted him, he told her to mind the baby and her own affairs:

> *"'Wag na 'wag ko na daw sya pakialaman sa gusto nya sa buhay. Ma...mahirap! Wag ko na daw sya pakialaman sa ginagawa nya. Pinagsabihan ko siya. Sabi ko, umayos-ayos ka kasi pinaglaban kita. Sinuway ko ang mga magulang ko para lang sa yo. Sinaktan nya ako. Pinagsusuntok nya ako"* (I should just mind my own business because this was his life and his choices. It- it was difficult! He told me not to mess up with him. I told him that he should fix his life because I fought for him. I went against my parents' wishes for him. But he hurt me. He punched me.).

Throughout the first pregnancy and birth of her second child, her husband would leave and then return, leave and then return, each time asking for money which Alma gave because he beat her up. Each time she'd ask him to stop the drugs and the drinking, and he would promise. She knew where the money would go:

> *"Kinukuha nya yung kita ko, ipinagbibisyo nya yung kita ko. Tinatanggap ko naman sya. Syempre, mahal ko. Mahal ko siya, may*

mga anak kami. Syrempre, syempre, mahal ko sya. Mahal ko yung asawa ko. Siya lang ang hindi nagmahal sa akin. Ipinipilit ko yung sarili ko sa kanya" (He got the money I worked for, he used the fruits of my labor for his vices. But I still welcomed him back. I love him, I really love my husband. But he didn't love me. I was forcing myself on him.).

Holding on to the hotel chair, Alma claimed her strength: her husband never worked, she built that house, she kept that home for her kids, and she knew what her love was made of. She started to draw a line to the loving, to set some parameters when she learned from her mother-in-law that her husband was already married to another woman.

"May sarili kaming bahay. Ako din ang nagbili ng bahay. Sige pa rin sya sa bisyo nya. Paulit-ulit na kaming nag-aaway. Di sya umuuwi. Hanggang sabi ng nanay nya nag-asawa na sya. Iniwanan nya ako. Sabi ko sa kanya, gani-ganitong iniwan nya ko sa bahay hindi na sya matatangap na asawa. Marami, marami syang ginawa sa kin na 'di ko gusto." (We had our own house. I bought that house. He continued with his vices. We were fighting constantly. He wasn't going home anymore until his mom told me he had taken on another wife. He left me. I told him because he left me, I cannot accept him anymore as my husband. He did many things to me that I did not like.)

The man called her up almost daily, *"misis, misis,"* he'd cajole, if I came back to you, would you accept me back? She is braver when the exchange is not face-to-face, and she will not come out black and blue so she told him to stick with his new wife because she'd rather be separated and single than stay in the old crack of hurt.

"Tumatawag sya sa akin, sabi nya, asawa ko, misis...ah...misis, kung babalik na ako sa yo, matatanggap mo pa ba 'ko? Sabi ko hindi na kita matatanggap pa. Dyan ka na lang sa asawa mo. Sobrang sakit gg ginawa mo sa 'kin. Mas gusto ko pang wala nang asawa. Ang sakit! Masakit. Sa (komunidad amin), di ako mahilig sa duwa-duwaya. Dalawang asawa." (He'd call me and say, my wife, misis, misis, would you still accept me if I came back to you. I told him that I can not accept him anymore and he should just stay with his second wife. He hurt me too much. I'd rather not have a husband. It hurt so much, so much. Among our communities, I don't tolerage duwa-duwaya, men taking on two wives.)

He returned swearing that he will abandon the second wife, and asked Alma to marry him again – and they did. The second wife did not know that the husband remarried his first wife.

> *"Sobra akong nasaktan. Hahahaha! Ayoko na sa kanya. Hahahaha! Goodbye! Di ko sya, di ko sya matanggap. Ang sabi nya lang, uh, gusto nyang umuwi sa kin kasi may mga anak kami. Sabi nya, tatanggapin mo pa ba ko, misis? Kasi yung asawa ko iiwasan ko na. Tinanggap ko sya, ang sabi ko sa kanya, kapag nagpakasal tayo, yung huling asawa mo, hiwalayan mo na. Kinasal kami ulit sa (relihiyon)"* (I was so hurt. Hahahaha! I don't like him in my life anymore. Hahahaha! Goodbye! I can't accept him anymore. Then he told me that he wanted to come back because of our kids. He asked if I would take him back because he would be avoiding his second wife already. I accepted him again. I said, when we remarry, you have to divorce your second wife. So we got married again in the religion.)

Alma paused in her storytelling, and the silence was long. She was twice married, she breathed deeply, her long exhale filling the hotel room, I was married twice to the same man, she repeated. Married in the religion, she added. In the silence, the reckoning was private, Alma was still fighting a war inside.

> *"Mahal ko talaga yun! Pero di nya ko mahal. Sige-sige lang ako sa pag-iyak. Nasaktan ako talaga. Pero syempre kasi nung ipinanhik nya sa amin, pinag-ayos kami. Alam mo na sa (mga komunidad kagaya ng sa amin). Mag-ayos na daw kami sabi ng magulang ng asawa ko para maganda yung pagsasama. Nakipagbati ako sa asawa nya pero sya yung nakikipag-plastikan sa akin."* (I really loved that guy. But he did not love me back. I just cried and cried. I was really hurt. Of course when he went up to me to ask for my hand in remarriage, you know how it is among minority groups. His parents said we should reconcile so our relationship will get better. I tried to befriend his wife but she did not treat me well.)

Neighbors have long dropped hints about the husband's affairs but despite the pain in every betrayal, she couldn't confront him without evidence. The second marriage was evidence, finally. The second wife is Catholic. She is older than Alma. And she is also a drug addict.

Alma saw them together in the city market and she was ready with her silence and indifference. But the second wife saw and approached her, high, drunk and livid and said, pointing to the husband who hurried over on unsteady legs:

> *"Yang si love? Di ka nya mahal. Ah, galit na galit! Di ka nya mahal. Ako ang mahal nya"* (This, my love? He doesn't love you. She was so angry. It is me whom he loves.).

And it was enough. Alma screamed something she couldn't remember later, and only knew that it was guttural, grabbed the second wife's hair, and pulled hard, reached for the neck for a strangling, ready to kill:

> *"Nagsabunutan kami. Inawat kami nung asawa, nung asawa namin. Ayaw nyo tumigil, sabi niya. Kasi ako, gusto ko siyang patayin. Oo! Sasakalin ko siya para ma-understood nya ang...mapapel kasi! Hahahaha! Syempre mahal ko ang asawa ko"* (we pulled each other's hair. My husband, our husband tried to stop us. Why don't you want to stop, he told us. I wanted to kill her. I wanted to strangle her so she will understand her place. Hahahaha! Of couse, I loved my husband.).

Alma laughed at her own account of the drama she herself produced, as if watching another actress take her place as rampaging villain. She mused, her husband couldn't even raise one family and yet, he took on another, I thought that in the religion, men had to take care of their wives equally?

The war in Alma's stories resonates with its features of universality as drugs have figured in gender violence in marriage and relationships in the region under study and even across countries. Drugs and drug addiction form part of how she plotted timelines, personal milestones and narrative tension, using them as platform to make meaning out of her experiences. She burrowed instantly to this theme of drugs that I had to reflect whether she was exclusively framing her story and withholding other

versions of herself (Koenig Kellas, 2008) or whether it was my convenient interpretation of her framing that caused me to initially zoom in on her references on drugs. As Alma unfolded her stories, however, multiple other plotlines emerged although drugs and drug addiction were still central to her storytelling. According to Messias & Dejoseph (2004), in every storying and restorying, a woman can only share what is "real" and "true" for her at the moment of telling.

Alma's stories form plots that are not usually of development communication kind, as it is more anthropological, or more psychological, crisscrossing and blurring the thin, dangerous lines of religion, love and sexuality, and mild-altering substances and mind games. Later I realized that it falls squarely in the purview of development communication, just not the ones I usually encounter and precisely what this inquiry is about, because these experiences shaped how and why Alma communicates as she does, without edits or censors, unafraid to reflect or question sancrosant, inviolable institutions, dominant thinking systems and practices.

Alma is a self-made, educated woman earning her own keep. Yet, she allowed her construct of love and loving to define why – although she clearly recognized the symptoms of an abusive relationship and what it did to her – she still stayed in the situation for years. Alma's narratives, if taken out of the context of her religion and culture, can be dismissed as forming a narrative of victimization (Fivush, 2010). She conformed at first to a life script written by dominant power structures about women's forgiveness in the face of unfaithfulness in the name of love and marriage as she understood it, more than the threat of beatings and abuse, and even more than the threat of being involved in the drug war.

According to the 2013 analysis of the National Demographic Survey, women who are college graduates and in the upper wealth quintiles are less likely to experience

physical violence and sexual violence – a dominant narrative in itself – but Alma is all these. In her allowing herself to be interviewed, in telling her story, she broke these stereotypes that define minority women who are survivors of gender violence in the region being studied. The implication to me as a development communication practitioner is immense as I always look toward quantifiable evidence to map audience profiles, develop strategies, messaging and positioning based on audience behavior and information needs. Had I not done this inquiry, I would have excluded women like Alma from the change process because she did not fit the profiling, the mapping and the analysis of studies.

"Marriage in the religion" (*"Kinasal kami ulit sa relihiyon"*) is binding for Alma but the implications are more profound particularly for feminist advocates and development communication practitioners who go into the legal sphere to effect change (i.e., seek reforms in the Code of Muslim Personal Laws or Muslim Code as discussed in Chapter 1 of this inquiry). I have had long conversations with friends who belong to the minority group and all of them have different takes on what "marriage in the religion" meant, confirming the decades of smoothing over delineations in understanding and living religious interpretations, customs and practices.

I am still behooved to ask, however, that if Alma had raised her awareness about these multiple marriages from communication campaigns, could she have insisted on the platforms where she would have more rights? Knowing about them would increase her space and power to negotiate, but would she?

II. Storying silence, being silenced, being silent, choosing to be silent

1. The sound of our silences

Alma's stories on gender violence couched in a war involving drugs brought me back years back when I got asked: *Who gets to tell which story?* An old friend, an indigenous leader who led her organization consistently to question gender roles in tribal communities, asked this to no one in particular but I felt it was to me that she directed it. At that time, I had simply written news accounts and analyses of indigenous women's issues but I had never dared to put my head inside theirs – that is, although I resonated with almost everything they talked about on identity politics and gender, I wasn't one of them so I felt I couldn't write about their lives from their perspective.

This dichotomy would choke me many, many times as I examined my role as a journalist and creative writer in restoryings. Did I have the right to tell a minority story even if I am not demographically or politically a minority? Do I need license from minority voices to restory their narratives, particularly the sensitive ones that tackle gender violence in polygamy? Prepping myself for Alma's storytelling process, I had earlier printed an essay, *Who Gets to Write What* by Kaitlyn Greenidge (2016) and finally realized where I had always been:

> "There is the power of rendering another's perspective, which is not your own. There is the adage "Don't punch down," which sits like the shiny red lever of a fire alarm, irresistible for some writers who wish to pull it."

I had never been content to be an onlooker or chronicler, I had to trouble a problem that must be solved (Fivush, 2010) and an integral part of this is pulling that red lever. There was something else, too. All the time that I buried

my head under tons of analyses when what I really wanted to restory were personal narratives, I felt silenced, in fact, complicit in this silence. And it was a silence of my doing.

The nature of marital customs is always seen through cultural lenses, and polygamy remains as one of the moral and ideological dilemmas of feminists everywhere. I have seen hurt and pain among friends who belong to communities where this is practiced, especially when there is gender violence in polygamous arrangements, and while there are spaces for women's voices – most of them minorities holding minority views – these are pitted against each other. First wife versus second, third, fourth wife. Wives versus mothers-in-law. The silences, structured and loaded, are reserved for the men especially those caught in the grips of drugs.

Why did you spare him, Alma? Why did you not raise your voice on his role in the polygamous set-up? Why did you not raise your voice about polygamy? I gritted my teeth as I reviewed these insights in my journal, feeling the familiar dissonance and impatience at pulling the red lever.

2. Restorying Alma's silences

He left Alma and their kids to join the second wife. She couldn't remember when it happened, the actual leaving, because he was in and out of their lives since their marriage. She took the reins of raising her family as she always had. But he came back:

> *"Iniwan nya kami, pumunta sa isang asawa nya. Pero di rin kami nagkahiwalay. Di ko rin sya mapigilan. Uuwi lang sya sa akin. Tinanggap ko sya ulit. Akala ko magbabago na pero wala rin, sige pa rin sa bisyo nya."* (He abandoned us for his second wife. We did not really separate. I couldn't stop him. He'd go home to me when he wanted to and I accepted him back. I thought he would change but no, he continued with his vices.)

It was easy enough to recognize when her husband was drunk, easier when he was high. On those times, Alma sought safety in silence. It was one thing to get beaten up by a sober husband, she thought, but when he was drugged, she knew she could die.

> *"Di na nya kami nabubuhay ng maganda. Di sya nagtatrabaho, ako yung naghahanap-buhay para sa amin. Ako yung nagtatrabaho. Pag darating sya ng bahay, inaaway ako. Di na ko nagsasalita kasi natatakot akong baka saktan nya. Pero wala, nagkasabunutan kami, sinuntok nya 'ko. Pag high, pag high, takot na takot ako. Iniisip ko lagi, 'pano kung patayin nya 'ko? Ayay! 'Pano kung patayin nya mga anak 'ko?"* (He just didn't take care of us well. He wasn't working, I worked for all of us. I was the one who took a job. When he arrives in the house, he'd fight with me. I'd stay quiet because I was afraid he'd hurt me. But he still hit me. I was more afraid when he was so high. What if he kills me? Ayay! What if he kills the kids?)

There was no help anywhere. While neighbors gave her news of the husband's dalliances and addiction, warned even that he could get killed in his drug dealings, she couldn't tell them that she could also be a statistic. She explained the years of silence, *"Sinarili ko lang, nahihiya ako"* (I kept to myself because I was ashamed.). She calibrated the structure and timing of her silence, and knew that the only times she could confront her husband for the abandonment and abuse was when he wasn't high or drunk. But this was atypical and sporadic.

The one person Alma knew who would have believed and made sense of it for her was her mother but in her defiance of their arranged choice for marriage, her defense of her man, her parents disallowed her to even visit.

> *"Ang kinausap ko lang si nanay ko. Tsaka nanay ng lalaki. Sabi lang ng nanay ko, sige! Bahala ka na sa buhay mo. Tutal yan ang pinili mo. Ah, hindi na. Ang gusto pa ng nanay ko, 'di ko na sya balikan pa. Pero pinatawad naman ako ng nanay ko."* (I only spoke with my mother and my mother-in-law. My mother said, go! Live your own life since you chose that man, after all. She wanted me not to go back to my husband. She forgave me.)

It was her mother-in-law who somehow knew her plight because she knew her son, and attempted to stop the battering. But Alma's husband also knew his mother. He'd flatter and sweet-talk and promise. It was on Alma then that the mother-in-law worked on to maintain peace in the household, because that was the duty of a wife of a minority group. She giggled, recalling the day her husband sought her hand again in remarriage, with the mother-in-law:

> *"Ipinanhik nya sa amin, pinag-ayos naman kami ng magulang nya. Para maganda ang pagsasama. Alam mo na sa (komunidad kagaya ng sa amin)."* (She went to traditionally ask for permission for her son to remarry me. His parents sought to settle. They wanted a harmonious marriage. You know how it is among Muslims.).

And so one day, the husband brought the second wife to stay at Alma's home, and she tried to be a good, religious wife. Alma gripped the seat of the chair and closed her eyes, but she kept talking of the polygynous set-up. She'd cook share breakfast that they'd all share, her children, her husband, his second wife and she would leave for work. Then she'd cook dinner. Weekdays and weekends evolved the routine of her cooking, her cleaning and her washing up after everyone's mess.

> *"Sabi ng asawa ko, ah love, ah magtiis ka lang kasi ikaw naman naunang asawa ko. Iiwan ko rin 'yan. Pinagbibigyan ko lang 'yan, sabi nya. Ikaw pa rin ang mahal ko, sabi nya, dito sa puso ko. Naririnig din ng isang asawa nya kaya inaaway ako, sabi lagi sa akin, di ka nya mahal. Ako ang mahal nya. Kaya kami nandito kasi binubuhay mo sya. Ang sakit-sakit! Oo! Tama sya. Oo! Sakit! Ako bumubuhay sa kanila, inalagaan, pinagluto, inaayos ko buhay nila."* (My husband said, ah love, please be more patient because you are my first wife. I would eventually leave her. I was just letting her have her way now, he said. It is you I love, you in my heart, he said. But the second wife would hear it so she'd fight with me and always tell me, he doesn't love you. I am the one he loves. We are only here because you work for us. It was so painful to hear that. But yes! She was right. Yes! It hurt to hear that. I took care of them, I cooked for them, I fixed their lives.)

Her husband and his second wife were practically intoxicated day-in and day-out, and only moved to fill the gaps in their high or when other addicts came in and they would wheel and deal. While she suspected the mother-in-the mother-in-law, however, simply dismissed addiction as *"haram"* (forbidden in the religion) and addicts are un-religious. It worsened when the husband asked her not to work anymore because he and the second wife would just deal in drugs.

> *"Araw-araw, araw-araw, gabi-gabi, high sila. Shabu! Sabi pa nya, misis, tumigil ka na magtrabaho. Ako na lang magtatrabaho. Kami nung asawa ko, sabi nya. Sinubukan ko. Nagbenta sila ng shabu pero di rin naman ako binuhay. Huminto ako sa pagtrabaho pero di rin naman pala ako kayang buhayin. Bisyo-bisyo wala naman trabaho. Steady lang, sabi ko sa sarili, steady lang."* (Every day, every day, night and day, they were high with shabu. He even told me, misis, stop working, my wife and I would work instead. So I tried not to work outside. They sold shabu but weren't able to take care of the household needs. They had vices but they didn't have the means to sustain them. Steady, I told myself, stay steady.)

But Alma thought of the many moments when her husband and his addicted friends came, and asked the hard questions: weren't they all (religious) minorities, identified themselves as (religious) minorities while doing drugs? She leaned forward, determined to press home:

> *"Puwede ba yung araw-araw e relihiyoso ka, pero ito, ah, puwede sa (relihiyon), ito, ah, hindi. E kung ganito, asawa kong high na high sa shabu, nag-dua, pano yun?"* (Can it be that every day you call yourself religious but say, oh, this act is allowed in the religion, and this one isn't. But how about this, my husband who is so high with shabu goes to prayer, is he being religious or un- religious?)

For a full month, she saw and heard. Husband being conscientious and caring to his second wife, calling her his love. Second wife boastful, saying she knew she was loved more. *"Binuhay ko pa yan sila"* (I worked for them all.), Alma silently reflected.

But it was the nights, the nights that, to this day, make up the stuff of her nightmares. Alma, shut her eyes again, and took full minutes before she spoke, eyes still unopened. They slept in a single room, our bedroom, she whispered, me, my husband and his second wife. He would be in the middle and I would turn my back but I could hear them, Alma said, then stopped talking. I could hear them making love, the second wife moaning. I could see them making love, Alma whispered.

> *"Nagsama kami sa iisang bahay. Asawa ko sa gitna. Isa-isang kwarto lang. Ahm...mmmm...maglalambingan na sila, ako—hahahaha! Maglalambingan na sila, ako dito sa kabila. Nakikita ko –ku-kung ano gingagawa nila. Yung babae, manyakis ba. Di umabot ng isang buwan. Di ko na, di ko na kinaya. Mahal ko ang asawa ko pero di nya 'ko mahal. "* (We all lived in one house. We'd sleep in one room, my husband in the middle. And they would have sex, me—hahahaha! They'd have sex and I would be in the other end of the bed. I saw, I saw what they did. The woman is a maniac. We did not last for a month. I couldn't take it anymore. I love my husband but he did not love me back.)

Alma's story brought to life shadow stories of polygynous set-ups only whispered among my girl friends who are members of the minority group. That it can happen, two women at the same time, "sharing" a man even in bed, two religious minorities and a Christian, drugs and drinks in between. Alma's narrative is coherent[3], linear and chronologically sequenced, as she plotted and replotted the courtships, then the abuses and conflicts, and towards the end of her storytelling, her turning points. Alma engaged in her own self-exploration while telling her story, with the consciousness of her agency unveiling when she realized she had the power to affect her own life, and her shaped identity before,

[3] The concept of coherence, refers to how a narrative is communicated which can make narrative easy or difficult to listen to (Leavy, 2015).

during and after surviving gender violence in a difficult marital set-up sanctioned by her religion and community.

Bullock (2002) cautions against judgments on polygamy, and for this inquiry, the restorying of polygamy, because when it comes to minority women, there is a danger in accepting the notion that women's experiences are "ontologically fractured." Alma raised her voice against drug use and addiction among the minority group vis-à-vis religion, and the many nuances of loving: "*mahal ko sya pero hindi nya ako mahal*" (I love him but he did not love me back); *"hindi yun ang mahal"* (that is not love) and not outrightly on polygamy *per se*.

On the surface, Alma didn't question polygamy as a religious concept or practice and the women' status in this set-up but instead trained her voice and meaning-making on the other woman involved in the polygamous set-up. Clandinin and Rosiek (2006) call this as among the borderlands in narrative inquiry with no clear and demarcation lines but depicting the close connections between interior and exterior struggles. Minority women, who have been exposed to gender violence in the context of religion and culture, continue to link their personal, individual struggles to their struggle with external forces — but not overtly. With polygamy a macro context in Alma's story and relatively dangerous to pursue perhaps at this time, she may have found a way to unpack her accounting of her experiences by finding proxy spaces where her voice may find more solid traction, and one of those spaces is how she felt towards the second wife.

Restorying the borderland of polygamy is particularly difficult because I found myself crossing many cultural, ideological and spiritual borders where there was much ambiguity and dissonance. Am I developing a "tolerance for contradiction

and ambiguity" — as Clandinin and Rosiek (2006) quoting Gloria Anzaldua's work on Mestiza consciousness asked. Anzaldua's reminds us that these borderlands are never clear-cut and in restorying gender violence, development communications will not just give minority women a voice, but go through these borderlands with them carrying all our profound similarities and differences and perhaps "creative(ly) break the new unitary aspect of new and old paradigms."

III. Storying becomes Voice

1. *Restorying our voices*

It is with Alma that I reconstructed and restoried silence as voice. Often in this inquiry I redefined silence as not just limited to *being silenced*, and therefore, loosing power, identity and voice. With Alma, I shared a concept of silence as *being silent*, using moments of long silences in storytelling to reflect, make sense of and internally seek an accounting of gender violence in religious interpretations, culture and practices. It was to Fivush (2010) that I looked for help in articulating that silence can also be a waging of power because in restorying our voices, Alma and I "shared understanding that need not (be) voiced" and in fact, if we needed to speak, to voice, then we would lose power (*ibid*).

I experienced a rush of admiration when she asked me not to record a portion of the interview when she decided to speak about religion, to use her story of gender violence in polygamy as lens to unpack what are religious interpretations and what are cultural practices. Ethics urge me now to

describe only in general terms those attempts at delineation but I cannot detail them to protect her and me in our restorying. Alma inclined her head to one side and I marveled at the gesture. I, too, use that when I prod another to speak. She was asking me to talk.

That was where the real conversation began, where and when we really restoried our voices. We had two more cups of instant coffee and I felt the sugar in the 3-in-1s explode. From Dropbox where I secured the desk research, I downloaded documents that I felt would interest her and pointed to features that resonated with her points.

I shared with Alma the results of my literature review, about the work of religious feminist scholars in combing through the historical and politico-social contexts of why gender violence seemed to have been read into religious texts, and reinterpreted. I told her about literature that showed the dominance of at least two narratives that claim gender violence existing in her community as a simple breach in social protocol, and how survivors who told their stories were labeled as un- religious.

When I stopped to listen to how Alma was absorbing these, I let her claim silence again as she processed the information obviously foregrounding her story as many aha's clicked in place. I felt what Fivush (2010) described as having "moments of shared silence" which "can also provide the space for the creation of a new narrative, a narrative of resistance."

2. *Restorying Alma's voice*

Alma thought she could keep the abuse from everyone but her children, one an adult, the other nearing the end of teenage years, have known all

along. But they, like her, kept silent until one day when her son bluntly told her that it was important that she separate from his father. And it was more important to stay separated. When her loved ones spoke, she breached the dam of her own silence.

> *"Yung anak kong lalaki, sabi ng anak kong lalaki, pabayaan mo na sya, Inay. Ang importante, ang importante, magkahiwalay kayo. Wag ka nang makipagbalikan sa kanya. Di ka rin nya inalagaan! Di ka pa rin natatanggap ng mga magulang mo kaysa paulit-ulit mo na lang sya tinatanggap. Di ka rin nya inalagaan, sabi ng anak kong lalaki."* (My son said let him go, mom. What's important is that you have separated from him. Please don't reconcile with him again. He did not care for you! Your parents will also not accept you because you have always gotten back with your husband. He did not care for you, that's what my son said.)

Her son was right, she knew what her husband doing, conscious of he hurt. But every time the husband came back, committing to something she knew she could not give, her heart remained open to his homecoming.

> *"Ma-ma-marami syang ginawa sa akin na di ko gusto. Tinanggap ko sya pauli-ulit. Sabi ko bago kami ikasal ulit, nung pangalawang beses, hihiwalayan mo na yung asawa mo ha. Basta kapag iniwalayan mo sya, tatanggapin kita. Kinasal kami, wala. Wala, nagtawagan din sila. Magkakabalikan daw sila. Kapag nagkabalikan sila, iiwanan na naman nya 'ko."* (He did many things to me that I did not like. I accepted him many times. Before we remarried the second time, I told him to separate from his second wife. I told him if he divorces her, I would take him back. So we married but it was the same. They called each other and told me that they were reconciling. I knew that if they got back, he leave me again.)

She took time to remove her *hijab*, arranges her hair before putting it back on, silent and unhurried in her memories, her thoughts back on those decisive moments years back. Shaking her head that dislodged the delicate, thin cloth of the *hijab*, she tries to explain what drove her to take him back, and in taking him back, essentially took in even the second wife. The batterings hurt, the abuses hurt, the polygamous arrangement hurt, but what was more painful was seeing their love:

"Mmmm, okay naman, okay naman sa akin. Pero yung lalaki, sila yung naglalambingan. Di nya ako ilalambing. Ang tawagan nila, 'love.' 'Mahal na mahal kita, love, pasensya ka na kasi yung unang asawa ko, iiwan ko rin.' Ako raw! Sabi nya sa asawa nyang huli, ikaw talaga ang mahal ko. Dapat ako ang mahalin nya kasi syempre ako yung naunang asawa." (Mmm, it was okay, it was okay for me. Except for their loving. He wasn't as loving with me. They called each other, 'love.' He'd say, 'I love you very much, love, please bear with me but I will leave my wife soon.' Me, he meant me. Shouldn't he love me more because I was the first wife?)

Alma sold the house she built for her family, tipping her chin up as she told me this, aware of the power it wielded:

"Binenta ko na bahay. Pera ko naman yun. Mahirap! Mahirap, syempre wala na kong asawa." (I sold the house. The money used to buy it was mine, after all. It was very hard. Hard, because I had no more husband.)

It is the first time I am telling this, she said, looking at me straight. I feel embarrassed but let me tell you that I really loved that man. But he, he did not love me back, she said, fingers twisting and retwisting the edges of her *hijab*.

"Marami, marami akong di makakalimutan sa kanya. Di ko sya matatanggap syempre, ipinagpalit nya ako. Syempre, syempre di nya ko mahal...hahahaha! Ako, mahal ko talaga. Hahahaha! Oo, hahahaha! Mmmm, Masaya na, hayaan na lang sila. Ngayon, masaya din ako." (There were many, many things I couldn't forget about him. I cannot take him back, of course, he exchanged me for someone else. Of course, of course, he did not love me....hahahaha! But me, I really loved him. Hahahaha! Yes, hahahaha! Mmmm, things are happy, I have let them be. Now, I am also happy.)

Alma's husband spammed her mobile phone with SMS messages, texting that he loved her and still do. But she texted back, her last one, despite the many more he sent, *"Sabi mo, mahal mo 'ko, pero di yun ang mahal"* (You said you love me, but this is not love.)

And then she pulled out the *hijab* from her shoulders – that representation of oppression for many, that emblem for colonial resistance for some – and used it to wipe silent tears.

Of all the three participants, it was Alma who attempted to delineate what is religious versus what is cultural versus what is practiced in the restorying of her abuses. Alma also agreed to be wed twice, specifically saying they were "married in the religion," which raised crucial nuances that development communication practitioners have to seriously look into. This is because Alma's reflections about religion, or how she understood its teachings, affirm that religious interpretations, culture and practices are so intertwined that they are not used as lenses by the minority women in their storytelling – but rather, rely on their experience base to make meaning. While there were overt and veiled references to how the religion is practiced, not once did Alma, or any of the minority women participants, mention the sacred book and possibilities that gender violence and patriarchy may have been read into it.

Alma had also overtly articulated some inconsistencies in religious interpretation and practices that as far as she knew, the men had to take care of their wives equally and yet, her lived experience showed otherwise. Her storytelling challenged the dominant narrative that gender violence, if they do happen, are un-religious and merely breaches in conduct. She also raised a crucial point not normally considered as a frame for development communication and gender discourse: drug use among the minority. *"Puwede ba yung araw-araw e relihiyoso ka, pero ito, ah, puwede sa (relihiyon), ito, ah, hindi. E kung ganito, asawa kong*

high na high sa shabu, nag-dua, pano yun?" (Can it be that every day you call yourself religious but say, oh, this act is allowed in [the religion], and this one isn't. But how about this, my husband who is so high with shabu goes to prayer, is he being religious or un- religious?)

Alma requests that portions of the interview not be recorded, among them, the musings about what is religious and un-religious, and the difficulty of simplifying the identities of individuals simply for what they do, as these changes every second. Alma is the one who tells me what must be done: that there be a shelter dedicated for minority women, with counselors whose numbers can be passed on secretly to women in crisis; that there be influential people they trust who can help "rescue" Minority women and their children who have decided to leave and escape.

I have never met a minority woman like Alma who may be what Scheufele (2007) describes as an avant-garde who, while still a minority, can go against the majority voice, which is needed by other minority voices to challenge dominant public perceptions. But I am not exactly a "public" yet being alone with her in the hotel room as we sowed seeds of creating narratives of resistance. But as a development communicator, I have the chance and opportunity to co-author difficult, contentious stories that because they rock foundations, then they have the most potential to effect change. As they charged me with these stories, it is my turn not to be afraid.

AMINAH'S STORY

I. Storying the war within as with the war without

1. We, in the thick of wars

I saw her already sitting at the lobby of the hotel on the single couch at the corner nearest a tall, carved indigenous drum. Light pink *hijab,* she sent by SMS, black long-sleeved blouse and blue jeans. And then the curious reminder that I not approach her immediately, and only do so when no one is about which I thought could only be possible in a hotel lobby at the dead of night. But it is a little past noon and the lobby is too small to give her a wider berth; there is just the couch she sat on, a long settee and several more single seats. I sat on the receptionist's chair opposite the lobby and turned to the hotel staff, mind scrambling, until I spy wedding photographers on the spiral stairway dressing up a mannequin with a white satin gown. So I ask about ballroom rates and whether the hotel could accommodate 500 people for a fictional ceremony.

The two photographers were securing the mannequin, fully dressed now, to the balustrade, intent. I mumble my thanks to the receptionist and ballroom quotation in hand, walked to Aminah. She looks straight at me with unnerving pale eyes. I am not sure if it is gray, but I am certain it is not black. She verifies, you are? I nod, and take my turn, you are? I sense that I cannot shake her hand here as she curled all fingers on the tiny handle of a dark colored, stylish handbag, and kept them there.

We entered my hotel room and I asked her about the roundabouts as she sat and I offered coffee. Being careful, she said. It's been four years but I

care about *rido*, she explained. And just like that, she launched into her story. Her *hijab* fell to her shoulders as the first scents of decaf also launches and she sipped from the white hotel cup. Aminah has long straight hair, tied in a ponytail. Her round face is a whiter than the rest of her, her lipstick is mauve, and more natural looking. She is 32 years old with sons, one a toddler, and the other, an infant at four months whom she left with her mother.

What is this about a *rido*, I ask, chucking my standard opening line of asking the women to tell their story. Aminah looked at me with those pale eyes, I couldn't leave my husband because it would start a *rido*. His family would kill my family, she said. *Rido* is a clan war, I knew. She was the only one in between, the only one holding a white flag over a deep crack.

2. *Storying the war within as with the war without*

Her story started with a courtship, and not just with her but her entire family. It wasn't bad at the start, there was even a "*play-play*," Aminah laughlingly recalled, "a honeymoon."

> "*Kasi grabe din siya magligaw. Hindi naman sya gwapo pero grabe sya manligaw. Pati pamilya ko ba. Kilala pala sya sa lugar nila na bayolente. Hindi ko alam nun. Pero nung kinasal kami, dun na nagsimula.*" (His courtship was intense. He's not very handsome but he made up for this through his courtship. It wasn't just me he courted, but my entire family. I didn't know that he was known in his neighborhood for being violent. When we got married, that was when the abuses started.)

The relationship though was *haram* (forbidden in the religion) from the onset. They had been intimate and lovers for two years, Amina recalled, but they couldn't stay together too long without marriage or a ceremony of some sort.

"Hindi kayo pwedeng magtagal na mag-boyfriend kasi nakikita kayo ng mga matatanda o yung mga relatives nyo. Magpakasal kayo, magpakasal kayo! Lalo na pag nakikita na yung lalaki pumupunta sa bahay nyo, hindi umuuwi, yung inuuwian ka na ba. Kailangan magpakasal ba, bawal ma'am." Sa (kultura naming tribo), haram *kasi pag walang kasal"* (We couldn't stay long as boyfriend-girlfriend since the elders were seeing us, relatives were seeing us. Get married, get married, they said. Especially when they see that the man goes to your house, and he doesn't go home to his house anymore, and goes home to you. They had to marry us. For our tribe, it is considered forbidden if there is no marriage).

His family called for a local *ustadz* (scholar) and *imam* (priest), laid out a simple feast and they were bound. Aminah described it as a binding in the eyes of Allah and the people. They were married, even without the legalities or paperwork:

"Yung sa amin, sa (tribo) basta may ustadz lang, imam ganyan, tapos may kainan, puwede ka nang magpakasal. Puwede walang pirmahan, walang marriage contract. Kasal yun. Lalo pag sa baryo. Pero walang papeles, walang kasulatan. Pero sa mata ng Diyos, mata ng tao, kasal kayo. Parang ganun. Pero walang kasulatan, ma'am. Kasal pa rin." (In our tribe, as long as there is an ustadz or an imam and then some food is laid out, you can get married. And it is marriage. There were no papers, no signings, no marriage contract especially in the villages. We had what is perhaps also a marriage.).

It was also a tribal practice that she live with her husband's family, and extended family, and serve them as a good, religious wife.

"Nandun kasi pamilya nya, mga pamangkin lahat nandun. Tatay, nanay, pamilya ng kapatid nya. Kasi sa (tribo), ma'am, sa (tribo), ang babae ang makikitira sa bahay ng lalaki..... Mahirap ang buhay dun sa bahay nya. Ako nag nagsisilbi sa bahay nya. Hindi puwedeng hindi ka magsilbi sa parents nya. Kasi sina baboo, matanda na rin sila. Di puwede yung, upo-upo ka lang,di pwedeng ganun. Sabi nila, kailangan magtrabaho dahil hindi natin lugar yun." (Everyone was in their house, his parents, his siblings and their families. In our tribe, the wife has to stay in the house of the husband's family...It was a difficult life for me as I had to serve his parents who were already old. They said I couldn't just sit around because it wasn't my space.)

Aminah wanted semblances of breathing space, legroom where she could start raising a basic family unit but her husband nixed even the very idea of finding a separate house. She tried to convince him but he refused every time:

> *"Sinabi ko, kung mag-separate na lang kami ng bahay? Para hindi na tayo makaistorbo sa magulang nya. Ayaw nya! Di ako makadesisyon ng sarili kong desisyon kasi nagagalit sya. Ayaw nya talaga, ayaw nya iwanan ang parents nya. Isip ko, kasi ang sarap ng buhay nya pag nasa poder pa sya ng magulang."* (I asked him, what if find a another house so we wouldn't be bothering his parents anymore. He didn't like it! I couldn't decide on anything because he'd be angry. He refused to move because he said he didn't want to leave his parents. I thought, why would he move when his life is so good with with no responsibilities.)

They lived in a single house and shared the daily details of living, more than twenty of them but nobody knew, or nobody dared to know the stories behind a closed door. That he was drinking, and drinking hard, and smoking which are *haram*, Aminah said, and he forced me to have sex from the time he got back home at night to the wee hours, which is *haram,* too. If they heard the ruckus and the thuds of the rapes, she said, nobody in the household said anything. If she refused her husband's sexual advances, he threw anything at her and stabbed her.

> *"Pag nakainom. Pag di nakainom, grabe. Tinatago nya sa kuwarto! Naninigarilyo. Pero baka alam din ng parents nya, ma'am, pero palangga ng parents nya yun. Hinahayaan lang. Magdadabog sya, bagsak lahat ng gamit.....Gigisingin ako madaling araw, mga 3, mga 4. Gigisingin ako, sexual. Pinilit nya ako. Pag di ako pumayag, sinasaktan ako. Di lang pisikal. Kahit sexual."* (When he drinks, he goes overboard. He hides his drinking and smoking in our room. I think his parents know this but he's there palangga, their love, so they just let him continue. He'd throw things around.....He'd wake me up, around 3 or 4 in the morning to have sex. He'd force me. If I don't allow him, he'd hurt me. Not just physically, also sexual.)

Aminah pulled the pink *hijab* from her shoulders, and hitched back her blouse's right neckline to show the scar on her shoulder blade. It is round, almost surgical in shape. She touches her left rib, a spot parallel to her elbow and said, he stabbed me here, too. With an ice pick. She did not put the *hijab* back on, and continued to talk, *"sadista. Palalim ang pagsugat nya"* (He was as sadist. His hurting was superficial on the surface, but cut very deep.):

> *"Meron nga ako sugat dito ma'am. May peklat na. Tinusok nya. Umiinom din, tapos grabe mag sigarilyo. Sa baryo namin, mas matindi. Hindi lang nakikita. Isa ito may peklat parang malalim yata ito. Sinaksak nya ba parang ice pick yata ito. Sa bahay namin. Sa loob ng kuwarto."* (I have a scar here ma'am where he pierced me. He was drinking then, smoking even. In our village this is rampant although they hide it successfully so it is known but not seen. It's like this deep scar. He stabbed me with an ice pick. In the house. Inside our room.)

She hid the scar as she did the hurt. He was good, she remembered, he'd leave very little evidence of his nightly routine of drink, smokes and rape. She found it amazing that her skin seemed to have erased all the hurts. Maybe because they weren't superficial, Aminah figured, sadistic men choose their opening and infest the wound below the surface:

> *"Parang sadista, palalim sya. Hindi katulad ng mga babaeng sinasampal. Iba siya. Makahawak ng isang bagay, itusok nya sa akin. Forced ba talaga ba. Lalo na yung sexual abuse. Niii!"* (He was a sadist, his hurting was beyond skin-deep. I was not like women who get slapped or beaten up. His style is different. When he grabs hold of something, he'd stab me, but the opening is small. And he'd force me to have sex.)

She could not even cry. She made obscure excuses for the stab wounds, that she was pierced by bamboo, tripped on some twigs; she made up inconsistent and absurd tales for the parents-in-law to pay attention to the red flags for help. She couldn't even get out of the house, they had no bamboo

and the twigs available to her were only the soft stalks of vegetables from the backyard.

> *"Hindi ako nakaiyak. Gumagawa lang ako ng paraan. Sabi ko natusok ako ng kawayan. Opo! Tinatago ko lang, ma'am, hindi puwedeng malaman. Tinatakot nya ako ma'am. Pag mag sumbong ka, may magyayari sa pamilya mo, sa mga kapatid mo, Iniwasan ko na lang yung mga ganun.....Iniisip ko yung mga kapatid ko, hindi pwedeng isumbong. Pano na mga kapatid ko? Kinabukasan nila. Yung dating asawa ko, ma'am. Di ko matiis.... (Aminah breaks down and cries.)"* (I couldn't even cry. I just made excuses to cover up. I'd tell people, oh, I got stabbed by bamboo. Yes! I kept it to myself, ma'am, I couldn't let the abuse be known. He thereatened me, ma'am. He said if you tell anyone, something will happen to your family, to your siblings. I tried to protect them. I thought, my poor siblings. What will happen to them? Ah, my first husband. I couldn't take it anymore.)

Aminah threatened to tell her mother and leave her husband, and that was when she knew the measurements of her trap. *Rido*.

> *"Kung magsumbong ka, may mangyayari sa pamilya mo, sa mga kapatid mo. Uubusin ko kayo."* (If you dare tell anyone, something bad will happen to your family, to your siblings. My family will decimate your clan.),

Aminah had memorized the nightly threat. *"Buhay ko ang kapalit ng buhay ng pamilya ko"* (It was my life for the life of my family.), Aminah shared, and in tribal practice, *rido* meant not just this generation but succeeding ones as well. If she left her husband, she explained, if she told of the abuse, her family will be killed and if her clan retaliated on any member of her husband's family which it surely will, for honor and status, the cycle will continue for many lifetimes.

What is it about women, she muses, that they stay, even if they know they could die?

> *"Hindi na puwedeng basta iwan ang lalaki dahil sya na nakakuha, para sabihin ko sa yo ba, virginity ba. Hindi agad-agad na hihiwalay ka sa kanya. Hindi mo basta iwanan basta mahal mo ba. Yung babae lang nagmahal sa kanya. Tapos yung lalaki parang wala lang sa kanya."* (You cannot just leave the man because he already got you, he claimed your virginity. You cannot just separate because you love him. But it is only the women who love, it seems. The man does not care at all.)

And what is it about women, Aminah reflects, that they allow abuses for the smallest dose of love? What kind of woman loves an abusive man? And what kind man is undeserving of a woman's love?

> *"Hindi dapat sa isang babae yun. Kahit gaano ka kabait, kahit gaano mo ipakita ang pagkababae mo. Di ba madali lang ang babae, ma'am, madali lang masaktan. Mahalin lang ng lalaki, ok na sa kanya. Basta malambing lang ng asawa. Pero ganung klaseng tao, di puwedeng mahalin, ma'am."* (Women don't deserve men like my husband. If even if you are the nicest, even you show how feminine you are. We easily get hurt but as long as we are loved, the hurt is okay. As long as the husband is loving. But men like my husband cannot be loved, ma'am.)

What makes Aminah's narrative on gender violence critical is that it speaks of a dimension of war, *rido*, which is specific to the region under study, as a central theme in her storytelling. Her references to *rido* throughout her narrative symbolizes a larger socio-political context to her individual fear of leaving an abusive relationship and hints at another possible dominant narrative to reporting gender violence as kindling to a war.

Contending with the anticipation of *rido* then and to a certain extent, now, preventing war and conflict has characterized Aminah's stories and storytelling

process not just about her lived experiences of gender violence but also how she tells them. Narratively sequential, she built her story along the lines of the overt threat to her family and defined why she chose silence and let it spiral for years but not in fear of rebuke and isolation (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) but in fear for other people's safety – constant elements in her restorying. This fear of the consequences of *rido* was more perceived and anticipatory and a result of her appraisal of the narrative inquiry dimension of sociality – specifically her sense-making of the connection between her individual experience and the society context of how her community deals with stories like hers. This reflects what Messias & Dejoseph (2004) calls as stories combining more "factual" accounts with personal reflections, the lines of which minority women do not consider as critical to delineate.

Aminah chose to honor what Saleh, et al. (2014) described as "the complexity of lives lived in different places, different times and structured by different landscapes." She could still laugh at the history of her husband's courtship and how it metamorphosed into something violent and dark when their status changed from boyfriend-girlfriend to something more binding. She traced her multiple narratives as girlfriend, wife, sister and daughter, constantly shifting her identities as she made sense of each life and the voices within each life. Aminah's multiple realities are enough information that show how morally-laden stories and storytelling them reject generalizability as there are so many political, social and cultural contexts interwoven in her meaning-making.

What struck me with Aminah, compared with Taya and Alma is that she acknowledged me, "ma'am" in her storytelling and this constant reference to myself as an active listener included me in the space of "mutual vulnerability" (*ibid*). Because I am not invisible to her but part of her process, even in the most

uncomfortable plots on sexual abuse, the restorying is strengthened as she brought me in not just as witness to her storytelling experience but as kindred trusted with sensitive disclosures. The narrative inquiry relationship forged something "akin to friendship" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) because her overt invitation for restorying allowed me to experience what Witherell and Noddings (1991) described as a penetration of cultural barriers, discovering the power of self and the integrity of the other to deepen our understanding of our respective histories and possibilities. Not only was her voice amplified, my voice too, in the reflections and resonance that followed the restorying as together, we expanded the power of her narrative.

II. **Storying silence, being silenced, being silent, choosing to be silent**

1. The sound of our silences

I almost lost my partner to a *rido* years back. It was a routine assignment to meet with a midwife in a rural health clinic in the region under study. While still on the way there, the presence of guns and armed men amassing on the open square in front of the clinic was ordinary and also routine that my partner and his companions did not know that they were riding into a deadly clan war. Of his three companions, my partner was the only one not belonging to the minority group but his clothing mimicked the locals' as per security guidelines, and only their white van, as it meandered and then parked on the square signaled that they were not from the area.

The clinic was surprisingly closed on the day it was scheduled for maternal services which was usually very busy with pregnant and lactating women

spilling outside the squat bungalow structure for their turn. My partner and his colleagues were on the front door, some peeking through the barred windows, wondering what to do when the armed men started heading to them. The door opened and the frightened midwife quickly ushered them in, locked the door, and bewildered, they saw nurses and barangay health workers huddled under tables with several women heavily pregnant women. One word got them down flat on the floor silencing the questions: *rido*.

The details are still hazy even years later. A woman who was the wife of a chieftain escaped from her husband's house. She sought shelter from a businessman who was until that moment her husband's trusted associate, someone whom the wife knew and also trusted. Speculations flew on why she escaped, why she chose the businessman, why she refused to return to her husband. But the husband and his clan took her act as offenses to their honor, and went on a killing spree. The businessman and his clan took her act as a crime against honor, and in retaliation, also went on a killing spree. So they met on that busy square where pregnant women came to have safe deliveries, and where babies got treated to survive through their first birthdays.

I remembered my partner's story when Aminah told hers. Only, while my partner was an accidental witness to the violence, Aminah was the woman in the middle of the violence. It was different recalling my partner's story and the way he told it with Aminah's. His was animated, continuing, with hands ministrating. But Aminah's storytelling included pauses and long, long silences that I could only surmise whether she was living her story again or reflecting on where she was then to where she is now. Reflecting on these

silences, I wrote in my journal: *I waited for Aminah to break her silence and catch the tail of her story to continue. Should I have prodded? But I let her control her silence, there is something happening there. In our restorying, I have to describe that her silence was not a void of voice, there is an identity rebuilding, there is an accounting, there is definitely something happening there.*

2. *Restorying Aminah's silence*

She'd sleep and wake up with fear as a constant, Aminah said, her voice fractured, that she kept silent about the sexual attacks and threats by her husband because he had a reputation for violence so she was more afraid more for her family than herself:

> "*Tinatago ko lang, hindi puwede malaman ng iba. Tinatakot nya ako. Pag mag sumbong ka, may magyayari sa pamilya mo, sa mga kapatid mo. Iniwasan ko na lang yung mga ganun.*" (I just hid it, I knew it couldn't be leaked out. He threatened me. He said if you tell anyone, something will happen to your family, your siblings. I just avoided that situation to happen.)

The man would not let her own a mobile phone, and when she borrowed his, her contacts were limited to just her mother and siblings. She never had enough money to buy phone units to answer them when they texted how she was so sometimes, she'd steal his phone just to be able to text her family back.

> "*Sa bahay lang ako. Kasi seloso sya. Hindi ako makalabas. Nagtatrabaho din sya. Bakit pa raw ako magtatrabaho. Sobrang higpit ba. Mahirap yun, wala kang kalayaan ma'am. Hindi ko alam kung kanino nagseselos! Hindi ako makahawak ng cellphone. Nagnanakaw ako ng text sa phone nya. Grabe kahigpit ma'am. Mahigpit talaga.*" (I cannot go out of the house. He's a very jealous guy. He said he was already working

so why do I have to work? He was so strict with me. It was so difficult, I had no freedom, ma'am. I didn't even know whom he was jealous with. I couldn't even touch a cellphone. I steal his phone to text. He was so authoritarian with me, ma'am, very strict.)

After a year, however, her mother who already had suspicions, wheedled the stories of the abuses out of her, and asked only that she tread carefully, understanding how complex the situation was – their next steps could be fatal, their decisions, private until then could lead not just to a very public war but a genocide. Tears freely flowing, Aminah recalled her mother asking her:

"Hanggang saan ang kaya mo, sabi nya. Hanggang saan at gawin natin ang lahat. Naglakas ang loob ko dahil sa nanay ko." (until where can you take this? Until where and we will do everything. I only had courage because of my mother.)

She built her voice from her mother's strength, Aminah said:

"Sa nanay ko lang sinabi, naiindintihan nya ako e. Hindi ako nahiya yung kuwento ko sa kanya. Lalo na yung mga sensitibong ganyan" (I only told my mother because I knew she'd understand me. I was not ashamed of telling her my story, even very sensitive ones like these.).

She did weigh whether she could tell her mother-in-law as Aminah speculated that she might also have been abused. Always though, her anger turned tail knowing that the mother-in-law would choose her family, her son over Aminah, and worse, twist her story in the worst way.

She balked at getting talked about. But also realized that her silence, her relative anonymity will cloak her when she could finally seize her fear and shape a plan to escape:

"Hindi na ko makalakad sa lugar sa baryo kung alam nila, ay yang babaeng yan, binubugbog. Hindi ko masabi sa mga kapati ko. Ayoko kamuhian nila ako, ayoko masabi yung ganyan, ganyan, ganyan. Nanay ko lang talaga. Kahit anong sakit, ang magulang, di ka nyan matitiis." (I wouldn't be able to walk out with my head up in the village if they knew.

They'd talk and call me the battered woman. I couldn't tell my siblings. I didn't want them to resent me or reject me, and tell me that I am a so and so woman. I could only tell my mother. I knew that however painful the situation was, parents will not reject their kids.)

Aminah had turned the situation inside out, plotting, planning in her mind. If she stayed, she could get killed from the continued assault. She recognized a hate close to exploding, but knew that if she lost control and fought back, it would even be considered honorable for the man to kill her:

"Punong-puno na ako. Pag lumaban ako dun, puwede nya ako mamatay, puwede nya ako patayin." (I am so tired and full of this shit. If I fight him, I can die, he can kill me.).

If she left, Aminah knew she wouldn't reach the village outskirts before someone told on her, and the little freedom she had would be taken away:

"Hindi kami puwede magsumbong sa pulis. Malayo kami e. Magsakay ka pa ng motor papunta sa bayan. Hindi ako makatakas. Malayo sa amin. Bago ako makaalis, napatay na ako." (I couldn't as the police for help. Our village was far away. We needed to ride a motorcycle before we could reach the main center. I couldn't escape as the village is remote. Before I can fully leave, they would have killed me).

Her mother simply appeared one day without notice, and took her. Aminah said that it was that moment when she blessed her womb for being barren as her husband always berated her; the parents-in-law would not have allowed her to leave with any grandchild. But it was just her and her mother with nary a change of clothes, no extra *hijab*, a comb or a toothbrush. They went to her mother's sister in a village far away where Aminah met her second husband.

"Ginawa ng nanay ko, nilayo ako. Tapos pumunta kami sa isang baryo kung nasaan kapatid ng nanay ko. Importante, nakaalis na ako dun sa poder nya.Dun ko nakilala yung asawa ko ngayon. 'Yung pangalawa." (My mother just took me away from mu husband's house. We went to a village where my mother's sister lived. What was important was I got out of his

control. The place where I escaped to was where I met my husband now. My second husband.)

Her auntie's clan shielded her, the threat of *rido* always in their minds, and for months, she had to be invisible, a non-entity. If anyone inquired, she was not there. Aminah did not exist.

> *"Rido. Aawayin ng pamilya nya yung pamilya ko. Hinanap nila ako. Hindi puwede maglabas ka lang ng ganito, magpakatapang ka. Buhay ang kapalit. Mahirap yung ganun. Dapat kung ano yung maganda, mas mabuti pa umalis na lang sa lugar kaysa lumaki pa yung plano ng lalaki at pamilya nya. Hindi ako makalabas ng bahay, para akong pader lang dun. Lalala pa kasi yung sitwasyon kung may nakakita sa akin."* (It would be a clan war. They looked for me. I couldn't just be brave and go out of my aunt's house. Lives were at stake. That was difficult for everyone. What worked was that I just got out of that place rather than wait for my husband and his family to use their network to look for me. I felt like a wall in that house, I couldn't get or the situation would have gotten worse.)

She'd listen to nights of debate and replotting but she didn't speak. Her mother's relatives wanted *"danyos"* (compensation), and they believed in the institutions of religious enough that they demanded seeking legal recourse. But not *rido*, they said.

> *"Hindi natakot ang nanay ko. Gusto nya labanan yung lalaki. Sabi ko wag na, ma. Ang sabi ng mga kamag-anak, bigyan na lang ng ganito, ayuda, para di ka na magsumbong. Sala ba. Bigyan ako ng danyos, sa mga magulang ko para di na ko magsumbong. Pero ako ang umalis. Ako ang umalis. Nanahimik na lang din, ma'am. Kasi ang nanay ko gusto nya talaga isumbong pero ako ang natakot. Inisip ko ang mga kapatid ko. Hindi na lang kami nag-ingay, mahirap talaga yung rido, ma'am."* (My mother was not afraid. He wanted to sue mu husband. I said, no more, ma. Her relatives said, my husband's family should just give me compensation so I wouldn't complain. But I left. I left. I'd rather stay quiet. My mother wanted to fight but I was afraid. I thought of my siblings. We decided to stay quiet, I didn't want to avoid a rido, ma'am.)

Aminah's mother quietly argued that there was no paper, that Aminah did not sign anything and she treated the in-laws well so her husband's family had

nothing against her. No grounds for *rido*, she said. And Aminah still did not speak.

> *"Ang sabi ng nanay ko, wala naman kaming pinirmahan. Walang papeles e, walang kasulatan, walang pinirmahan. Ang importante, sabi nya, hindi mo sya nilabanan, hindi ka nagsalita. Maayos naman pakikitungo ko sa mga magulang nya."* (My mother said, you did not sign anything. There were no paperwork, no contracts, no signings. What is important was that you did not fight him. You stayed silent. And you treated his parents well.)

She whispered as she recalled those times and spaces, as if undergoing the state of non-existence again. She hitched her *hijab* back, the only time in her storytelling, the veiling synonymous with anonymity.

Aminah designated particular turning points in her narratives: her mother's mature assessment of the threats of *rido* and the feudal set-up, and the decision of physically uprooting of Aminah to get her out of the situation; her arranged marriage to a second husband; her pregnancies and realization that she is not barren.

She also built her story around silence and why she chose silence. She arrived at the anticipation of *rido* after regular assessments of her social environment versus the actual one or whether the threat of *rido* was real, because the danger to her was articulated by her first husband, "the opinion whose strength is overestimated [because it is] displayed more in public" (Noelle-Neuman, 1974).

This constant assessment of her social environment and trying to prevent conflict became identifiable in her speech patterns. I recognized when Aminah would be divulging points that she thought could be controversial and touchy when she would ask, *"ok lang?"* (is it okay?) as if my permission for the disclosure stabilizes what

those exposés would unhinge. Just as she had been selective in whom to confide to – her mother – she was just as discerning on language, and what to reveal. This weighing of "what must be voiced, what must be silenced" (Fivush, 2010) is a constant tension for minorities as they assemble stories for the benefit of particular audiences. Narrative inquiry methodologies require inquirers to pay attention to who audiences are talking to when they tell their stories, and this is manifest in Aminah's storytelling, and an important consideration for development communicators.

I found myself musing: typically, I would be mapping my audiences and generating strategies from audience insights, and I have taken for granted that this can work both ways. This time, Aminah has assessed *me* as an audience for this contentious story outside of her immediate public, what is it that she is not saying and why is it important for me to be aware of that? This willingness to self-censor as posited by Noelle-Neumann (1974) and self-silencing (Fivush, 2010) for minorities with direct experiences in violence is evident in Aminah who is only starting to realize that her narrative authority counts.

By asking whether it was ok to reveal her disclosures, she broke through her silences, and had taken me into what I called as her zone where she actively, albeit not overtly, asked another woman to appraise the experience with her. Kranstuber (2012) citing appraisal theorist, Lazarus (1999), wrote that individuals with confusing or difficult experiences engage in an appraisal process evaluating the potential threat of situations, the results of which shape how they behave and emotionally react to these situations. Distressed individuals seek out social support through interpersonal communication, deciding that silence was enough, and by talking through their problems, they readied to go through another reappraisal process. This reappraisal

is akin to sense-making in restorying which leads to not just to amplification of voice but ultimately to "overall well-being and emptional health" (*ibid*).

III. Storying becomes Voice

1. Restorying our voices

They still haunt me, Aminah's questions: "*Paano ko ulit ito iwala ba?*" (How do I negate this?) And another: *"Nung dumating ka, sabi ko baka ito na, pag naikuwento ko, puwede ko na kalimutan.* (When you came, I said, maybe this is it. If I tell her my story, then I can forget it.)

My reactions have been different from when I first listened to her, different when I reread her transcripts, and different now as we restory our voices. On her narrative sketch, I encircled "iwala" and wrote on the margin, *you don't.* On the third column of the sketch where I separated my voice and insights after a period of reflection, I wrote, an arrow to "iwala" linking my thoughts, *but this is how and why you have become you.* Now that I am restorying with hindsight and the benefits of reading and rereading her story, I realized that the next time I will see Aminah, she could either have dismissed and erased her stories in a bid to move on from a narrative of victimization or with a community of listeners validating her story, she would have claimed it as part of her identity and create a narrative of redemption.

Aminah finally broke down, crying, after almost two hours of holding back tears, her voice cracking all the time at the strain of keeping control. I let her be for I don't know how long, waiting for more stories and more sense-

making, not wanting to interfere in this process of unfolding. In this inquiry when I discovered the many structures of silence in how minority women told their stories, I considered crying as a hybrid of voice and silence. The tears, like silence, have many shapes, too. They may have been molded by the hubris of restorying, the act of finally letting go of sensitive stories to a receptive channel and being validated in the telling, or they may have been reiterations of regret, or even a stone thrown at having been caught in a socio-political conflict where she is the only one bearing the white flag to prevent a *rido*.

And then I reached out to her, both of us crossing our intersections, and cried with her just as I shared silence with Alma and conflict and contradictions with Taya. It must have been a social media meme that I first read the story about a young boy who insisted on going to a neighbor whose wife had just died. When the boy's mother asked him what he did with the old man, he said he sat there and cried with him.

For Aminah and myself, restorying our voices have far-reaching implications. We created something here, I knew, and it was Hopkins (2001) who helped tell that what we accomplished was, a "conscious process of integrating new material to reflect on the same evidence, the same material, the same fabric of life, anew."

2. *Restorying Aminah's voice*

She did not trust herself enough and was close to paralysis afterwards to choose, so she let the freedom of choice go. Aminah became bethrothed via

"parental," she recalled, with her mother and the man's parents arranging her second marriage.

> *"Hindi ko naman naging kasintahan 'yan, ma'am. Parental. Pinag-usapan ng magulang, dalawa kayo. Pumili sa kanya magulang ko, ang nagpili sa 'kin, magulang nya. Hindi kami naging kasintahan man. 3 years na kami. Pero sa bandang huli-- dun mo lang naman malalaman, ma'am, kung ang asawa mo-- Ang kasintahan mo, malalaman mo ang totoong ugali pag asawa mo na."* (We never had a courtship or became boyfriend-girlfriend, ma'am. Parental. His parents and mine talked. I was chosen by his parents, and he, by mine. We were never lovers. We have been together for 3 years. In the end, the only time you'd ever know your bofriend's true nature is when he is already your husband.)

She has two kids with this husband now, she smiled for the first time musing, I am not the deficient one, after all.

> *"Ok lang? Kasi iniwan ko nga sya dahil sa pananakit nya. Hindi sya nabigyan ng Diyos na magkaanak siguro. Siya ang may diperensya. Kasi may anak ako ngayon sa asawa ko ngayon. Kasi yung dati, grabe yun."* (Is it ok to tell you? I left my husband because of his abuses. God didn't give us kids. He is the one with the problem because I have children with my present husband. The precious man was just terrible.)

Aminah slides off the *hijab* from her head, then her shoulders, and clutches it. She couldn't trace how she pieced broken pieces of voice and identity but found that one day, she spilled all the details of hurt and abuse and silence to the new husband. As she talks, she folds the *hijab* refletively, until it is a small square that fit in the palm of her hand.

> *"Yung asawa ko ngayon, dyan ko nabuhos lahat. Sabi nya, parang, God na lang yan. God na lang bahala sa lalaking yan. Yung experience, kinuwento ko lahat yan. At least walang pagsisihan ba. Opo! Open ako sa kanya, open sya sa akin."* (I was able to tell my present husband everything. He said, let God take care of that man. I told him everything about my experience. This way, there will be no regrets. Yes! I am open to him as he is open to me.)

Aminah was conscious all throughout her storytelling that she had to let go somehow, release her stories in the hope that they be forgotten or even perhaps negated.

> *"Grabe talaga ang experience na yun, ma'am. Parang hindi ka makawala sa isang-- Pero naranasan ko yung-- Paano ko kaya ito makakalimutan? Paano ko ulit ito iwala ba?"* (The experience was terrible, ma'am. It was as if I couldn't be release from— But I experience-- How can I forget that experience? How can I negate it?)

She admitted to still being afraid, still being easily startled to this day. Although the threat of *rido* isn't topmost anymore, time and distance being factors, she has ceased to let *rido* from her old life direct her new life.

> *"Bahala na sya maghabol. Bahala na sya mabuang. Hindi na ako bumalik, hinayaan ko na lang."* (I leave it up to him if he still wants to run after me. I leave it up to him to be crazy. I have not looked back, I am letting things run their course.)

She worries though that she will carry the trauma to her new family as they rewrite their own story. This is the first time I am telling this story outside of my family, she said:

> *"Minsan bumabalik, minsan-- parang ayoko na nga isipin. ayaw ko nga isipin. Grabe ang lalaking yun! Hindi makatarungan ang ginagawa nya. Everytime ma-kwan ako, ma-trauma ako sa asawa ko. Kasi parang, kung gawin pa ito ulit ng asawa ko, hindi ko na alam ang gawin ko ba. Baka mabuang na ko."* (Sometimes the memories return and I refuse, I refuse to entertain them. That man is terrible. What he did to me was unjust. Everytime I remember, I experience trauma even with my present husband. If he would do to me what the first one did, I don't know where I will end up. I will go crazy if that did happen again.)

But when the call for stories came, when she heard who I was and what I was looking forward. She volunteered quietly:

"Nung dumating ka, sabi ko baka ito na, pag naikuwento ko, puwede ko na kalimutan. Ngayon lang ako nagkuwento. Sinabihan ako ng asawa ko, baka may advice silang maibigay sa yo, baka makalimutan mo na." (but when you came, I said, maybe this is it. If I tell her my story, then I can forget it. This is the first time that I have told anyone this story. My husband told me that you may have advice for me to help me forget).

She unfolds the *hijab* from the tight square it had become, stretches it, and slowly, slowly hitches it back to her head. And then she smiles and sips her coffee, which was now cold, and grimaces. "*One more*?" I ask in the vernacular. "*Yes po, one more.*"

Reeling from the months of invisibility and hiding from the first husband and his clan who might actualize the threat of *rido*, she tentatively asked whether she could forget the experiences of gender violence and negate them, "*Paano ko ulit ito iwala ba?"* (How can I negate it?), suggesting a profound self-exploration and transitioning.

Several reasons exist why restorying holds vast empowering potential for individuals holding minority voices, and communities are the economic and cultural margins. For fragile environments such as the region under study, stories that challenge the dominant narratives may act as triggers, but done in utmost consideration of temporality, sociality and space, according to James (1996), they can essentially build trust and connection between people. Aminah, like other minority women, may hold negative constructions of themselves, but through restorying, they may discover what Espton and White (1990) described as "new self-perceptions and strengths that fall outside previous 'problem saturated'."

Of all the women participants, it was Aminah, who took me to task to clearly position my role, and our mutual restorying, reflecting the crux of this inquiry: *"Nung*

dumating ka, sabi ko baka ito na, pag naikuwento ko, puwede ko na kalimutan. (When you came, I said, maybe this is it. If I tell her my story, then I can forget it.). Aminah's stance showed that minority women's restorying allows them voice as she had critically inquired into her world in a dalogical encounter (Yang, 2011) with me. She showed that however submerged the minority women experiencing gender violence are in a culture of silence, provided with the tools of restorying, they can become conscious of their many realities and deal critically with them (*ibid*).

Her taking control of voice, eschewing silence when she related her traumatic stories to her second husband showed how Aminah knew instinctively that her storytelling gave her an opportunity to reorder her approach to events (Batini, 2009). Aminah wanted to craft a new life narrative. Her previous disclosures to her husband may not have been enough as she admits to still feeling traumatized, and looked to storytelling again, this time to me, to help her not just to make sense, to measure accountabilities but to forget. She used recollection in her restorying process with me to account for actions taken and not taken so she could act differently in the future (*ibid*).

CHAPTER 5

Reflections and Recommendations

For now, as I restoried the sensitive narratives of minority women, I have mediated in directing the power of formal inquiries and participated in the incremental expansion of public communication spaces. I anticipate to be disputed for co-authoring minority women's stories when I am not a member of the minority group myself, I am not a religious scholar, and I have not been raised nor lived in the region under study, even if a substantial timeline of my working life as a development communication practitioner was spent in the region. I anticipate to be confronted because I am female much more because I am a feminist. But because I am all these, I can help transform the minority women's stories of gender violence as narratives of resistance, and as I wrote in the introduction, continue to trouble a problem that must be solved (Fivush, 2010).

Women in the region under study, as minorities holding minority views, have constantly assessed their social environment and seized avenues for their sensitive stories to leak in any platform where they perceive that narratives will find traction and mileage. The telling of their stories – what to disclose, when and what to retain -- still depends on the receptiveness of every new platform.

For the first time, presented with a communication platform, all three women exercised control over their stories and storytelling processes to convey their minority voices over the two dominant narratives put forward by this inquiry: one, they resisted that cultural script that their act of communicating gender violence goes against the sacred book; and second, they publicly communicated that they, as well

as members of their families, are survivors of chronic abuse and battering, affirming that gender violence exists in minority communities.

In the act of storytelling gender violence in a sensitive context and claiming narrative authority, the women expanded communication spaces by creating new publics in every disclosure beyond the closeted discussions among intimate and private circles of family members and trusted institutions all of which are steeped in religion and minority culture. That these new publics are known to the women as non-minorities with possibilities for opening more platforms doubles the expansion of the communication spaces further.

While there is power in the expansion of communication spaces through the storytelling of minority women, it is in the restorying that this power is amplified. A story, after all, is not just the work of the storyteller (Messias and Dejoseph, 2004). Voices of minority women, however legitimate their narratives are, require an audience otherwise the stories will remain untold or will be limited to the keeping of holders of dominant narratives who do not want stories of gender violence known because they lever a crack challenging the dominance. A receptive audience is crucial to how stories are told by minority women. In restorying with development communicators, as feminist theorists have always posited, the voices of minority women are mainstreamed and legitimized.

It is not just the physical communication spaces that minority women and development communicators co-created in expanding audiences, their confrontation with the themes of silence, fear, invisibility and isolation as they made sense of their stories in the process of telling them also expanded their own narrative interpretations of gender violence. The power of telling their own narratives without the encumbrances of externally dictated style or filter, except their own, allowed the

sense-making of contradictions, confusions and questions that they have raised to measure themselves against their environment.

Only one of the women attempted to tentatively delineate the conceptual boundaries between what is religious versus what is legal versus what is practiced. This affirms that religious interpretations, culture and practices are so intertwined that they are not used as lenses by the minority women in their storytelling – but rather, they rely on their experience base to make meaning. While this inquiry does not cover the scope of posing a conclusion that gender violence is built into the customs and practices of the minority or in the interpretations of religious texts, what is clear is that dominant power structures will continue to use the cracks and gray lines between religious interpretations, customs and practices to communicate their justification of gender violence.

As shown in the review of literature and the minority women's own admissions, fears of repercussions – but not fears of isolation – did play a role in shaping how the minority women told their stories but the contexts of the fears varied. Fear of starting a *rido*. Fear of not being able to get custody of a child. But it was also not just fears of repercussions that characterized their silences and withholding of their minority views because the women also used silence as a weapon to survive and in silence, they reflected their plight and plotted their directions.

These bring development communication practitioners and designers and implementers of anti-Violence Against Women (VAW) programs to task over what to do when confronted with morally-laden and sensitive issues. First, development communicators must be wary of being gatekeepers of dominant narratives by refusing, out of their own fears of repercussions, to burrow into the dynamics of conflict and power relations. In the process of restorying which takes place in the

entire inquiry process, they must ask inflammatory questions and keep troubling a problem that must be solved. A fine balance must, as a matter of course, be kept particularly in fragile areas like the region under study where the simplest sensitive disclosure can spark more conflict and be used to kindle hatred brimming just below civil surfaces.

As discussed, dominant power structures holding dominant views will definitely optimize the gray lines between religious interpretations, customs and practices to communicate their justification of gender violence – development communicators, in restorying, must pay critical attention to how stories get constructed by all respondents, for whom they were assembled, for what purpose, and what discourses they drew on. NGOs, in designing its anti-VAW programs, must take careful note of silences among survivors of gender violence – what is voiced and what is not – and how women structure their silences when they live their experiences and when they narrate them.

Second, development communicators and NGOs must pay attention to the dimensions of temporality. There will almost be no overt linear sequencing in the women's storytelling processes as they flit from past, present and future. This difficult timelining is all the more complex in a context where women's marriages are fluid as they divorce or are abandoned for another wife, and they will refer instinctively to a first, second or third husband in storytelling without referring to orders and ranks. The same intricate consideration must be given to polygynous set-ups where there are multiple characters with multiple voices.

Minority women may also constantly revise the details of their story as they tell their traumatic experiences as stories are different as lived versus stories as told. While seemingly inconsistent, development communicators and NGOs cannot

dismiss the conflicting stories as untrue because the inconsistencies speak of meaning-making that survivors of gender violence go through in every retelling. There is no single story. Restorying and accepting a single story is dangerous because it perpetuates stereotypes and holds minority women to task to conform to a dominant script.

Third, the dimension of sociality is critical in planning communication and counseling interventions on gender violence in a sensitive context. In all of the women's storytelling processes, the interplay among political and cultural frames of feudal relations (tenant-landowner) and gender roles in minority society and religion-custom are evident. They may not talk about these in dialectical terms but development communication practitioners and NGOs must be always pay attention to the social and political contexts from which their stories and storytelling are built.

Development communication practitioners and NGOs must be fully conscious of the dynamics of power relations in minorities' communication processes, but this should go beyond physical disaggregation to distinguish between gender or status. Attention must be paid to how minority survivors of gender violence in a fragile environment can tap influentials belonging to a majority that may hold a dominant view but are open to hearing marginalized stories. Based on the story of Taya, the *kamal* (influential people in communities), hearing her daily abuse, have intervened with reminders for the couple to stop fighting and keep the peace. With the prolonged battering, however, the *kamal* already warned of penalties should Taya's husband continue to abuse her but it was Taya herself who denied further beatings because they just couldn't afford the fines.

Sociality also applies to how marriage is regarded. The minority group attaches multiple meanings to the variety of "marriages" that delineations seem academic – religious and social ceremonies conducted by an *imam* (priest) and witnessed by the community – which to many, is binding but not legal; signing of papers which many deem as marriage contracts, but not necessarily so; signing of actual marriage contracts and have these registered in the court covering religious laws; or combinations of all these. Development communication strategies are focused on the legal sphere (particularly in seeking reforms to legislation) as this is the only arena where borders are fixed. The sociality dimension of marriage must be considered because more than fear of repercussions because of their storytelling, the vows they have taken in these "marriages" characterize how they make sense of abuse in a marital set-up.

Fourth, development communication practitioners and NGOs have to consider the dimension of place. Because of war and conflicts such as *rido*, communities may be displaced as the minority women have all evacuated at least once in their lives. Their storytelling processes are marked with milestones depicting evacuations, and places where gender violence happens are often characterized by whether their families have undergone physical displacements and disruptions.

One of the women recommended having a protected safe house in a neutral space where survivors can seek shelter and receive counseling. This neutral space will have to be defined to address the many fears that characterized not just the minority women's storytelling but also mold the decision to finally seek for help. Attached to the physical set-up is the need for a safe communication system where they can relay requests for help and rescue. Development communication

practitioners and NGOs should not just consider the safety of the women, but also devise mechanisms to ensure protection for themselves.

The minority women structured their silences, choosing when and how much to divulge depending on whom they talk to, and by telling me their stories for the first time, the women risked their personal communication spaces just as I risk mine in co-authoring their stories. I entered this inquiry with knowledge of the danger – to the women and to myself. In all three engagements with the minority women, while I calibrated new, possible development communication approaches, I always had to contend with fear at many levels. All of the women' stories had various layers of war and violence, after all, and these continue to characterize their stories and storytelling, and mine.

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