

Exploring Social Identity in Peace Reports: The Case of the Mamasapano, Philippines (Mis) Encounter

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ABSTRACT

Using a discursive approach to understanding social identity, we examined constructed and shifting identities in written discourse and the political outcomes associated with the shift in identity construction. We specifically analyzed the fact-finding reports of the five bodies of inquiry created to probe into the (mis)encounter of the Philippine Government's Police Special Action Force, Moro rebel troops, and private armed groups on January 25, 2015, in Mamasapano, Maguindanao, Philippines. The ferocious firefight that took the lives of 67 Filipinos occurred in the midst of peace negotiations between the government and Moro rebels. Results showed shifts in identity construction among three of the five investigating bodies in their reports. From their investigating body identity, the Philippine police and Moro rebels shifted back to their respective group identities; while the Philippine Senate moved from being an investigating body to being a critic to being a defender of the police and the country. Shifts in identity construction justified their intention to strengthen their reputation as pursuers of peace and justice, reinforce the integrity of their respective social groups, discredit their opponents, and enhance their credibility as protectors of the country. Findings lend support to the conceptualization of social identity as discursively produced and actively performed in written discourse. Implications of the findings to peace negotiations are discussed.

Keywords: Social Identity, Discourse Analysis, Intergroup conflict, Philippine peace process, Mamasapano (mis) encounter

Social identity dynamically unfolds across contexts and situations (Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Wodak et al., 2009). Groups construct, contest (Olinger, 2011), negotiate (Clary- Lemon, 2010), transform, or dismantle (Wodak et al., 2009) their collective identities or take on identity positions at different moments (Reddy, 2019). These shifts in identification may be carried out discursively (Colombo & Senatore, 2005; Wodak et al., 2009), contingent on what justifies a particular course of contextualized action (Slocum-Bradley, 2009).

Several studies point to social identities as constructed and shifting across oral and written discourses (e.g., de Cillia et al., 1999; Popow, 2014; Stein, 2001; Wodak et al., 2009). We posit that these identification shifts are deliberate acts that support a group's political ends. To elaborate on our proposition, we first present a discussion of a discursive approach

to the study of social identity and then give a brief description of how social identities shift in discourse. Lastly, we illustrate how identity shifts justify outcomes favorable to particular groups.

Exploring Social Identity in Discourse

With the discursive turn in social psychology (Bozatzis & Dragonas, 2014), conceptualizing social identity within the frame of discourse has significantly progressed. Putting forward a discursive approach to investigating social identity, we conceptualize this construct in the larger scheme of positioning theory, which sees identity as one of the several discursive elements constructed in the course of interpersonal or intergroup conversation. In this research, we define discursive social identity as features of particular groups related to their discursive positioning in the political arena (Slocum-Bradley, 2009). For example, a social group that believes it is its duty to determine

criminal liability may discursively project or identify itself as an investigating body out to uncover the “truth” behind a skirmish.

A discursive approach to understanding social identity deems social identity to be nonessentialist (Butler, 1990), contingent on context (Antaki et al., 1996), and actively performed (Howard, 2000). The anti-essentialist view of social identity posits that identity is not situated within the self, nor something that one “has”; but is rather a fluid construct that is located in people’s talk and text (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Butler, 1990; Howard, 2000). As such, social identity is not an “essence” but a “description” that is created and found in language (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). For example, a group may be called “defender” not because it is “being” one, but because it has been labeled as such or it describes itself as such.

As gleaned from above, identities are socially constructed, even as interaction between or among groups proceeds (Antaki et al., 1996). Groups construct “selves” or identities (Slocum-Bradley, 2009), or express these in various ways in various settings (Gilchrist et al., 2010), such that meanings of identities are dependent on the prevailing contexts that a group finds itself in (Winn & Rubin, 2001) or its relationship (Bradatan et al., 2010) or interaction (Antaki et al., 1996) with other social actors. Hence, certain social identities may be considered fitting to be adopted in some contexts but not in others (Slocum-Bradley, 2009). As Verkuyten (1997) asserts, groups do not use fixed genres but rather cross borders of varying genres in defining themselves.

Social identities are performed or enacted (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). This is “done” through language, both in interaction, such as talk, and discourse, such as through various forms of media (de Cillia et al., 1999; Howard, 2000). In talk, a group may use verbal acts so as to construct one’s own social identity or that of another group who is part of the conversation (Ochs, 1993). For instance, Kitzinger and Mandelbaum (2013) showed evidence of how social identities are constructed through vocabulary use in naturally occurring talk-in-interaction. Archakis and Tzanne (2009), on the other hand, found that participants in their study co-construct their ingroup identity, Greekness, in the course of their story-telling. With this, we can see that social identity is a process, not a product of group membership. It is a position that a group actively takes on, not a category that it passively accepts (Reddy, 2019). Hence, social

identity is provisional and negotiated with others.

Shifting Social Identity in Discourse

Literature does not only show social identities as enacted in oral and written discourse. It also points to how social identity shifts as group interaction proceeds. This has been observed in studies that looked at racial and national identities. For instance, Rockquemore and Arend (2002) found that mixed-race people in post-civil rights America identify in no less than five different ways: a.) Black; b.) White; c.) biracial; d.) Black, White, and biracial, depending on the social environment; and e.) no racial identity. In a similar study that looks at national identity among Austrians, de Cillia and colleagues (1999) found that depending on contexts, Austrians may discursively construct themselves as Austrians, Carinthians, Slovenes, Carinthian Slovenes, or Slovenian-speaking Carinthians.

In the above examples, shifting identities are captured in talk. Interestingly, however, we only found a few studies that actually look at shifting identities in written discourse. One example of this is the study of Popow (2014) which found in Polish literature textbooks that national identity shifts from Polishness to Europeaness. The former is constructed using ethnic nation discourse emphasizing community values and traditions; the latter is framed using discourses linked with duty towards society. Another example is that of Stein (2001), which illustrates shifts in identity construction in Rabbinic literature. In her study, she points to how a maidservant’s narratives can transform her from a lowly slave woman into one who actually teaches or provides important information to scholars, like the rabbis. It is interesting to note that Stein also indicates how such identity construction can be contested when, in the next turn, someone of a higher rank says something that quickly reinstates the maidservant into the realm of housecleaning.

Social Identity as Justifying an Outcome

The discursive construction of a particular social identity justifies a group’s course of action (Slocum-Bradley, 2009). It could serve social functions to help groups participate in the social world or maintain positive regard (Reddy, 2019). Modification of identity expression may be consciously performed, deliberately engineered, or automatically carried out, with subtle cognizance of prevailing expectations (Gilchrist et al., 2010) and aspired outcome (Slocum-Bradley, 2009). For instance, Colombo and Senatore

(2005) found that the construction of different versions of community identity protects the uniqueness of the ingroup as well as its internal homogeneity. In another study, Kirkwood and colleagues (2013) found that various ways of identity construction help legitimize or criticize people's presence in a certain area. Garvida (2012) also found in web-based discussions that some Filipino netizens use "conyo" talk — a mix of predominantly Spanish and English with Tagalog — instinctively and/or intentionally to position themselves, establish their hybrid identities, and display their power. Shifts in identities, therefore, may be deliberately carried out because they facilitate in accomplishing a particular outcome.

This study examines constructed and shifting identities in written discourse, in relation to political outcomes identified with each group. As we propose to investigate shifts in constructed identities in official peace reports we shall first give a background of where these reports came from. What follows is a brief description of the incident that led to the creation of the reports.

The Mamasapano Incident: A Brief Background

In the early morning of January 25, 2015, members of the elite Philippine National Police - Special Action Force, ran into a ferocious firefight with the various troops that are known to be present in Mamasapano, Maguindanao: Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, and Private Armed Groups (Alim, 2016). Sixty-seven Filipinos — 44 Special Action Force members, 18 Moro Islamic Liberation Front members, and 5 civilians — were killed in the hostile encounter (Altez, 2017).

The Special Action Force members were on a mission to serve warrants of arrest to suspected terrorists, Zulkifli Bin Hir, also known as Marwan, Ahmad Akmad Batabol Usman alias Basit Usman (Maitem & Maulana, 2015), and Amin Baco alias Jihad (Macas, 2015). Marwan was said to be a member and bomb-maker of the international terrorist group, Jema'ah Islamiyah, and was considered one of the most wanted terrorists by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (De Jesus, 2015a). Usman, on the other hand, was also linked to the Jema'ah Islamiyah and was said to be making bombs for the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, a breakaway group of Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which has been reported to oppose the Moro rebel group's peace negotiation with the Philippine government (Sabillo, 2015). Baco was a Malaysian member of the Jema'ah Islamiyah and

an expert bomb-maker, particularly on improvised explosive devices (Macas, 2015). Marwan had a five million US dollar bounty on his head (De Jesus, 2015a) while Usman had two million US dollars (Maitem & Maulana, 2015), courtesy of the United States of America State Department. The mission to neutralize these identified high-value targets was called Operation Plan Exodus (Mangosing, 2015a; Timeline: Mamasapano clash, 2015).

Around three o'clock, dawn of January 25, Special Action Force troopers entered the village where the targets' hideouts were said to be located. The task was supposed to be a surgical operation of 30 minutes. As early as 4:00 a.m., Special Action Force commandos were already able to kill Marwan on the spot (Timeline: Mamasapano clash, 2015), but were not able to catch the two other targets (De Jesus, 2015b; Macas, 2015). On their way out of the area, the commandos as well as the other Special Action Company that served as blocking force that would secure their withdrawal route were engaged in a gun battle, separately, with the three aforementioned groups (Mayol, 2017; Mendez, 2015). The encounter lasted for almost 12 hours (Mangosing, 2015b) and left many casualties.

It must be noted that Maguindanao is part of the Bangsamoro Zone which is known for its territorial conflict and factionalism (Paredes, 2015), clan disputes (Rood, 2005), and communal violence (Hall, 2017). As such, security within the Bangsamoro region is unpredictable. The various armed groups in the area may come together or disband at crucial moments (Hall, 2015).

Investigations on the incident suggested that prior to the launching of the operation, the Philippine National Police - Special Action Force deliberately did not coordinate with the Armed Forces of the Philippines, which could have provided the elite group with reinforcement (Balana, 2015). They also did not coordinate with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, with whom the Government of the Philippines had ongoing peace talks (Dizon, 2015; Mangosing, 2015b; Sabillo, 2015), as well as with the Philippine National Police officer-in-charge (De Jesus, 2015c) and the Secretary of the Department of Interior and Local Government (Timeline: Mamasapano clash, 2015). According to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, it was because of this non-coordination that its forces, the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces, were involved in the gunfight especially since the Bangsamoro

armed forces were fired at first by the police special action force. The Moro rebel group maintained that its armed forces did not even know that they were fighting with the police elite group as they did not recognize the uniforms of the police commandos (Ramos & Dizon, 2015). The Moro Islamic Liberation Front further said that the police special force's entry into its lair was a violation of the peace agreement (Mangosing, 2015b). The military, on the other hand, asserted that there was also a lack of information from the police special force, making it difficult for them to provide the needed reinforcement for the beleaguered commandos (Balana, 2015; Ramos & Dizon, 2015).

Several bodies of inquiry were formed to get to the bottom of the incident. The Philippine National Police created the Board of Inquiry, which was composed of a select group of star-ranked officers. The Board of Inquiry collected documents and sworn statements as well as conducted interviews and site surveys to "establish the facts" regarding Operation Plan Exodus. The Department of Justice, on the other hand, constituted the Joint National Bureau of Investigation - National Prosecution Service Special Investigation Team. The team was made up of five prosecutors from the Office of the Prosecutor General and 10 agents from the National Bureau of Investigations Regional Operations Service. The investigating body conducted detailed interviews and rigorous interrogations of witnesses, examined various videos, and photographic and electronic data, and studied and analyzed technical reports. Their investigation extended to all administrative and criminal offenses possibly committed by anyone involved in the Mamasapano incident.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front organized the Special Investigative Commission, a five-member team mandated to shed light on the Mamasapano incident, assess the conduct of the involved Bangsamoro Islamic Liberation Front members, and propose action points to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) leadership. The team conducted an ocular inspection and interviews among members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), the MILF Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Conflict, as well as the relatives of the BIAF members and civilian casualties.

The International Monitoring Team, the overseer of the implementation of the Agreement of Peace between the Government of the Philippines and

the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, also conducted its independent Verification Mission regarding the debacle. The International Monitoring Team aimed to verify the allegations of ceasefire violations and to propose recommendations to avoid similar occurrences and enhance the ceasefire mechanism. The team reviewed the Mamasapano reports of the Philippine National Police Board of Inquiry and the MILF Special Investigative Commission.

The Philippine Senate set up the Mamasapano Truth Commission to look into the armed encounter. This was composed of the Committees on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation, and Finance. They jointly held five public hearings and five executive sessions. A total of 37 persons and/or witnesses appeared before the Committees and testified under oath. They also looked at the public statements of the President of the Philippines relating to Operation Plan Exodus.

There was public outrage over the death of the 44 members of the Special Action Force (Hilario, 2015) when news about the Mamasapano incident broke out; and cry for justice over their deaths shored up with the coming out of the reports of the investigation teams (Arguillas, 2017). Following public indignation, Congress and Senate suspended the deliberation of the Bangsamoro Basic Law and even filed another bill that would replace the proposed law (Arguillas, 2016).

The use of the word, *massacre*, in the senate report led to the propagation of othering and exclusionary discourses (Castillo, 2018). Morophobia/ Islamophobia became more pronounced, which augured to reopen old wounds (Rosauero, 2016). There was also a significant change in public perception and attitude towards the peace process and the Bangsamoro Basic Law (David, 2015), the bill that was hoped to end the decades-long Moro liberation struggle.

Despite all these, however, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front still continued to call for the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (Soriano, 2015). In keeping with the previously signed agreements, it also went ahead with the decommissioning of a portion of its arms and combatants on June 16, 2015 (Magno, 2015).

This study intends to examine the official reports of the Mamasapano incident to capture how the created investigating bodies construct and reconstruct their social identities in their written discourse. Following

Slocum-Bradley's (2009) definition of social identity as attributes linked to a group's political utterances, we operationalize this construct as discursively constructed group features emanating from each investigative body's political positions about the Mamasapano incident. We see the entire data corpus as an intergroup conversation in the public sphere, where such investigations unfold simultaneously in the political arena. Hence, we hope to answer the following research questions:

- a. what are the identity shifts in the five investigative reports?
- b. what political outcomes justify these identity shifts?

Method: Discourse Analysis

We used Discourse Analysis (DA) to examine the dynamic construction of social identities in the official reports of the five investigating bodies in the Mamasapano incident. DA views discourse as constructed and constructive (Wiggins & Potter, 2017). People use words, repertoires, idioms, and other linguistic building blocks in creating versions of reality and in forming social categories (Willig, 2013).

As such, DA is a powerful tool to utilize in examining patterns of identity construction (Willig, 2013) in naturally occurring text or talk (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2005).

Language is performative or action-oriented (Wiggins & Potter, 2017; Willig 2013). Articulated views, opinions, accounts, and explanations, *do* something when expressed in a particular social context. Discursive practices are thus both constructive and functional as these are used in conversations to achieve social objectives (Willig, 2013).

Applying this to the discursive (re)construction of identities in the Mamasapano reports, this study dissects how the written texts (re)construct the social identities of the investigating bodies and the various social actors in the incident, as well as the political outcomes associated with such discursive constructions.

Data Source

The data used in the study were the five official reports that were put forward after the bloody gunfight on January 25, 2015, in Mamasapano, Maguindanao. Table 1 presents a description of each report.

Table 1. Official Reports on the Mamasapano Incident

Initiating Organization	Investigating Body/ Team	Report	Date of Release
Philippine National Police (PNP)	Board of Inquiry (BOI)	The Mamasapano Report	March 12, 2015
Department of Justice	Joint National Bureau of Investigation National Prosecution Service Special Investigation Team (NBI-NPS SIT)	The Report of the Joint NBI- NPS SIT on the January 25, 2015 Mamasapano Incident, and The Second Report of the Joint NBI-NPS SIT on the January 25, 2015 Mamasapano Incident	April 16, 2015 September 30, 2015
Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)	Special Investigative Commission (SIC)	Report on the Mamasapano Incident	March 24, 2015

Table 1 continued

International Monitoring Team (IMT)	IMT Verification Mission	Verification and Assessment Report – Ceasefire Violations Mamasapano Incident January 25, 2015	April 5, 2015
Philippine Senate	Mamasapano Truth Commission	The Committee Report on the Mamasapano Incident	March 15, 2015

All five agencies came up with one official report each, except for the Department of Justice, which came up with two reports, having done another investigation several months after its submission of the first report. As these reports were made public, they were easily accessible from the websites of newspaper and television companies, such as the Philippine Daily Inquirer and GMA News Online.

Analyzing Construction and Reconstruction of Social Identity in Written Discourse

We followed Willig's (2013) analytical procedures in conducting discourse analysis. After obtaining the data, at least two members of the research team carefully read each report without attempting to conduct any analysis. This helped in familiarizing ourselves with the textual data. The second step involved independent coding by two researchers of all the relevant texts from each report. First, the researchers located all the texts that mentioned the name of the investigating body (e.g. IMT Verification Mission) and the nouns referring to people (e.g. Purisima, Napenas), positions (e.g. President of the Philippines) and social groups (e.g. Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Special Action Force, Armed Forces of the Philippines, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, among others) as well as pronouns used in the report (e.g. we, they, our, he). Each statement described the groups/persons (adjectives), what they did (verbs) and what describes their actions (adverbs). These were highlighted and then copied to a spreadsheet for consolidation. This was done to make sure that all relevant materials were included without prejudice to selecting only texts that reflected a set of predetermined keywords (MacNaghten, 1993; Willig, 2013).

The examination focused on the constructive and functional aspects of the discourse captured in the investigative reports. We attended to the linguistic building blocks used in the construction of social identities. More specific focus was given to how words, repertoires, and other linguistic means reflected shifts in identity construction throughout each report, and insights were drawn on what function (i.e. political ends) these shifts in identity may serve. Inter-coder discussions between members of the research team assigned to each report were utilized to enhance the reliability of the analysis.

RESULTS

Discursive production of identity of the groups that probed the Mamasapano incident consistently shifted across their respective peace reports, save for the Joint National Bureau of Investigation-National Prosecution Service Special Investigation Team (NBI-NPS SIT) and the International Monitoring Team's Verification Mission. The table below shows a summary of each group's shifts in identity construction and the outcomes that justify these changes.

Identity Shifts Across Report

Results showed shifts in identity construction in the peace reports. Findings also pointed to the accomplishment of their desired outcomes with such a move.

All investigating teams — Philippine National Police Board of Inquiry, Department of Justice Joint National Bureau of Investigation - National Prosecution Service Special Investigation Team, Moro Islamic Liberation Front Special Investigative

Table 2. Summary of Mamasapano Bodies of Inquiry Identity (Re) Construction, Strategies, Used, and Political Goals

Investigating Body/ Team	Constructed Identities	Political Outcomes Accomplished in Identity Construction
International Monitoring Team Verification Mission	Investigating body (neutral, conduct fact-finding & verification)	Enhanced reputation as a credible body of inquiry; strengthened integrity as pursuer of justice
Department of Justice	Investigating body (neutral, conduct fact-finding & verification)	Enhanced reputation as a credible body of inquiry; strengthened integrity as pursuer of justice
Joint National Bureau of Investigation National Prosecution Service Special Investigation Team		
Moro Islamic Liberation Front - Special Investigative Commission	Investigating body (neutral, conduct fact-finding & verification)	Enhanced reputation as a credible body of inquiry; strengthened integrity as pursuer of justice
	Moro Islamic Liberation Front	reinforced probity as pursuer of peace and as faithful partner to the peace process
Philippine National Police- Board of Inquiry	Investigating body (neutral, conduct fact-finding & verification)	bolstered reputation as credible body of inquiry; strengthened credibility as pursuer of justice

Table 2 continued

Philippine National Police- Board of Inquiry	National	Philippine National Police	sustained credibility as an agency doing its job, as heroes, as protector of the country and its people
Philippine Mamasapano Commission	Senate Truth	Investigating body (neutral, conduct fact-finding & verification)	Enhanced reputation as a credible body of inquiry; strengthened integrity as pursuer of justice
		Critic of Moro Islamic Liberation Front Defender of Philippine National Police	Liberation Front strengthened credibility as protector of the country's heroes
		Pro-peace, defender of the country	Enhanced credibility as champion of peace

Commission, International Monitoring Team Verification Mission, and the Philippine Senate Mamasapano Truth Commission — started their official peace reports projecting themselves as a body of inquiry whose aim was to uncover and surface the “real” story behind the Mamasapano incident. This was evidenced by their use of words such as, “as a neutral body...,” “...created to investigate...,” “... to shed light,” “launch fact-finding investigation...,” “provide detailed narratives...,” “obtain various types of evidence, processing and reviewing hundreds of documents,” or “identify and find *all* persons, whether public or private individuals, who must be held accountable.” By presenting themselves as a neutral body created to investigate, shed light, and provide detailed narratives on the Mamasapano incident, these teams characterized themselves as unbiased, thorough, objective, and fact-finding.

Two of the five investigating teams — the Joint National Bureau of Investigation - National Prosecution Service Special Investigation Team of the Department of Justice and the Verification Mission of the International Monitoring Team — consistently presented themselves as an impartial investigating body across their reports. In the two official accounts that were released on April 16, 2015, and September 30, 2015, the Department of Justice Special Investigation Team sustained the identity that

it established at the start of its first report — that of an investigating body intent on determining the criminal liability of those involved in the incident. This identity has been upheld even up to the last part of its second report where the team maintained that “its mandate is in the nature of a fact-finding body” and its duty is to “warrant that its findings and recommendations on who may be held liable for the crimes committed during the Mamasapano incident be supported only by competent evidence that is relevant and admissible.”

The International Monitoring Team Verification Mission, on the other hand, carried on a fact-finding identity whose goal was to verify and assess ceasefire violations that transpired in the Mamasapano incident. Across its official report, the team stressed that it was not a fault-finding body, but rather an even-handed one that only looked into possible breaches of the ceasefire agreement and proposed recommendations that would help enhance ceasefire mechanisms. It kept pointing to what acts of which group was a “violation of Agreement for General Cessation of Hostilities of 1997.”

From investigative to defensive. Change in identity construction could be clearly observed from the peace reports of the three remaining investigating teams. Of the three, the two fact-finding bodies which also represented the social groups involved in the

incident shifted from being a body of inquiry to being the group that they represented themselves.

These were the Moro Islamic Liberation Front Special Investigative Commission and the Philippine National Police Board of Inquiry.

The Special Investigative Commission shifted from being an investigative body to being the Moro Islamic Liberation Front itself. After explicitly stating its mandate to investigate and its objectives, the main one being to “shed light on what happened on January 25 and 26, 2015 in Mamasapano, Maguindanao,” the team proceeded to discuss in its report the details of the incident starting this with “narration of the facts.” This “narration of facts,” however, was an account of what happened based mainly on the interviews that the team conducted with members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. In its report, the commission asserted that the Bangsamoro armed group was not guilty, but was rather the offended party, being the one attacked and invaded by the police special force. These are some extracts from the report:

Extract 1. The operation of the PNP-SAF in Mamasapano on January 25, 2015, caught the BIAF by surprise...As there was no coordination between the government and the MILF through the AHJAG and CCCH mechanisms, the BIAF cannot be faulted for concluding that the PNP-SAF forces that they chanced upon in Sitio Amilil were enemies, especially that they were fired upon, and after two (2) of their men were shot and killed by the PNP-SAF (p.20-21).

Extract 2. The action of the MILF-CCCH in informing the GP-CCCH about the reported encounter in Mamasapano at 0638H shows that the MILF was concerned about preventing or stopping any armed clash between the parties...so that they could effectively enforce a ceasefire (p. 21).

Extract 3. Still, in the interest of peace, these firearms have been returned to the government on February 18, 2015. The MILF leadership took the initiative of asking their men to return the firearms (p. 27).

From what can be gleaned in the report, the commission pointed to the government force as the one breaking the ceasefire agreement, entering the sanctuary of the moro rebels without coordination

despite the ongoing peace talks, and attacking several members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The Special Action Force, according to the commission, fired first at Moro rebels who were crossing a bridge, which led to the deadly armed encounter. It also fired at some Moro rebels who were sleeping inside a *langgal* or small mosque and even pursued and fired at those who were raising their hands saying they were unarmed. The commission accentuated that whatever hostile action the Moro Islamic Liberation Front armed forces did was an act to defend themselves. It also kept reiterating that there were other forces present at the time of the firefight, particularly the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and several Private Armed Groups, that it did its best to stop the armed encounter, and that it handed the firearms back to the government after. The report wove a narrative that attempted to exonerate the Moro rebel armed forces from the ferocious firefight that led to the death of 67 Filipinos.

Discursively identifying itself as Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the Special Investigative Commission continued by highlighting in its report the Bangsamoro insurgent group as victim and co-victim with the civilian casualties in the Mamasapano incident. It explicitly showed in its report pictures of the dead bodies of each of the members of the rebel group who were killed during the firefight as well as those of the civilians. The commission also underlined the Moro Islamic Liberation Front as not guilty of violence but as pursuer of peace. It underscored that its armed forces were fired at first and so acted only in self-defense and that it was the members of the insurgent group who informed the Coordinating Committee on Cessation of Hostilities about the armed encounter, helped organize the Mamasapano Crisis Team, assisted in the extraction of Special Action Force dead bodies, and even returned personal effects which the rebels originally collected as war booties.

In the same manner, the Philippine National Police Board of Inquiry discursively shifted its identity from being an investigating body to being the Philippine National Police itself and Special Action Force protector. After stating that the Board of Inquiry was created to “investigate the facts and circumstances surrounding the encounters in Mamasapano... from various parties, offices, units, and organizations involved” and “produce an exhaustive and thorough analysis” of the incident, the investigating body, in its report, proceeded to shift its identity construction

from a neutral body to Special Action Force defender by explaining the incident through the eyes of the Philippine National Police and justifying the action of the Special Action Force of entering the lair of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The investigating body outlined in its report how the elite group of policemen were not to be blamed for the incident and that they were actually victims, that their leaders were the ones who broke the chain of command, and violated the peace process mechanism. They further asserted that their Special Action Force director failed to effectively supervise, control, and direct them, the Oplan Exodus strategy was ineffective, they were given equipment that were unreliable, the support from the Philippine Armed Forces came too late, and they were literally executed at close range and shot even when they were already dead. This narrative was further reinforced with a short description of the 16 wounded commandos and the autopsy report of each of the 44 who died.

The discursive identification as Philippine National Police was further bolstered by the investigating team's acclaim of the Special Action Force as heroes. According to the board of inquiry, the elite police force was under heavy enemy fire and basically lost their lives for carrying out their mission. That they went ahead to "pursue their objective regardless of the severe difficulties, limitations, and hindrances that affected their operation. Their resolve to accomplish their mission despite serious challenges to their survival is admirable and noteworthy" (p. 67). The report also highlighted the special force's neutralization of a high-value target as evidenced by the DNA sample and digital picture that it produced. Romanticizing this heroism further, the report stated, "All these happened while most of the other 100 million Filipinos, here and abroad, heard Mass, dined with their loved ones, watched movies, strolled in the park, labored for their paycheck, and just that, enjoyed their carefree Sunday" (p. 9).

From investigative to offensive to defensive. The Philippine Senate Mamasapano Truth Commission, also known as the Committees, tasked to probe the Mamasapano incident shifted its identity from being a body of inquiry to being a critic, to being a defender of the police and the country. After evincing itself as a nonpartisan investigating body through its presentation of the context of the ongoing peace talks and description of "statements of facts: before, during, and after the Mamasapano incident," at the beginning of its report, the Committees, moved on

to demonstrate a critic identity after. Such a shift in identity construction was evidenced by its railing against the Philippine National Police - Special Action Force, particularly its officials, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and the President of the Philippines. It criticized the Special Action Force for its "failure to coordinate with the Armed Forces of the Philippines prior to the launch of [its] operations," for its "inadequate intelligence" preparation, "poor planning" and execution of Oplan Exodus, and for its violation of the Philippine National Police chain of command. According to the Committees, the police special force made "fatal mistakes" and caused a crisis that had inimical effects on the peace process. As it stated in its report:

"The PNP's tactical plan to act autonomously was detrimental to the strategic plans of the government. By intentionally disobeying the agreements on protocol for the conduct of Law Enforcement Operations, the PNP caused a crisis with repercussions on the peace process" (p. 79).

Still presenting a critic identity, the Mamasapano Truth Commission, in its report, condemned the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and its leadership saying that the group's armed forces, together with the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and other Private Armed Groups, murdered, robbed, and massacred the 44 members of the police special armed force, and that its leaders did not have absolute control of their ground troops. It boldly asserted that "what happened in the Mamasapano on 25 January 2015 was a massacre, not a misencounter" (p.57) and that "the gory details, the overkill reactions of the combined groups of BIFF, MILF, and PAGS as indicated in their massive and heavy firing all point to massacre" (p. 57). Because of this, the Committees was now questioning the rebel group's sincerity as the government's partner in the peace process.

As critic, the body of inquiry likewise censured the Philippine president for having consented to the unlawful participation of a suspended officer in the execution of Oplan Exodus. For the Senate, "the President assented to, or at the very least failed to prevent PDG Purisima for the latter's violation of Article 177 of the Revised Penal Code" (p. 90).

Then towards the last part of its report, the Philippine Senate Truth Commission shifted from being a critic of the Philippine National Police to being its magnanimous defender, singing praises for the

Special Action Force's bravery and heroism as well as crying for *katarungan* or justice for their deaths and recommending that those liable for their demise be charged. As it explicitly declared, "justice cannot be achieved unless those directly responsible for the deaths of SAF 44, be they members of the MILF, the BIFF or any other PAGs, are prosecuted and convicted in accordance with our laws" (p. 122). In addition, the Committees also strongly recommended policies that would transform the police force and help improve the well-being of the police personnel. It also commended the Armed Forces of the Philippines and its officers for the expertise, courage, and the support they gave that, according to the Committees, were "instrumental in the rescue of the beleaguered SAF" (p.106).

Lastly, ascribing itself as peace defender, the senate truth commission also argued that the government should ensure that the long-standing dream to have genuine peace, especially in Mindanao, should be reached without compromising the sovereignty or territorial integrity of the country. As it articulated in its report:

KAPAYAPAAN—Nobody can argue against the nation's aspiration to realize the long-standing dream to have genuine peace in Mindanao. It has been said after all these years that peace can only be achieved through a political settlement based on compromise and mutual concessions. However, before our government, including Congress, compromise with, and grant concessions to, the MILF, we must be sure that the peace we seek to attain is both permanent and all-encompassing. More importantly, peace must be reached without compromising our sovereignty or the territorial integrity of our country. The peace we seek to achieve must be in full accord with the Constitution (p. 127).

Shifts in Identity Construction as Justifying Outcomes

The discursive shift in the identity construction of the five investigating teams endeavored to enhance the reputation of each as a credible body of inquiry. To achieve this, they exerted effort first to present the context surrounding the Mamasapano incident including the ongoing peace talks between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the several failed attempts to capture high value targets, particularly Zulkifli Bin Hir

or Marwan, and the Oplan Exodus blueprint; second, to carefully dig into the details so as to provide a blow by blow account of what happened on January 25, 2015; third, to transparently show the sources of their information; and fourth, to expound their analysis and recommendations.

The Department of Justice Special Investigation Team also highlighted that it ensured the protection of its sources. All five bodies of inquiry strove to strengthen their credibility as pursuers of justice by emphasizing that the main goals of their investigation were to verify and unearth the "truth" surrounding the Mamasapano incident as well as to determine the administrative and criminal liability of those responsible for the deaths of 67 Filipinos. They all tried to realize this by projecting scrupulousness and impartiality in the conduct of their investigation. They clearly demonstrated this, especially in the first part of their respective reports.

Shifting identity from being an investigating body to being the group they represented themselves, both the Board of Inquiry and Special Investigative Commission endeavored to reinforce the integrity of their respective groups. The former being a government agency created to protect the people, promote peace and order, and ensure public safety, even dying for the country. The latter being a revolutionary group that sought just peace for the Bangsamoro people, thus its faithfulness to its peace agreement with the Philippine government. Both teams strove to achieve their desired outcomes through the application of positive self-presentation. They tried to protect their group identities which had been threatened by the bloody encounter. They also emphasized the legitimacy of their respective group's acts and shifted blame to others.

A discursive shift in the construction of its identity from being a body of inquiry to being a critic, particularly that of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the Senate Truth Commission sought to cast doubts upon the sincerity of the Moro rebel group and to discredit it as a veritable partner of the government in the quest for lasting peace, especially in Mindanao. The Senate Truth Commission did this by employing a negative presentation of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front using descriptions such as having no restraint, murderers, robbers, and coddlers of criminals and terrorists. Constructing a defender identity, the Senate Truth Commission endeavored to enhance its credibility as protector of the country and the

country's heroes. It emphasized the bravery of the "fallen 44" and the need to come up with policies that would better equip and give the Special Action Force greater benefits.

DISCUSSION

The study located discursive constructions and shifts in social identities in written discourse. It specifically examined how the five investigating bodies constructed and reconstructed their social identities in the official reports that they produced on the Mamasapano incident. In the process of locating constructed and shifting identities, we determined what political outcomes were achieved by the groups' discursive acts.

Constructed and Shifting Identities

The examination of the five official peace reports on the Mamasapano incident included in the study lends evidence to the conceptualization of social identity as discursively produced (Colombo & Senatore, 2005; Wodak et al., 2009) and actively performed (Howard, 2000) in written discourse (Popow, 2014; Stein, 2001). Similar to the findings of de Cilia and colleagues (2009) as well as Popow (2014), the identity of the five groups was formed and enacted through the reports. The groups - Philippine National Police Board of Inquiry, the Philippine Department of Justice Joint National Bureau of Investigation-National Prosecution Service Special Investigation Team, Moro Islamic Liberation Front Special Investigative Commission, International Monitoring Team Verification Mission, Philippine Senate Mamasapano Truth Commission- constructed an *investigating body* identity by including information in the reports that are reflective of an unbiased, thorough, objective, and fact-finding investigation. Nonetheless, the reports of the Board of Inquiry and the Special Investigative Commission, interspersed factual accounts with comments/opinions on how the events reflected violations on the chain of command and of the peace process, respectively. In these instances, the two groups seem to have shifted from their *investigating body* identity that gave them credence to conduct the investigation to their group identity as either the Philippine National Police or the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. As the two social groups directly involved in the incident, the shift in identity as expressed in the written discourse, served to present their groups as not responsible for the (mis)encounter but were rather victims of

the circumstances and actions of the other groups. These discursive acts in the written reports appear to put forth a positive self-presentation of the Philippine National Police and Moro Islamic Liberation Front aimed at protecting their respective group identity that was threatened by the fact that their troops participated in the bloody Mamasapano encounter. These findings are reflective of claims in literature (e.g. Reddy, 2019) that the discursive construction of social identity serve the purpose of creating or maintaining a group's favorable reputation.

Performative Identity Construction

Findings showed that group identities shift and vary depending on the context of the social actors (de Cilia, 1999) and the group's aspired outcomes (Slocum-Bradley, 2009). Given the highly controversial and contested nature of the Mamasapano armed (mis) encounter, the investigating teams began their reports by establishing themselves as bodies of inquiry that are neutral, thorough, objective, and fact-finding. This seems necessary since assuming an *investigating body* identity will enhance the credibility of the written reports regardless of the group's political standpoint. This did not just construct a shared desirable identity of groups tasked to conduct an investigation but also discursively projected the groups' aspiration to contribute to the effective pursuance of the peace process. The two groups that consistently acted out this identity throughout their reports were the International Monitoring Team and the Department of Justice. The former is the overseer of the peace process and was therefore expected to not put forth any political objective while the latter is the primary institution that ensures objective determination of criminal liability and upholding of justice in the country.

The other three groups- Philippine National Police Board of Inquiry, Moro Islamic Liberation Front Special Investigative Commission, and the Philippine Senate Mamasapano Truth Commission or Senate-reconstructed and shifted their identities in their respective reports. As investigating groups coming from the two of the main actors in the Mamasapano armed (mis)encounter, the Board of Inquiry and Special Investigative Commission, shifted from being investigative to defensive. Specifically, the Board of Inquiry shifted from its initially constructed identity of being a neutral body to being a defender of the Special Action Force. This was done by justifying the Special Action Force's actions of invading the Moro rebel area, presenting them as the victims of the armed

encounter, and later on as heroes who lost their lives in accomplishing the mission of neutralizing the high-value targets. The Special Investigative Commission, on the other hand, asserted that Moro Islamic Liberation Front's Bangsamoro armed group was not guilty and their actions during the Mamasapano incident only sought to defend themselves and their community. They also pointed to the SAF's violation of the ceasefire agreement.

In the process of constructing favorable self-presentations, both the Board of Inquiry and Special Investigative Commission, respectively shifted to their Philippine National Police and Moro Islamic Liberation Front identities and drew attention to the violations and inappropriate actions of the other social actors (e.g. the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters). Perhaps due to the likelihood of being tagged as the group liable for the (mis)encounter, the Board of Inquiry and the Special Investigative Commission in assuming their respective group identities as Philippine National Police and Moro Islamic Liberation Front gave grounds to the actions of their armed forces. In putting forth these justifications of their actions in the reports, the groups discursively projected themselves as pursuers of peace which is critical in the context of the ongoing peace process. These acts performed through written texts support Slocum-Bradley's (2009) claims that the discursive construction of social identities serves to justify a group's course of action and reflects desired political outcomes.

The Senate Truth Commission also shifted from its investigating body identity to being a critic, particularly, of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. As an arm of the state, this group discredited the projected identity of the Moro Islamic group as a pursuer of peace by using negative presentations of the rebel group (as murderers, and robbers among others) and essentially questioned the group's sincerity in pursuing peace. In the process, the Senate Truth Commission constructed a defender identity that sought to protect the country and its heroes. This is particularly evident in the senate's effort to advocate for peace, highlight the heroism of the "fallen 44", and to come up with legislations that would enhance the support for the Special Action Force in light of the public outrage over the death of its members.

This performative identity construction may have been in response to this widespread public sentiment. Of all the groups investigating the incident, it was the senate that is composed of members that gained their

posts through popular elections. The Mamasapano incident happened a year before the 2016 national elections where some of the senators were eye-ing to again vie for various government posts including the presidency. The shift in identity as reflected in the Senate's Mamasapano Truth Commission report may have been shaped by these political aspirations.

Practical Implications

Findings may be useful to political groups especially those involved in ongoing peace negotiations. In similarly fragile conditions, how identities are (re) constructed or negotiated may mean escalation or de-escalation of conflict. Opposing groups and those within a peace process need to be clear and strategic about political outcomes that they aspire for and may deliberately use identity construction in verbal and written discourse based on these.

In the same vein, investigating bodies may use the findings of this study to examine how they may engage in discursive identity construction and shifts as well as how this may impact their credibility. Finally, findings may orient people, groups, and societies engaging in any written work not just peace reports. This study found support for claims that discursive acts, including those done through writing, enable social groups to realize desired political outcomes (de Cillia et al., 1999; Slocum-Bradley, 2009). Especially in investigative or even news reports, where information is mostly presented as facts, readers need to be more critical in making sense of data and forming opinions or interpretations.

Limitations and Implications for Research

The study examined identity construction and shifts in the official peace reports of the five investigating bodies tasked to shed light on the Mamasapano (mis) encounter. Given this, data gathering and analysis were confined to this data corpus and did not capture other materials related to the incident such as news and opinion articles as well as social media posts.

Future studies may look into these data sources and examine the different social identities that were constructed, negotiated, and reconstructed in these materials and forms of social discourse. Shifts in identity construction may also be captured and analyzed through time (before, during, immediately after and long after the (mis)encounter). Data may likewise be examined based on the evolving societal discourse on the issue.

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