Social Work Behind Bars

* A study of Balay, a human rights organization working with torture victims in Philippine prisons.



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**Abstract**

In the Philippines human rights violations can be considered mundane events that especially target poor segments of the population. Balay, a local human rights organization works with torture victims who have been imprisoned because of political matter. This study is about this organization and the social work they do inside a specific prison in the Philippines.

Building on six weeks fieldwork, as well as 6 months working in the prison for Balay as a social worker, this study seeks to explore and explicate the situated social work of Balay, by simply asking the question; what is it they do? This is done through an action research design where the aim has been to generate new knowledge about the practice of Balay and the challenges and dilemmas connected to working in Philippine prisons. As such this study is based on the empirical findings and has been shaped through the collaboration with Balay

The findings of this study suggest that the social workers from Balay draw from many different kinds of knowledge when practicing social work with the clients in the prison. Especially contextual knowledge, which is generated through action, seems to occupy a central role in the practice of Balay. It is also analyzed how the challenges the social workers face, working in the prison, is often connected to the prison setting itself and that they often mimic general ethical dilemmas embedded in social work.

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Chapter one

Introduction

# ****1.0 Introduction****

*“The first thing that caught my attention when I entered the prison gate was the smell. The same smell I experienced the first time I visited the prison three years ago. How could I forget that almost sweet half rotten smell”* (FN11)

These were some of the first thoughts I scribbled down in my notebook during my internship at DIGNITY – Danish Institute Against Torture in the fall of 2012. Here I had the opportunity to go back to the Philippines. Back to the prison I worked in three years earlier for 5 months as part of an internship during the studies to become a social worker. This time however, I did not visit to help facilitate workshops, group therapy or livelihood projects with the inmates. I was there to facilitate and support the research DIGNITY is doing in collaboration with a local Filipino organization who is working with tortured political prisoners in especially Manila. The name of that organization is Balay. It is the same organization I worked for three years ago.

This thesis is about Balay and the work they do in a specific prison in Manila. The same prison I worked in a couple of years ago. As part of the thesis project I therefore went back to the Philippines and Balay in the spring of 2013. The aim of that visit was to collect data. Data that could somehow give an insight into the practice of a human rights organization working with tortured political detainees in a prison in the Philippines.

In the prison I focus on, poor living conditions is what defines much of the prisoners’ daily life. Lack of food and healthcare as well as unsanitary and worn down cells are a part of being imprisoned. Human right violations are of concern, as especially the right to a fair trial[[1]](#footnote-1) is being violated in many cases. Also police violence and torture are human rights violations many of the clients of Balay have been exposed to in their past. Furthermore corruption is an issue that has dominated much of the Philippine society for decades, and the penal system is also influenced by this. These are challenges the social workers from Balay are confronted with when working in the prison, and their work methods are thus heavily influenced by the context itself.

That social work interventions are always influenced by the context is not only valid when analyzing how Balay works in the prison setting. Social work can never be disconnected from the place in which it is practiced. This is one of the first lessons being taught when studying social work. Theories and concepts should never be applied without the practitioner taking into account the environment he or she is working in. This implies that the social worker should consciously consider the relationship between the desired intervention and the context. Who is the target group, what are their needs and how will a specific intervention form work under the conditions in which it is taking in place? These are just some of the questions that should be reflected upon. The key notion is that no intervention form can or should be applied heedlessly in the same way in different contexts. For example, working with a small tribal village in Ghana is quite different than working with Muslim women in Copenhagen, even though the social worker makes use of the same social work principles and methods in the two different contexts.

To question why social workers do as they do, therefore requires that one take a step back, and explore the context in which the practice is taking place. Much has been written about how social work is perceived in different parts of the world, and the main point is that social work is not a static entity that is defined the same way everywhere. Social work is tightly linked to the historic and social context in which it is practiced (Mayadas et al. 1997).

The aim of this thesis is to explore why the Human Rights organization Balay do as they do working in the Philippine prisons with torture victims. Through my time working with, and observing the social workers from Balay in their daily interaction with their clients, I have been confronted with the frustrations, challenges and problems they face working in the prison context. These obstacles are to a large extent linked to the context itself and the rules the social workers have to abide to when dealing with the often paradoxical nature of the prison as an institution.

Moreover, as Balay is mostly working with torture victims many of their clients are traumatized because of their past experiences. Also troubled thoughts about their future, how and when they will get out, and how they will support their loved ones when they do, are issues the clients often bring up when talking to them. The target group is therefore dealing with a variety of problems, that are quite complex in their nature as they dont not only refer to the present situation, but also to the past and the future.

To practice social work in the prison therefore requires that the social workers make use of a variety of skills in their daily contact with the clients. No two days are alike, and the social worker must be able to adapt to the changing needs of the partners as well as the prison setting itself. How to navigate in such a context therefore becomes important. This is knowledge that is not, and in fact cannot, be gained from reading books about prisons, torture or the effects imprisonment have on inmates. This knowledge is generated through practice. It is a *learning by doing* process that requires the use of intuition and skills, which are not only taught through education but also through their constant confrontation with the prison environment.

The themes, questions and reflections this thesis is based on are as such not uncharted waters. The dilemmas and obstacles social workers face dealing with the complexity that define us as human beings is certainly a key area of interest for many social work practitioners and researchers alike.

The questions this thesis raises and explore are therefore not only relevant for social work in prisons. However, not much has been written about social work done in prisons, especially in prisons outside a western context.

## 1.1 Balay – a Human Rights Organization

Before presenting the aim of this study as well as the research questions posed, a descriptive introduction of the organization being researched will be presented.

Balay was founded in 1985 during a time of turmoil where martial law had been instated in the Philippines under the rule of Dictator Marcos. This period was characterized by massive human right violations, which functioned as a catalyst for the establishment of Balay. Their purpose was to support people who stood up against the unjust political system. As a result of this, their target group became political prisoners. They committed to documenting cases of torture and help the victims and families that had been affected through psycho-social interventions.

After the time of martial law, Balay continued their work with political prisoners, but with new problems arising in the Philippines during the 90ties their focus was broadened. Especially the turmoil in the southern Philippines due to the struggle between different Muslim groups and the government became an area of intervention.

The ability and willingness to adapt according to the changing political and social landscape in the Philippines is what characterize Balay. The understanding that human rights are universal, and that all people, no matter their circumstances, are entitled to not having these rights violated, have been the entry point for their work since the beginning. However, how they have gone about doing this has changed through the years.

During the marital law era torture was mainly used as a political tool to suppress resistance against the political system. After that Balay was witness to what they themselves describe as a change in the role and form of torture in the country[[2]](#footnote-2). That torture is still being practiced today in the Philippines has been documented by many human rights organization. Especially reports from *Asian Human Rights Commission* paints a bleak picture in terms of the many human right violations in the country[[3]](#footnote-3). What Balay saw, and what these reports also document, is that torture today is used against a much broader segment of the population than in the eighties. Incidents of police brutality are a recurring phenomenon in the Philippines, as torture is now used as a tool to fight crime, especially in poor urban areas around the country. The victims are often not aware of their rights, even though the Philippines implement the Anti-torture Act in 2009, and as such many cases of torture during police detention is not documented or brought to the court room (Anasarias et al. 2012).

It is to a large degree (political) prisoners coming from the poor segment of the Philippines that are the target group of Balay’s prison work. Balay also advocate for the abolishment of torture by pushing for changes in policies and law. They try to raise awareness about torture among the public and politicians by using their knowledge, and the documentation of torture they have gained through working in the prisons

Today Balay mainly focuses on two different sites of intervention; their work with tortured political prisoners, which will be the subject of this study, as well as their youth project in a poor community in Manila[[4]](#footnote-4). The work Balay is doing in these settings is conducted by the STOV team (Survivors of Torture and Organized Violence).

The work Balay is doing in the prisons consists of a variety of different activities and programs. On their website they stat that their work entails

*“(…) psychological processing, psycho-education, community building (among detainees) and case management. Benefactors to these comprehensive psychosocial activities are prisoners or detainees who have experienced torture and have been assessed by Balay’s psychosocial staff as individuals in need of specialized help”[[5]](#footnote-5).*

As such, their work methods cater to a variety of different needs inside the prisons. They range from interventions focused on the individual to programs targeting the prison as a community.

Through the time spent with Balay I have participated in many of these different activities. It is the reflections and observations about these that have led me towards the aim of this thesis and as such the research questions asked. In the next part I will further elaborate on the development of the research questions and lastly present the outcome.

## 1.2 Research questions

The research questions in this study were developed through observations of the practice of Balay. As such it was the empirical data that guided me towards what the focus ended up being. Analyzing the data I discovered that there were some differences to be found between how the staff of Balay, especially during staff meetings, talked about their work, and what the social worker actually did when going to the prisons. Even though they used psychodynamic and community building terms, what I found was that in practice these concepts were referred to the back seat. The gap between theory and practice has always been of concern in social work. What could be called the positivistic divorce of theory and practice has proven to be a problematic fragmentation for both social workers (agents of practice) and social scientists (Montaño 2012). The inconsistency between *talking* and *doing* could therefore be seen as sign of difficulties in transforming theory to practice. However, as Montaño points out, theoretical knowledge is only one of many that social workers make use off in their daily practice (Montaño 2012)

The “absence” of theoretical knowledge, could therefore also be seen as an invitation to ask another set of questions. Questions that revolved around the exploration of what Balay actually does when working in the prisons. Many of the dilemmas and obstacles the social workers articulated when engaging them in discussions about their work in the prisons, to a large degree revolved around the prison context itself. Practical matters, challenges and frustrations in navigating the prison setting became focal points for shared reflections. When discussing the needs and wellbeing of the partners, it became apparent that the social workers have to draw from other sources of knowledge than what the psychology literature has to say about for instance PTSD, trauma and depression. The needs being articulated by the partners were often of a different nature.

It is these shared reflections between Balay and me that has framed and guided me towards the aim of this thesis as well as the research questions. The practice of Balay, as well as an attempt to try and understand and make sense of the challenges connected to their prison social work became the focal point for this study. As such, the aim of this thesis is to explicate the practice of Balay, and by that generating new knowledge about their work. Knowledge that is not only of interest to social (work) scientists alone, but also to Balay themselves, as they continually strive to fine tune and adapt their work methods to their clients, and to the prison setting itself.

With this aim in mind we can move on to the research questions used in framing the analysis:

***How do the social workers from the human rights organization Balay work with survivors of torture in a specific prison in Manila?***

***and***

***What are the obstacles, challenges and dilemmas the social workers are confronted with working with this target group in the prison setting?***

The first research question revolves around what the social workers from Balay actually do in terms of interventions and activities when working with their partners[[6]](#footnote-6) in the prison. With the second question, I want to explore how especially the prison setting itself influence the work they are doing. The questions will be answered using the extensive collection of data from especially the fieldwork I did as a part of this thesis. In the analysis I will make use of empirical findings to shed light on the social work practice as well as the challenges, frustrations and dilemmas the social workers are confronted with.

As part of answering the research questions the analysis will also contain a more general theoretical discussion about the connection between social work and prisons as well as more in-depth presentation of the context in which the practice of Balay is situated. This is done to frame the practice of Balay which allows for a more nuanced understanding of their work.

My reason for choosing the Philippines is not coincidental. As mentioned in the introduction, I have been working with this organization several times, and during my internship, studying to become a social worker, I worked with them in the prisons for 6 months. They have agreed to be a part of my thesis research, and as such the approach I will take will be heavily influenced by this collaboration.

Also DIGNITY – Danish Institute Against Torture have played a pivotal role in the making of this study. DIGNITY has for a long time collaborated with Balay as a partner organization, and different research project have been developed through this relation. Especially senior researcher Andrew M. Jefferson has provided support and council through the writing process.

## 1.3 Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter one, which was the previous one, dealt with the developing of research questions. In chapter two, the methodology this study is based on will be presented. Here, the metatheoretical framework as well the data collection methods used will be unfolded and discussed. It ends with the development of an analytical framework used in the analysis of the empirical data, and ultimately in answering the two research questions. Chapter three is the analysis and contains three parts. The first part will be a theoretical discussion about the general connection between prisons and social work. Part two will further unfold the context in which the practice of Balay is situated. Part three consist of two sections. The first one is devoted to the answering of the first research question while the second research question will be answered in the second section. Chapter four entails the conclusion. Here the usefulness of the findings generated through this study will be discussed.

Chapter two

 Methodology

# 2.0 Methodology

How a research study position itself methodological has a profound impact on how the research questions are answered and ultimately what kind of knowledge is generated. In this chapter the methodology this study is based on will be presented. It will start with the overall metatheoretical foundation. Then a discussion about the use of an action research design will follow, before unfolding the actual fieldwork experience, positioned within an ethnographic tradition. The last part will entail the analytical framework. The structure as well as the connection between these different levels of methodology is pictured below.

The circle within circle structure emphasizes the hierarchy as well as the embedded relationship between these different levels. The arrows indicate that the methodological choices this study is based on, is of a somewhat dialectic nature. My observations and collaboration with Balay would give way to reflections about how I could make sense of the practice of Balay and how this study should be positioned in terms of epistemological and ontological questions. These reflections would again influence my data gathering. The analytical framework has been developed last, and is influenced by the methodological choices this study is based on.

## 2.1 Metatheoretical position

Before moving closer to the analysis of the practice of Balay and the answering of the research questions a metatheoretical framework has to be explicated, as this will have an impact on how one positions oneself in terms of ontological and epistemological questions. Hjørland argues that metatheories are less specific than theories and imply assumptions behind theoretical, empirical and practical work (Hjørland 1998: 608).

This understanding correlates well with Thomas Kuhn who makes use of the term paradigm. This term encapsulates collective convictions, values and ideas of a defined scientific community (Kuhn 1962: 11). As such, a paradigm creates a more or less coherent discourse that makes communication and sharing of knowledge possible within the community. To adopt a certain paradigm therefore has implications for how one approaches the data. It enables the researcher to focus narrowly on what is deemed important, but it can also lead to the researcher overlooking things (Wray 2011). What guided me in terms of positioning myself in the field of different, and often competing paradigms has to a large degree been determined through the interaction with Balay and the observations done in the field.

As the focus became the practice of Balay and the dilemmas and obstacles connected to working in the prison setting, it became apparent that what was considered the “truth” and reality of the prison was determined by the eye of the beholder; from the warden to the social worker. Sometimes these different convictions would clash and it was often in these situations that the challenges of working in the prison setting seemed to become most apparent. It was therefore essential that the lens through which I looked at the data could embrace these different discourses and the relational dimension to the dilemmas observed. Here social constructionism became a main source of inspiration.

### 2.1.1 Social constructionism

Within social science the idea that there is a reality “out there” and that “good” knowledge is the kind that can capture this reality accurately and objectively has been the predominant one. Over the last 40 years or so this discourse has been challenged by other ways of understanding the world we live in (Cunliffe 2008:124). Social Constructionism[[7]](#footnote-7) became one such voice and has emerged as a significant paradigm in the field of social science (Brinkmann 2006). It should be stressed that social constructionism is not a unified paradigm as there are different forms (Raskin 2002). However, most of them share the same basic approach to the relationship between subjects, the world and knowledge. They argue that the world we live in and what we know about it is not objective in the sense that it is separate from us. Our social reality is molded, constructed and negotiated between subjects and groups and as such intimately interwoven with our everyday interaction. It is a dialectic relationship as we shape our world and it shapes us (Cunliffe 2008: 131).

A prominent voice in the development of this paradigm has been that of Berger and Luckmann and their classic work “The Social Construction of Reality” (Berger and Luckmann 1966). It is their work that on a metatheoretical level will be the basis for this study’s framework. As their work is rather extensive and deals with many different issues regarding the intertwined relationship between subjectivity, objectivity and the production of knowledge I will only present their main points as well as unfold specific elements of it that have had an impact on my approach to the field as well as the analyzing of data.

In their book Berger and Luckmann set forth to establish how sociology of knowledge is about the analysis of the social construction of reality. Their main focus is the relationship between human thoughts and the social context in which it arises. Their point is that Knowledge is socially constructed. This implies that the social relations we form and engage in, is what constitute our objective reality. What is taken for granted as knowledge is historically and socially constructed. They argue this by pointing to the fact that what is deemed as “objective” knowledge differs between societies (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 140). Knowledge can therefore be seen as relational. It is something generated in between subjects and groups.

The production of knowledge and reality ultimately creates what they define as a symbolic universe. A symbolic universe constitutes the world in which we live in. It is the final form of legitimation of the knowledge we take for granted and symbolizes the absolute internalization of the social reality in which we live in. It provides order by incorporating our lived experiences in the different social spheres we navigate in, into an overarching universe of meaning - keeping the chaos at bay. As they write

*“The symbolic universe transcends the finitude of our existence, and gives meaning to our death.”* (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 120)

Another important aspect of their work is the notion of sub-universes. Sub-universes are smaller communities and groups that share a body of knowledge and give meaning to their social reality in a specific way. These universes are to a large extent associated with the division of labor.

Sub-universes must be carried by a particular collectivity that continually produces and reaffirm the social reality, through which they give meaning to their lives and actions, which again acts back upon them. It is a dialectic process. These sub-universes can however also be communities and groups tied together by other reasons than labor. For instance, a prison can be defined as a sub-universe where the logics and the meanings the subjects living (or working) there give to the prison setting is constructed, and only valid in that particular setting.

It can then be argued that our world consist of different sub-universes all navigating in the overarching symbolic spaces. These different sub-universes can, in a fairly friendly manner, co-exist if they are conceptually and socially segregated to the point that one poses no threat to the other. However

*“the trouble begins whenever the “strangeness” is broken through and the deviant universe appears as possible habitat for one's own people.”* (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 140)

Also as the sub-universes increase in numbers and complexity they become more and more impenetrable to all outsiders who have not been initiated into their mysteries *(Berger and Luckmann 1966:* 140*)*.

This understanding provides us with an analytical frame for making sense of, and analyzing social conflicts. Social conflicts can easily be translated into rivalry between different schools of thoughts (sub-universes). They all seek to establish themselves and legitimate their own world view while at the same time discrediting others.

The understanding that our reality is constructed and that knowledge is relational has an influence on how this study positions itself in terms of questions about the ontological and epistemological foundation of our assumptions as well as how to decipher the data gathered. Reflections regarding these matters will be explicated throughout the thesis. Committing to the paradigm of social constructionism also has linguistic consequences. For instance, subjects do not *possess* individual knowledge. Rather it is *generated* and *shared* in between groups and people. The terms used in this chapter as well as in my analysis, will as such implicitly reflect the main assumptions behind this paradigm.

## 2.2 The Fieldwork

*“Field research is not for the soft-hearted, the self-conscious, or the person who requires a great deal of structure”* (Sommer 1971)

This section revolves around my methodological approach to the field and how the data gathering was conducted. As Jefferson argues, modes of encountering the field are just as important to discuss and reflect upon as what we discover in them (Jefferson 2014).

The aim of this section is to unfold reflections, dilemmas and thoughts connected to my collaboration with Balay as well as the fieldwork in the prisons. The methodology connected to the fieldwork will be discussed through the use of the terms action and ethnographic research. The use of an action research design as a framework for the fieldwork as well as the barriers and obstacles connected to doing ethnographic research in a prison setting will be reflected upon. Also how my epistemological position has had an impact on my findings and reflections concerning being a researcher in a Philippine prison will be touched upon.

The section will start with a discussion about the collaboration with Balay and the use of an action research design. The next part deals with the use of an ethnographic approach as well as data collection instruments, and my experiences doing research in the prison setting.

### 2.2.1 My collaboration with Balay – a participatory action research design

In a conventional study one would often have the research questions to be answered before committing to any fieldwork. They might change during the writing process, but the theme usually stays the same. These questions are usually of a confirmatory nature where the aim is to test, prove or corroborate ones hypothesis (Reiter 2013: 1). As the methodological framework of this study is based on action research the research questions I pose were not formulated at the outset.

Action research in the social science takes many forms and has emerged as a discipline from a broad range of fields (Brydon-Miller and Coghlan 2014). As such action research can be defined in many different ways. However there is a broad agreement that action research is always of a participatory nature. As Green in his general definition argue:

“*Participatory research is defined as systematic inquiry, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for purposes of education and taking action or effecting change.*” (Green 2003: 409)

The methodology this study is based on has been inspired from how action research is perceived through a critical lens. There are many similarities, both in theory and in practice, to be found between action research, critical theory and constructionism (Kemmis 2007: 126). The understanding that the subject is fundamentally societal in its existence and always developed in a historical context is shared between these different schools. As such the subject is defined through its engagement with the world (Motzkau and Jefferson 2009).

With this understanding it becomes apparent that the social science researcher needs to contextualize the practice or daily life that is put under the academic microscope. This is one of the aims when committing to an action research design; to understand and reveal in which way the subjects the researcher is working with interpret and makes sense of the world they live in (Genat 2009: 103). This implies that the focus of attention was directed towards how the subjects I was working with, whether this was the social workers from Balay or the inmates in the prison, attributed meaning and interpreted their world.

As this study is about the practice of Balay how the social worker make sense of the prison setting, their work and the dilemmas they are confronted with is of importance. This approach can be described as a *searching for persons in practice* (Jefferson and Huniche 2009). The way we act is always interrelated with the conditions under which it takes place. Being aware of the external structures that forms and constrains our actions is an integrated part of this approach but with the understanding that these structures are not objective in the sense that they are static. They are socially constructed and thus unstable and changeable (Carson 1990).

Another aspect of action research is the collaboration between the researcher and co-researcher. It entails a form of partnership between researcher and the subjects the research is about. As Nissen argues, this form of research:

“viewed *as a situated practice, is ideally the joint venture of two distinct situated practices. It should be reduced neither to a research methodology nor to a means of strategic development practice.”* (Nissen 2000: 170)

Furthermore it acknowledges the intersubjective relationship between researcher and practitioners. It is an approach from “within and below” (Nissen 2009: 69). During the time with Balay I was not a bystander observing their practice from outside. I engaged and emerged myself in their practice and participated in reflexive discussions about their work and the conditions they are subjected to.

Committing to such an endeavor also highlights the importance of a partnership based on the principle of reciprocity. The collaboration should be of a dialectic nature where both parties in a dynamic fusion together develop the research project. (Genat 2009;Nissen 2000;Nissen 2009). Positioned within the paradigm of social constructionism this understanding correlates well with the notion of knowledge as relational. Ideally a collaboration based on these principles will create opportunities for the co-construction of emergent situated knowledge that is useful for both parties.

Committing to such a design therefor entails that the research should have the potential of not only creating knowledge useful for the social scientist but also for other stakeholders and co-researchers. As Genat argues this kind of research

“*contains cycles of action-reflection that produce experiential learning amongst a particular group of research participants in a specific context”* (Genat 2009: 103).

For this study, this entailed that the aim is to generate knowledge that can be useful for Balay in terms of broadening their understanding of themselves as an organization, and their epistemology of practice. Action research always entails the potential for positive change to occur for the people who the study is about.

The development of knowledge also requires that not only the practitioners but also other stakeholders’ perspectives should be incorporated in the research project. In this study that meant the partners of Balay. Not understood as isolated attitudes, but as a perspective significant for the development of practice, and grounded in the partners daily lives (Nissen 2000: 164).

The construction of shared knowledge became especially evident when dilemmas and obstacles regarding their work presented themselves. The epistemological foundation of their practice was challenged through discussions about these obstacles. Discussions about these and what impact they have on their work created a space where different interpretations and understandings could emerge. It is also these dilemmas that should be the foundation of the research questions asked when committing to a study based on an action research design (Genat 2009).

### 2.2.2 Exploring different paths

Committing to an action research design created opportunities to explore different paths. The range of possible roads to travel was to a large degree influenced by Balay and their practice. The questions asked should somehow echo and reflect obstacles, dilemmas and problems Balay find of importance when it come to their prison social work. As such, the knowledge generated through the fieldwork should be of value for Balay as well. As Jefferson and Huniche puts it:

*“Cooperation with participants in practice is a basic building block in generating knowledge “about subjects” (…). Like researchers, professionals and participants in everyday life may have an interest in generating alternative representations of and perspectives on their problems and circumstances”* (Jefferson & Huniche, 2009: 15)

However, my first idea in terms of what I wanted to write about had very little to do with Balay. I wanted to write about Baklas. In a simplified understanding, Baklas is the term used for gays in the Philippines and is often used for male homosexuals with transgender tendencies. Baklas were quite visible in the prison setting as they would usually wear makeup and hot pants. It was hard not to look when a guy dressed like that strolled down the prison corridor. It however quickly became apparent that this theme would be hard for me to pursue. First of all, as Balay did not have any real connection with this group, it was difficult for me to argue why a thesis about Baklas would be relevant as a student doing a master in social work. Secondly, it quickly became apparent, when I started visiting the prisons, that the “world of the Baklas” in many ways was a closed territory for me. I could only observe them from afar. I could not use Balay as a gatekeeper in terms of establishing a connection to this group, as Balay had nothing to do with them. Trying to interact with them would mean that I would have had to conduct my research without Balay, which would undermine my collaboration with them and the use of an action research design.

After that my focus shifted. I wanted to navigate my focus closer to the actual practice of Balay and tie my research questions to issues that were of relevance for their prison work. My exploratory lens was still broad and everything I saw and experienced inside the prison became data. It was through revisiting this data that the problem statement started to take form. The situated practices of Balay became a focal point.

The collaborative exploration of Balay’s practice and the challenges they face was an intuitive and reflexive process that required patience and, dare I say, a bit of faith. As Mansourian points, this form of research can be a source of ambiguity and uncertainty at times, as one does not have an anchor to hold on to (Mansourian 2008: 279). My fieldwork experience was at times, a stressful affair. Especially in the beginning I was apprehensive about where I was going. This approach however, also gave room for curiosity, and to explore interesting paths. It was a dynamic endeavor that gave room for reflections and discussions that would otherwise have been missed. At times I felt like a boy with a stick, poking at an ant nest, hoping that something interesting would happen.

The exploratory nature of action research also hints to the understanding that it does not entail a specific set of methods. How to conduct the research, and what methods to use to gather data in the field is dependent on the aim of the research project, the context and the form of collaboration that has been established between the researcher and practitioners. In this study an ethnographic orientation was chosen as a way of studying the prison setting and the practice of Balay.

### 2.2.3 Challenges connected to action research

When committing to a methodology based on action research principles some pitfalls and challenges have to be taken into consideration. First off, as it require a close collaboration between researcher and practitioners, a certain degree of respect and trust between the two parties is necessary. My earlier time spent with Balay ensured that I was not seen as a stranger, and a sense of mutual respect was established. It can however be argued that the two months spent with Balay collecting the data was not sufficient time in terms of creating the sort of collaboration that the action research approach emphasize as important. Finding common ground, as well as getting the people involved to commit fully to the project, is a time consuming endeavor. In regards to this study, this challenge was further underlined due to the busy schedule of the staff of Balay. It was therefor hard to maintain the form of continuity in my relations to especially the social workers that this approach ideally requires. It is therefore questionable if my time with Balay has been as fruitful for them as I would have liked it to be.

A second aspect worth reflecting upon is how action research relates and positions itself in terms of power. Although this approach emphasize the importance of developing a relation between researcher and other participants based on equality, it cannot escape the inherent power dynamics always entwined in the relationship between individuals (Dillon 2014;Jefferson and Huniche 2009). During the time with Balay I bore witness too many incidents where the often shifting and dynamic power relation between the people I worked with and me would reveal itself. I was keenly aware of the fact that I needed Balay to gain access to the prisons. They were the gatekeepers, and I therefore needed to structure much of my data collection around the schedule of especially the social workers. Although some goodwill was established between Balay and me, the need to positively contribute to the organization for helping and granting me access to the prisons was always present. These feelings are in many ways inevitable when committing to a collaborative project where all parties are working so close together. The shifting power dynamics also revealed itself in terms of how I was positioned. During my time with Balay I got introduced to a lot of people. It was quite common for me to be introduced as a researcher from Denmark. Although I was there to conduct research for my thesis, I felt I was attributed some level of power and knowledge I did not possess. This was especially apparent during meetings and discussions with Balay or/and other stakeholders. Here my argumentations and points of views seemed to be credited more value than I myself would give them. This could also have something to do with my affiliation with DIGNITY. I was not only seen as a university student, conducting my research alone, but also as a person working for Balay’s partner organization This positioning sometimes clashed with my rather humble approach to the field study, and how I perceived myself as “just a” studen

## 2.3 Course of fieldwork

The data collection was mainly conducted through a seven week stay in Manila, during the spring of 2013. The data was gathered together with Liv Gaborit, a psychology student from the University of Copenhagen, who I met during my time in the Philippines when I was an intern at DIGNITY. Our common interest in the prison setting, and the work of Balay paved the way for the collaborative data collection for our studies.

I participated in ten prison visits during the fieldwork. Seven of these were visits to the focus prison this thesis is mainly about. Three of these seven visits were done together with a social worker from Balay while the other four were done just with Liv. The last three visits that were not to the focus prison were to other jails where Balay also have partners. When not going to the prison I usually stayed at Balay’s office, writing, reading or planning interviews and prison visits with Liv. The period I stayed with Balay was a rather hectic period for the organization. Much of the STOV team were visiting the outreach jails, and were therefore away some of the time. During these periods Liv and I did visits to the focus prison alone, where we conducted four interviews. I also attended two reflexive seminars with the STOV team regarding this study. One in the beginning of my stay, offering some of my preliminary thoughts about my thesis, and one in the end of my stay, where I presented some of the findings, reflections, and discussions Liv and I had found interesting during the field research.

### 2.3.1 Doing action research behind bars - An ethnographic approach

As discussed the use of an action research framework in this study does not entail any specific data collection methods. However theoretically action research is often situated within the qualitative tradition (Wisniewska 2011). The strength of a qualitative study is that it seeks to understand and make sense of the research subjects own world seen from their perspective(Denzin and lincoln 2005: 3).

This understanding correlates well with my initial reflections about how I wanted to conduct the fieldwork. I wanted to get a better understanding of Balay’s practice in the prison setting and the dilemmas they face working under such conditions. Generating qualitative data about the social workers own understandings and preconceptions about the prison setting, the work methods used, as well as the life of the partners became the obvious choice.

To be positioned as closely as possible to the actual social work done in the prison as well acquiring a deeper understanding of the needs of the partners and their lives inside the prison, an ethnographic approach to the field was chosen. The strength of ethnography is that it makes it possible for the researcher

*“to gain a deeper understanding of a given set of social relations, a particular culture, organization or other social phenomenon.”* (Drake and Harvey 2013: 3).

The position as an ethnographer would allow me to gain an insight into the encounter between the social worker from Balay and the prison setting, their practice as well as reveal dilemmas, obstacles and frustrations connected to their work. By choosing ethnography as a way of collecting data inside the prison I follow in the footstep of many other studies done about the lives of those who live and work behind prison walls (Bosworth 2005;Drake and Harvey 2013;Liebling 1999;Phillips and Earle 2010;Piacentini 2007).

### 2.3.2 Ethnographic data collection methods

The position as an ethnographic researcher makes it possible to gather data through a variety of what could be called data collection instruments (Williamson, 2014). The empirical data gathered in this study is based on observations, interviews as well as formal and informal discussions with the staff from Balay.

I would always bring a notebook and a pen when going to the prison or having discussions with the staff from Balay, ready to scribble down observations. What these notes entailed varied greatly. When going to the prison I would sometimes just sit, observe and write down what I saw. Other times it would be conversations between me and the inmates that became the focus point and I would try to get as much of these conversations down on paper. It could be stressful at times as the prison setting overloads you with impressions. There is always something happening. During the visits with the social worker from Balay I would normally focus on them and their interaction with the partners. At times, however, something else would catch my eye. Commotion or shouting would occasionally erupt in other parts of the prison. Sometimes it would be a heated game of table tennis or basketball that created these outbursts while the cause other times would elude me. Making *sense* of what I saw was at times difficult and I would make a point of trying to get my own reflections regarding what I saw and heard down on paper as well.

The ethnographic approach this study is based on created numerous situations where conversations with either the staff from Balay or the partners in the prisons could be said to be positioned somewhere between an informal conversation and an interview As Spradley argues:

*“In fact, skilled ethnographers often gather most of their data through observations and many casual conversations. They may interview people without their awareness, merely on a friendly conversation while introducing a few ethnographic questions.”* (Spradley 1979: 59)

Especially my interaction outside the prison with the social workers from Balay would often be of an informal nature. As mentioned, it was a busy time for Balay and it was therefore hard at times to find time to engage them in formal meetings and discussions about their practice. It was therefore necessary to find other opportunities for these shared reflections to take place. Particularly the drive to and back from the prison proved to be a good time for conversations to unfold. Here we would often discuss what the purpose of the visit was going to the prison, and on the way back we would engage in conversations about what had transpired during our visit. These discussions were often of an informal nature, but helped, immensely in term of making sense of the work they are doing in the prisons.

The notes gathered from observations conducted in the prisons were written out and elaborated on after the prison visits. I would flesh out my reflections as these would often just be formed as a question or a small side note. These field journals are what constitute the backbone of the empirical data used in this study. I would also make an effort to write down significant points and reflections that emerged through the informal conversations with the staff from Balay about their practice and the prison setting. This was sometimes difficult as they often transpired during events such as a lunch break or social gatherings, where having a notebook and pen would have been inappropriate. In these cases I would remember the essential parts and get them down on paper when I got home.

### 2.3.3 Conducting interviews and reflective seminars

As mentioned the data collected was not only done through the use of observations and (semi) informal discussions. Four interviews inside the prison were conducted. I also participated in two reflexive seminars. Two of the interviews were with partners from the Muslim community, one was a group interview with the leftist group and the last was with an inmate who was not actually a partner of Balay but proved to have some interesting reflections regarding life behind the prison walls.

The interviews were conducted late during the period we were in the Philippines. This was done deliberately as it gave us the opportunity to base our questions and on observations we had already done going to the prison. This made it possible to ask concrete questions about their daily lives and their interaction with Balay. If we had noticed something we did not understand, or found interesting, we would incorporate questions about these specific episodes in our interview guide[[8]](#footnote-8). Spradley defines these questions as descriptive as they revolve around the context in which the informant is situated (Spradley 1979: 85). This enabled us to get very detailed information and narratives about the topics we wanted. We especially made use of a descriptive sort of question that Spradley terms *as grand tour questions* (Spradley 1979: 86). One example of this could be the question *“can you describe what you do on a normal day in the prison from you wake up until you go to bed?”.* These sorts of questions gave an important insight into their daily lives inside the prison. The interviews also gave an invaluable insight into their connection to Balay. Themes regarding how Balay helps them, what Balay means to them and their relation to the social workers were explored. These questions gave an understanding of the practice of Balay, seen from the perspective of the partners and as such useful in term of answering the research questions.

We fully transcribed three of our interviews. The last interview mainly revolved around themes that were not of relevance for this study and therefore was not transcribed

The reflexive seminars were another way of gathering data about the practice of Balay. The use of the term reflexive underlines the purpose of these meetings. In the context of empirical research reflection can be defined as:

*“the interpretation of interpretation and the launching of critical self-exploration of one’s own interpretations of empirical material (including its construction).”* (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009: 6)

In line with this understanding the aim of these discussions was to reflect critically upon the practice of Balay and the underlying assumptions this is based on. This understanding also correlates well with the principle of generating useful knowledge when committing to an action research design. Although the use of a *reflexive methodology* in this study was most prominent during these seminars also the informal discussions I had with especially the social workers would sometimes have a similar form.

Both seminars were conducted at the office of Balay. At the first seminar I presented my preliminary thoughts about my fieldwork and Liv gave a presentation of some of her preliminary findings from the fieldwork conducted before I arrived. The second one was conducted just before I left, and was a discussion of the preliminary findings from our fieldwork. Both these meetings were recorded with a Dictaphone but have not been transcribed.

Data from two other seminars will also be used in this study. Both were conducted during my internship at DIGNITY in the fall 2012. The first one was a meeting I facilitated for the staff of Balay regarding a project I at that time was part of during the internship. The project was done in collaboration between DIGNITY and Balay and revolved around the development of a “practice paper” explicating the cause-effect dimension of their work. Although there are many overlaps between that project and this study, data from the praxis paper will not be used, as it is currently in development internally at Balay. The second seminar was conducted during a retreat for the prison STOV team with the aim of discussing their practice.

I would have liked to have had more of these discussions with the STOV team, as the shared reflections about their work and the prison environment seemed to be beneficial for all parties, and more than anything, emphasized the practice research collaboration I with this study have aimed for.

## 2.4 Challenges doing ethnographic fieldwork in prison

This last section deals with my own role and position as an ethnographic researcher in the prisons and the different challenges and dilemmas connected to this. Many criminologists and social science scholars who have conducted research behind prison walls have written about the hardship they have faced during their fieldwork, as well as the emotionally constrains it can have on the researcher working in the prison environment. These studies will be used as mirrors in terms of discussing and reflecting about my own time spent inside the prisons.

### 2.4.1 The participating observer

In the last section the term observation was used as a way of framing much of the data collected inside the prison. However the ethnographic researcher is never an objective outsider observing from afar. I did not go inside the prison with no preconceptions and thoughts about what I was looking at; I was always observing from somewhere. As Reiter argue:

*“There is no theory free perception of the world, because we can only relate to the world by applying our own mental categories, words, and frameworks. We simply do not see those things we do not understand.”* (Reiter 2013: 4)

Especially my previous experiences working in the prisons had left me with an understanding of what I thought interesting about them. Even though my role going there, as a researcher, was quite different from the role I had as a social worker student, my preconceptions and knowledge about the practice of Balay, and the context they work in have had an impact on my data collection. On one hand, these already generated preconceptions about the field can be seen as problematic. My initial encounter with Balay and the prisons was three years ago, and much change can occur during three years so my initial understanding of especially the work methods of Balay might not be valid anymore. I have been mindful of being open to observations and interpretations that might seem contradictory to my already established preconceptions. On the other hand, that I was able to draw from these experiences was in fact one of the main reasons why an action research design was compelling to me. I did not start from scratch. I had an understanding of some of the dynamics inside the prison, and through the collaboration with Balay I had the opportunity to let my thoughts and reflections about the prison unfold even more.

The use of the term observations as a way of understanding how much of my data was gathered also require further attention when understood from the perspective of social constructionism. Prison researcher Liebling makes use of the term “reserved participation” (Liebling 1999), while Jones describe his research method as “participant observation” (Jones 1995) when discussing their engagement with the prison setting. What these terms indicate is that doing observations in the prison setting always entails some form of participation. With this understanding both Liebling and Jones seems to position themselves within the paradigm of social constructionism. We cannot detach ourselves from the world we live in.

I participated in the activities done when going to the prison with the social workers. Sometimes I would help deliver food to the partners, or participate in livelihood workshops where I together with the partners would learn how to make soap or necklaces from beads. I also participated when the social worker went to see the warden to discuss future activities planned. I engage the partners of Balay in conversations about their feelings about prison life, what matters to them, and how they perceive Balay and feel about the services offered to them. This allowed me to share the experiences of both the social worker and the partners.

To be fully immersed in the practice of the social worker or the lives of the partners was however not possible which, when Liebling make use of the term “reserved” also indicate. The language barrier was often at play as I was not always able to understand the conversations between the social worker and the partners. I would however often ask the social worker later about what was discussed. Furthermore the relatively short period I conducted the research as well as the fact that I did not know many of the partners or their stories prevented me from participating fully when discussing their cases or other problems.

 My engagement with the partners also highlighted how participating on equal terms with them was impossible. If I wanted to leave I could, and the conditions I was subjected to being in the prison was quite different than theirs. It would therefore be problematic to argue that I was able to immerse myself fully into their lives. No matter how many hours I spent with them, I would never be able to understand the consequences it has for them being imprisoned.

Participating, although in a reserved manner, also had an impact on my position as a researcher inside the prison and how I was perceived by the different groups that occupy the prison space. It is these implications of my ethnographic position that will be unfolded in the next part.

### 2.4.2 The (im)partial participant – entangled positions and sensitive knowledge

For a researcher conducting fieldwork inside the prison, where contradicting interests, values and points of views are always at play, it becomes almost impossible not to be entangled in these dynamics. During the fieldwork I interacted with many different groups behind the prison walls, and how I was perceived raised some interesting challenges regarding the position as a researcher. As Liebling writes about her fieldwork:

*“Prisoners, staff, managers and senior managers in the service all drew us into their dilemmas, looking for assistance, advice opinion or just an audience. It was impossible not to “return the ball” on occasions. We entered our research world and by doing so, inevitably changed it.”* (Liebling 1999: 156)

Much as Liebling, I also experienced getting *drawn in,* conducting my fieldwork. This is in many ways unavoidable when conducting research in a context where conflict between authorities and inmates not only predates the researcher’s participation, but also pervades the conditions under which the research is done (Nielsen 2010: 313).

How I as an outsider positioned myself, and was positioned, when interacting with different groups, or using the term sub-universes, had a profound impact on the research. Being neutral in all matters became impossible. It was difficult for me not to *return the ball* at times.

During one incident Liv and I got involved in a dispute between the prison warden and a group of inmates. Several times we were drawn into the conflict. Both the warden and inmates knew that Liv and I regularly interacted with both parties and they attempted to take advantage of this by getting us to disclose information about each other. Other times they would try to convince us that it was the other group that was to blame. One warden tried to get me to fund a new desk and a computer for his office.

The affiliation with Balay would sometimes create incidents where the partners would try to get their requests approved through me. They would ask for food or medicine and instead of going straight to the social worker, they would hand in a written request to me.

Also my skin color proved to have an effect on how I was perceived and thus also on my interaction with the prison setting. Being white in the Philippines is often connected to power and wealth and white people are often given more privileges. As one (white) inmate puts it:

*(…) if you are just white, then you must be better, you know, it is almost like reverse racism (…) they just have this, you know, if you are white you must be rich and you must be better than me* (TI3)

As such I sometimes experienced being perceived as someone with much more power than I actually had. On one hand this probably allowed me more freedom in terms of conducting my research. On the other hand, especially the inmates would occasionally believe me having influence in terms of changing their conditions and bringing the justice they feel has been denied them. In these situations I would explain, that I was merely a student writing my thesis and that I was in no position to be able to change their situation. What I however could guarantee was that I would tell their story, tell about the suffering they are enduring, and through that perhaps create awareness. It was a chance for them to be heard.

It was a peculiar experience at times, one moment affiliating myself with Balay to persuade a guard to let me into a prison only to tell a partner of Balay the next moment that I did not work for Balay, but was a researcher, and therefore could not help them with their requests. It was a form of *performance*. A way of tactically managing how I was perceived (Jefferson 2014).

How to navigate between these different roles became a delicate affair. It was a constant balancing act, as I also felt that I owed them something for taking their time talking to me and letting me into their lives. Being impartial in all matters also seemed to do exactly what Bosworth argues when she writes that:

*Criminologists tend to present their analysis of the prison in the form of inhuman data. As a result, prison studies have become cold, calculated, surgical (…). These days, most criminologists make precision cuts – no blood – no humanity. Why? So no one will care.” (Bosworth 2005: 259)*

Especially when it came to the often miserable and depressing situations many of the partners were in, *returning the ball* became a way to avoid such dehumanization. I would often acknowledge, recognize and share their frustrations in being treated poorly by an unjust and corrupt system.

Interacting with the different sub-universes inside the prison and taking part of their world also meant that I sometimes would gain sensitive knowledge. This created dilemmas as ethics and epistemology would intertwine. How one should handle such potential damaging information, as well as terms such as confidentiality and integrity became important to reflect upon. As Fine and Torre argues:

*“Few can speak the truth about prisons without enormous personal vulnerability.”* (Fine and Torre 2006: 255).

This not only applies to the inmates but to the prison officers and administration as well. It is quite common in the Philippine prison system that the individual management in the different prisons would break the rules at times. Not only because of corruption, which as I have discussed earlier, is widespread in the Philippines, but also because the rules at times are contradictive to what they believe is the best way to create a positive and safe atmosphere inside the prison. I was warned that if some of this information would get out about a specific prison, it could potentially lead to dismissal of the warden or other members of the prison administration.

The stakes are even higher for the inmates. Revealing sensitive information can create dispute and problems inside the prison and have severe consequences for the inmates. I do not doubt that the partners I talked to sometimes left out information. Yet they honored me with their trust in telling stories and sharing knowledge that if misinterpreted or made public could damage themselves. Only on one occasion during an interview was the danger of providing us with sensitive information brought to light:

*“That’s another thing that I wasn’t going to talk about (…) kind of worried about what you guys know about (…) as long as you guys don’t write about it, cause it doesn’t matter what jail you say it’s at, even if you say just some jail in the Philippines, that’s gonna cause a lot of problems”* (TI3)

The dilemmas concerning sensitive knowledge are further emphasized by the embedded inequality between researcher and the subjects who the research is about. In the prison the unequal relationship is evident in a rather concrete way; the researcher can leave, the inmates cannot. Because of this, prisoners are always more vulnerable than outsiders (Fine and Torre 2006). The effects an outside researcher, or a social worker can have on the lives of inmates or even the prison management can therefore be substantial. Their chances of escaping the consequences are slim. It is therefore vital that prison ethnographers reflect upon personal as well as researcher integrity when conducting prison research (Piacentini 2013).

Because of this, knowledge and stories have been excluded from this thesis. It is however not accounts or tales that in any way would change or contradict my analytical reflections about the practice of Balay, the partners or the prison setting. Rather it is personal stories that potentially could cause problems within the prison, and for the inmates who have participated in this research, if they got out.

### 2.4.3 Emotions and subjectivity working in the prison

As I argue from a social constructionism standpoint, the ethnographic position is never objective. Our emotional experiences are always at play, entangled with our observations and engagement with the field. This postmodern turn in the debate regarding the epistemology of ethnography has however not been paid much attention when it comes to qualitative prison research (Phillips and Earle 2010). This is surprising considering that many prison scholars describe fieldwork in the prison setting as an emotional and intense experience (Jewkes 2012;Liebling 1999;Nielsen 2010). The questions about how the ethnographic researcher deals with emotions in the field, especially if they are your own, becomes important.

Going to a prison in the Philippines can be a harrowing experience the first couple of times. When I first visited a Philippine prison as an intern for Balay three years ago it was an alien environment, and the mere place fueled me with feelings of insecurity, doubt and stress. The first couple of visits therefore mainly revolved around me trying to get through the day without saying anything inappropriate to the inmates or behaving in ways that might seem disrespectful.

This time around I was much more prepared. I knew the context, as well as some of the partners, and as such these feelings of insecurity and fear were subdued, or at least to some degree transformed into something of an academic nature, regarding my position as a researcher in the field. However, I still found the whole experience exhausting and emotionally draining at times. Especially the engagement with the inmates would spark a range of different emotions. My experience mimics that of prison researcher Liebling when she writes that they would often

*“(…) emerge from these encounters exhausted, upset, occasionally uplifted, by the satisfaction of a good interview”* (Liebling 1999: 158).

It can be an almost inspiring and life-affirming experience talking with people who lives under such harsh conditions, and still have the energy to crack a joke or smile as well as have faith in the future. It is an embodied experience working in what Cohen and Tayler describe as

*“(…) the cold and emotional world of the prison”* (Cohen and Taylor 1981: 70).

It can instill a feeling of fear, anxiety and uncertainty walking through the iron gates and into the world of the inmates. Also the presence of the guards can feel intimidating. Often I would find the guards with their automatic weapons more frightening that the prisoners.

Thoughts regarding security and the possible danger of being in the prison would sometimes spring to mind. During one prison visit Liv, the social worker and I were sitting on some benches talking to a couple of the partners. From where I sat I could see a cell door and a couple of inmates trying to peak out between the bars in the door. At one point another inmate walks up to the cell and starts talking to one of the men inside the cell. A small scissor is being handed to the inmate outside the cell. The inmate with the scissor starts walking towards us. As he passes behind me and I lose sight of him a sense of dread and insecurity fills my mind. Is it the inmate’s intention to attack me from behind and how come such an object is even allowed inside the prison? (FN5)

Another example of how conducting fieldwork in the prison is an embodied experience is related to my relation to the inmates. Even though I was there as a researcher, being the one conducting my studies about the prison setting and Balay, I often felt like I was the *research subject*. Whenever I observed inmates, inmates would observe me back. It was an unnerving experience for me sometimes, having their eyes fixed on me. I felt like an anomaly in their world, something that did not belong. During one visit I reflected upon this:

*“I wonder if they feel as uncomfortable with me, coming here, observing them for my own academic interest as I do when they look at me?”* (FN2)

Incidents like these also points to another aspect of how the researcher can make sense of own emotions and use them as a form of data. As Jefferson writes:

*“It seems clear that researcher emotions can resemble, echo or mirror the emotional impact of the prison on its occupants. Owning (up to) our dis/comfort can be a clue to the dis/comfort of the prison.”* (Jefferson 2014: 13)

Emotions were an integrated part of my fieldwork experience and it would be problematic to argue that they are of no epistemological significance (Jewkes 2012). I therefore made a point of being aware of my feelings during my time spent in the prison. I would write them down and reflect upon how they changed my perception of the surroundings. This can be described as a reflective process where the researcher, not to be self-indulgent or to privilege the ethnographers voice over the voices of the research subjects, acknowledges that he or she is part of the social phenomenon they seek to understand (Phillips and Earle 2010;Yuen 2011).

The intense experience it can be, doing research in a prison was somewhat subdued by the fact that I was conducting it with a fellow student. This created opportunities for the sharing of reflections, frustrations and observations connected to the fieldwork experience. After a visit, we would usually start discussing what had transpired immediately after exiting the door to the prison compound. It could be an almost cathartic experience, being able to share these experiences with each other. Comparing observations and reflections, as well as laughing together over amusing incidents that occurred inside the prison became an integrated part of the fieldwork experience. It was a form of supervision at times, as these intimate discussions would create a space where we could share thoughts and emotions that, in an academic context, would be difficult to articulate as they might seem self-indulgent or irrelevant to the production of knowledge (Sloan and Drake 2013).

Conducting fieldwork together also highlighted differences in the way Liv and I interacted with the people behind the prison walls. I had mostly worked with the Muslims during my previous experiences being in the prison, and as such some of them knew me and to a certain degree trusted me. My relation with them was therefore stronger than the one they had with Liv. The contact we had with the warden in the focus prison was also influenced by the fact that Liv knew him from when she was an intern at Balay, and therefore she would usually be the one taking lead during the meetings we had with him. To bring up the concept of performance again, one could say that we took advantage of the different roles we individually had access to. Sometimes we both performed as equals, while other times one would take center stage.

### 2.4.5 Selection Bias

To elaborate on significant biases in my field study some thoughts regarding who participated needs to be touched upon. During my fieldwork there were approximately 45 partners that Balay were supporting. Even though, I met most of them when participating in the activities with the social worker from Balay, it was limited how many I engaged in conversations with. The ones that did participate, from both the Muslims and the leftist group, were to a large extent of high rank. What it means to be high ranking inside the prison is often complex. Some high ranking positions are constructed outside and brought into the prison while others are created inside, either among the inmate community or the management. What high ranking inmates have in common though is that they to a certain degree have the power and right to talk on behalf of other inmates, especially inmates in the same group as them, as well as take day to day decisions regarding matters inside the prison. These were often the ones that would approach us, and be the ones who would answer questions if many partners were present. My understanding of prison life and the partner’s relation to Balay is therefore limited as it mostly consists of accounts from high ranking partners. I can therefore not claim that the data I have gathered can be generalized to the extent that it says something about how all of the partners experience living inside the prison as well as how they perceive and relates to the services Balay provides. However the observations, discussions and interviews inside the jail do give some insight into the dilemmas and challenges Balay faces as well as general understanding of *what matters* being an inmate in a Philippine prison.

## 2.5 Analytical framework

The methodology presented above must necessarily also have an impact on the way the data is analyzed.

The use of an action research design point to the understanding that my analysis takes its departure in the concrete practice of the social worker and the observations done during the field work. As such I will be moving gradually from a descriptive presentation of my empirical findings towards a more general theoretical discussion about the social work Balay is conducting in the prison setting. With this understanding it seems clear that this study is based on an inductive approach (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). This is however a simplification of the analytical position. As the metatheoretical paradigm of this study is social constructionism it is implicated that one is always irrevocably merged with the world. Being objective and without presumptions when observing the world is therefore not possible.

The term abduction is in this regard useful as a way of capturing the methodical approach. As with the inductive method, abduction has its point of departure in the empirical data but does not however reject theoretical preconceptions (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). As such it acknowledges the dialectic relationship between empirical findings and theory. Knowledge gained through my studies, as well as my subjective norm and value system has played a vital part in terms of how I have interpreted and reflected upon my observations.

The implication of an abductive approach is that this study does not entail a coherent theoretical lens through which the data will be analyzed. Rather it is the other way around. The use of social constructionism as the metaheoretical frame does provide me with a general understanding of the epistemology of Balay’s practice, but it does not provide any concrete methods for how to analyze the data.

In a general sense it can be said that “data analysis” is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data (Marshall and Rossman 1995: 111). As a way of doing so, Kvale’s three taxonomic ranks will be used.

In analyzing qualitative data, Kvale makes a distinction between what he describes as *understanding* (Selvforsåelse), *critical common sense* (kritisk common sense) and *theoretical understanding* (teoretisk forståelse) (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). *Understanding* is the first level and implies that I am able to descriptively pass on the empirical data in an often condensed form. The next level, *critical common sense,* means that I am able to critically look at my empirical findings and from that create my own opinions about it. Doing academic studies always entails that a critical position should be obtained. This implies that the statements of the informants should not be accepted heedlessly. The researcher is required to maintain a healthy dose of mistrust against the common sense and taken for granted “truths” that the practitioners follow (Carson 1990: 171). In this study this entails to position myself critically towards the practice of Balay and as such my observations. Not to be able to claim that their work is lackluster or unprofessional. This could be regarded as an imperialistic approach, but to support the generation of new knowledge, which hopefully will be able to benefit Balay.

*Theoretical understanding* is the last level and entails that I am able to frame the empirical data in a broader theoretical scope. The theoretical reflections will be of a somewhat eclectic nature. They will naturally revolve around social work theory and methods, and as such they will be based on the knowledge already generated through my social work studies. Making use of this knowledge however raises some challenges as heedlessly applying western theories to a non-western context can be problematic. The dilemmas connected to an ethnocentric approach in social science when conducting studies in cultures different than your own, has been discussed by many scholars (Adams and Hanna 2012;Smith 2013;Teo and Febbraro 2003). In their article Adams and Hanna make use of the term *allochronic discourse* as a way of capturing the dangers in applying theories and concepts from one’s own culture when studying another. As they argue:

*“The problem with allochronic discourse, at best, is its oversimplification of the social and subjective complexity of “others”; at worst, it reflects a cultural superiority and arrogance, implying that “we” are the first and only ones to free ourselves from an habitual adherence to the shackles of prescriptive cultures and tradition”* (Adams & Hanna, 2012).

Therefore researchers doing ethnographic research in “exotic” settings deliberately has to try and overcome observing through the “lens of the west” (Adams & Hanna, 2012).

It could be argued that there are two components one has to take into consideration in regards to an ethnocentric approach. The first one is of methodological nature, as applying a theoretical framework when conducting qualitative research without reflections about what theories are being used, and in what setting they are applied can have consequences in terms of validity or trustworthiness (Golafshani 2003). The second component is about ethicality when conducting research with other stakeholder. Especially in an action research collaboration it is essential that the researcher introduce theories and concepts that makes sense in terms of what is studied and with whom the research is undertaken.

Both the methodological and ethical challenges conducting fieldwork in cultural settings different than your own can be diminished through being sensitive when applying theories, and by explication all methodological and theoretical choices made. This insures that the trustworthiness of the study is maintained. In this study this implies that the theoretical reflections used when answering the research questions will be explicated and chosen in a sensitive manner. They will be used as a way of highlighting and unfolding important aspects of the practice of Balay in a respectful way. It is not the intention that Balay necessarily have to agree with all that is written in this study, as it is also about challenging their main assumptions. However applying theories and methods that directly oppose their understanding of their work and therefore hard for them to relate to is not productive either. Instead I will strive for a balance between these two, by giving voice to critical reflections but still operate within the epistemological sphere that constitute the practice of Balay.

As such I do not see it as an invitation to classify all that I have learned through my studies as irrelevant or as barriers when trying to answer the research questions posed in this study. In a social constructionism view, believing that it is possible to detach oneself from the social and historic context we all are embedded is a form of self-delusion and cannot be accomplished. Rather it is a reminder to reflect upon on what ground your arguments and reflections are based. The ethnocentric position can be used as a form of intuition and as a way of positioning yourself curiously and questioning towards what you observe (Teo and Febbraro 2003).

Chapter 3, the analysis will consist of three parts. As part of explicating the theoretical choices taken, the first is a theoretical discussion of the broader connection between social work and prisons. My aim with this is to frame the interventions of Balay in a broader social work context, and as such this section will serve as a mirror that can be used as a reflective tool in understanding the practice of Balay.

The second part deals with the historic and contextual conditions under which the practice of Balay can be said to take place. As argued, social workers make use of many different kinds of knowledge in their practice, and this section aims at explicating especially the historic and factual knowledge Balay draws from in their work. Knowledge about the target group, their problems and their heritage is intimately connected to how Balay works.

The third part will revolve around the answering of the research questions and will as such be divided into two sections. The first will deal with the first research question: *How do the social workers from the human rights organization Balay work with survivors of torture in a specific prison in Manila?* While the second section will be about answering the second research question: *What are the obstacles, challenges and dilemmas the social workers are confronted with working with this target group in the prison setting?*

Chapter 3

Analysis

# 3.0 Analysis – part one

To set the stage for a more in depth analysis of the work of Balay in the prison I am focusing on, a theoretical discussion about the connection between social work and prisons will be presented. The first section will revolve around how prisons through time have been perceived and how this has influenced how social work has been practiced in these settings. After that how social work is actually practiced in prisons will be unfolded and the challenges connected to this. As much of the literature used for these sections mostly applies to a western context the last section will be about how social work in a general sense can be said to be practiced in developing countries. Here Balay and their prison work will be used as a case.

## 3.1 Prisons and social work

Much has been written about prisons through time. From their role in the modern society, how they function, to the impact it has on people to be imprisoned. Most of this literature is about prisons in the west – especially the American and English context, whereas prisons in the global south to a large extent have been neglected (Jefferson 2014). A first important point to make is that prisons are not institutions disconnected from the surrounding society. They do not exist in a historic or social vacuum. Their appearance, how they function, and what kind of people inhabit them is closely linked to the society in which they are embedded. As Buntman writes:

*“Prisons symbolize, mirror, and shape the communities and countries in which they exist. (…) policies and practices of imprisonment reflect social orders, especially structures of inequality and understandings of legitimate power and opposition”* (Buntman 2009: 401).

What is argued here is that there is an almost dialectic relationship between the society and prisons, much as what could be said to hold true for the relationship between social work and the society (Payne 2005: 7)

In the past prisons has to large degree been seen as a space of punishment and control where the requirement for justice has been one of corner pillars in the correctional system. In the northern part of the world and especially in the United States a conservative and punitive ideology has been dominating the corrective system since the mid-seventies (Gumz 2004). This discourse also spread to other parts of the world, as Haney puts it:

*“The united States, it could be argued, played a key role in leading the rest of the world down this pessimistic path toward a dark place in the history of corrections”(Haney 2006: 1)*

It can be argued that the prisons, as a natural part of the modern society, are partly founded on the premises of psychological individualism (Haney 2005: 69). Criminal behavior has mainly been seen as a product of internal rather than external causes. Criminals were perceived as innately bad people with a flawed ethical code of conduct. It was argued that because the root of such deviant behavior was to be found in the subjects *soul* it could not be treated through rehabilitation or other kind of interventions – hard punishment was the only option.

The understanding has to a large degree molded and formed the correctional system seen in today’s societies. In some circles, working in the correctional system there has been an almost religious belief that treatment of inmates is ineffective and as such social workers were deemed of no use (Evans and Vincent 1983).

In the past, therapeutic programs behind prison walls have had a tendency to mimic this individualistic take on crime. “Criminal pedagogic therapy” was one of such methods as the goal was to get the offender to change his path of delinquency by establishing a hierarchy of specific offences and to help him develop a moral social behavior where he learns to appreciate the significance of norms, the law and of legal institutions (von Engelhardt 1978: 202). In these types of therapies not much emphasis was put on structural or social variables in terms of understanding the criminal behavior of inmates. Although these kinds of interventions did exist, the punitive nature of the correctional system led to that social work essentially abandoned the field of corrections (Gibelman 1995). The reason for this is that the values of order, control and punishment that can be said to characterize the criminal system even today, is very much in opposition to the values embedded in the field of social work (Gumz 2004)

Even though this ideology is very much present today, through the last 30 years or so, a new form of contemporary psychology has emerged that has radically challenged and questioned this individualistic view on human behavior. Human behavior cannot be adequately understood by looking on the subject disconnected from the social context in which he or she is imbedded. Our actions are not determined by internal forces alone, but are also formed by our interaction with the world we live in. As such, the understanding of the origin of criminality was challenged. As Craig Haney puts it:

*“The problem of crime and violence – formerly viewed in almost exclusively terms – are now understood through multi-level analyses that grant equal if not primary significance to situational, community and structural variables”* (Haney 2005: 77)

This understanding must also profoundly change our view on incarceration and imprisonment. Prisons do something to people. The way people behave when in prison cannot be understood without taking into account that this behavior is taking place in a prison. Also the understanding that deviant behavior is not only the product of a *flawed soul* but also linked to our place in the world, opens up for the possibility of rehabilitation that would not be possible from the more deterministic view on human behavior. Prison reforms have become more and more common. The goal with implementing these has been to create a more humane prison environment for the detainees (Bertrand-Godfrey and Loewenthal 2011). These changes have opened new doors for social workers wanting to work in the prison setting.

These opposing ideologies when it comes to “what prisons are?” and what role they should have in the society also emphasize the paradoxical nature of these institutions, where the seemingly dichotomous relationship between punishment and rehabilitation are always at play. This can create a complex working environment for the social worker as there are obvious value dilemmas connected to social work in prisons (Gibelman 1995). Also the prison setting itself is in many ways counterproductive to the practice of social work. The often strict daily prison routines, lack of privacy and security issues creates an less than ideal working environment for the social worker (Bertrand-Godfrey and Loewenthal 2011;Martin 2001) However literature on the effects the prison environment have on social work practice is surprisingly scarce (Mazza 2008).

### 3.1.1 Social work behind bars – a challenging endeavor

There is surprisingly little knowledge about the connection between prisons and social work. This is especially true in contexts where social work is not institutionalized under the wings of the government, as is the case in most western societies. Here public social workers have become an integrated part of the correctional system and the prison has therefore benefited from a growing interest among social work practitioners.

A such social workers working in western societies are to a large degree employed by the government. The impact the state have on the tasks the social worker are required to carry out, and what role they are to have in the society is thus tightly linked to the state and influenced by political discourses (Brante 2005). This also holds true for social workers in the correctional system. General tasks include intake, screening, supervision, treatment and release planning (Gibelman 1995). Their focus is mostly directed against the individual detainee and the management of their individual cases. The social worker therefore to a large degree takes the role of a coordinator, working with professionals from other disciplines to support the individual detainee through different programs ranging from therapy for drug and alcohol abuse to legal support. Also programs concerning reentry into the society are an area social workers are greatly involved with, as securing and supporting the newly released inmate in creating a life outside the prison walls can help reduce the risk of the individual committing crimes again (Seiter and Kadela 2003).

The link between social workers and the state is also of importance for the relationships these practitioners create with their clients in the prisons. It is understandable if some inmates are skeptic and untrusting of the system that is responsible for incarcerating them, and how they construct the social worker could be influenced by this (Harvey 2011). This problem is further emphasized by prisons being *low trust* environments (Liebling and Arnold 2005: 240 - 249).

The support given by most social workers, practicing in the prison setting is as such directed against specific problem areas. While these programs can be useful and can give the individual inmate the tools to get out of, for example, an drug addiction, I argue that there are at least three areas where the current approach to prison social work in the west can be criticized for falling short in terms of providing the support and help the inmates need.

First off, the somewhat fragmented approach to the services given does not cater to all of the needs the inmate might have. Making sense of the present situation, the past as well as dreams about the future is matters many inmates have a need to discuss and reflect upon in a confidential relationship. The somewhat rigid social work practice in the prisons does not support such an approach, which could be defined as a more holistic one. Also the prison as an institution could be characterized as an environment that does not allow much room for personal reflections (Harvey 2011) and the psychological interventions offered to prisoners does not provide that needed space for narratives to emerge (Bertrand-Godfrey and Loewenthal 2011).

Secondly it could be argued that social work done in prisons does not take enough account of the fact that it is *done in prisons*. The effects imprisonment has on prisoners have been documented and discussed by many prison scholars (Haney 2001;Liebling and Arnold 2005;Liebling and Maruna 2005;Sykes 1958). However even though the extensive research in this field document how prison life has an deteriorating effect on inmates there is little evidence that this knowledge is used when practicing social work in prisons. As such, counseling and therapy that helps the individual detainee in dealing with prison life seems almost non-existent in most prisons.

The third argument I pose against the current social work paradigm in prisons is, as the second one, linked to the context itself. As I argue elsewhere prisons differ from each other. What works in one prison might not work in another. This requires that the social worker has an understanding of the specific prison, its rules, both formal and informal, as well as its history, culture and the interpersonal dynamics behind the prison walls. Much like the ethnographic prison researcher has to, if he is to decipher *what the prison is all about (Harvey 2011: 312)*. The social worker needs to be able to change or fine-tune his or her practice according to the specific prison climate, which in some cases might be a difficult endeavor considering how prison social work is structured. As mentioned, their role and assignments are to a large extend predefined and as such might not take into consideration the differences between prisons.

### 3.1.2. Prisons and social work in developing countries – the case of Balay

The way social work is organized in developing countries can be somewhat different from in the west. Although many countries here, including the Philippines, does provide public healthcare as well as social welfare support, these programs are often limited in scope compared to countries in the west. Limited economic resources are a problem as the governments does not have the means to implement adequate social protection programs[[9]](#footnote-9). Because of this, a need for private actors to help and reduce suffering for communities, families and subjects from the lower and often marginalized classes have arisen (Imhabekhai 2002). As such non-governmental organizations are occupying a central position when it comes to relief work in developing countries. Balay is one such Ngo.

These differences also have an impact on the social work being practiced. One could argue that how and where it is practiced is much more sporadic than in the west as it is not systematized in the same way. For instance, Balay’s limited resources require them to make certain decisions regarding which prisons to focus on and although they do have contact with other Ngo’es it is impossible for them to cover and be involved in every prison in the Philippines. For Balay this is an ever present concern as they constantly have to reevaluate how to use their limited resources.

Another important aspect of how social work is organized in developing countries has to do with the relationship between Ngo’es and donors. Partnerships between Ngo’es working in the south and donors, often from the north, has become an integrated part of international humanitarian work (Lewis and Kanji 2009). Many Ngo’es in the south are dependent on funds from other private or international actors as they are do not receive economic support from their own government. However these partnerships are not without their dilemmas and problems. As one author writes:

*“The term 'partnership ' can be considered something of a Trojan Horse, disguising the reality of the complex relationships in imbalances of power and inequality, often expressed through the control of one 'partner' over the other” (Reith 2010: 446)*.

Especially the flow of funds from one organization to another has an impact on how the partnership functions. As some writes suggest, donors are often in a position where they have the means and power to dictate how the money is being spent. This has the potential to undermine the identity of the Ngo as it is forced operate in accordance to the demands of the donor (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2004;Reith 2010). As such how some social work is perceived and practiced in the global south is being influenced by international donors and what they deem to be “best practice”.

These dilemmas are also relevant for Balay and their social work practice. They are, like many Ngo’es in the south, independent and are therefore dependent on external funds and as such sensitive to the sometimes ambiguous relationships with donors. My research questions are not as such focused on how the social work of Balay is influenced by their relationship with partners such as DIGNITY. My focus is on the situated practice of Balay. It would however be problematic to argue that external factors, such as relations to partners have no influence when it comes to how Balay choose to conduct their work.

# 4.0 Analysis – part two

As we are always embedded in a social and historic setting, understanding our actions require knowledge about the social reality in which we live (Payne 2005: 17). This holds true for the practice of Balay as well. The way they work with their partners is intimately intertwined with the context in which it occurs. In the introduction it is presented how Balay emerged from the political struggles that occurred in the eighties in the Philippines. This section will start by further elaborating on the history of the Philippines. Then the prison work of Balay will be touched upon before finally presenting the partners and the often complex problems they have, as well as the prison being focused on in this study.

## 4.1 The history of the Philippines

The Philippines have been under the domination of foreign countries for more than three hundred years. First the Spanish empire, then The United States of America, who ruled the country until the Second World War broke out. It was not until after the war ended that the country finally gained its independency. The post-colonial era was the chance for the Philippines to rebuild the country, and become a nation founded on democratic principles.

Strive for democracy was however severely halted by President Marcos who declared martial law in 1972. It lasted until 1981 but the regime of Marcos did not come till an end until 1986. The dictatorship of Marcus is considered one of the darker chapters in the history of the Philippines as corruption, nepotism and violence were methods used by Marcos regime to suppress the civil society and maintain power (Hedman and Sidel 2000).

The ripples these historic events have created are very much visible when examining the present situation in the Philippines. Even though democracy has been reinstated and the economy is booming, the Philippines still faces challenges. Corruption[[10]](#footnote-10) has in many ways eroded the democratic principles and is one of the main factors why terms such as “cacique” or “low quality” democracy are used when scholars have described the current political landscape in the Philippines (Dressel 2011).

The division between classes is sharp in the Philippines (Juan 2006). In the year 2012, statistics showed that around 28% of the population in the Philippines could be considered poor[[11]](#footnote-11). The connection between poverty, crime and imprisonment is a complex one. Wacquant argues how poverty have been criminalized in the age of neo-liberalism and how penal institutions became the solution (Wacquant 2009). That the poor are indeed the ones who have the highest risk of ending up in prisons is no less evident in the Philippines than the rest of the world. This becomes apparent quite fast when visiting the prisons in the Philippines. Most of the clients that Balay is working with are from lower classes in the Philippine society.

## 4.2 Balay – the prisons and the partners

The prisons Balay are working in are divided into two groups: “focus” and “outreach”. The prisons classified as focus prisons are the ones which has the highest priority because of strategic value. These prisons have a high number of political prisoners incarcerated, who have also experience torture. Documenting these cases of torture is also important for the anti-torture advocacy work Balay is doing. These prisons are visited approximately two times a week.

Outreach prisons are usually visited a couple of times a year depending on the economic resources available. A prison gets designated as an outreach prison if there is a documented case of a political prisoner or torture survivor in the prison. Visits are mainly done to monitor and document the prison conditions as well as providing food assistance for the partners.

The prison being focused on in this thesis is a focus prison. Here Balay conduct psycho-social support for their partners. There are two distinct groups of partners in this prison; the Muslims and the leftists. The Muslim community is by far the larger of the two. It is within these groups that the partners of Balay can be found.

It is also important to note that the prison that is being focused on in this study mainly house prisoners who have not yet been convicted. Most of Balay’s partners in this prison is therefore on trial and are waiting to be sentenced.

Knowledge about these groups, what they stand for and how they differ from each other is of importance for Balay. It also serves as a backdrop for understanding how the narratives of many of the partners are created. Their religious and political convictions as well as the struggle against, what they perceive as an unjust system, is tightly linked to the history of the Philippines.

It is important to emphasize that the use of the categorizations “Muslims” and “leftists” does not indicate total homogeneousness within the two groups. Diverse opinions and values do exist within these communities, and this categorization is therefore a simplification of some of the differences between the partners Balay is working with.

### 4.2.1 The Muslims

Different religious beliefs have been the cause of a four decade long civil war between the Christian majority and the Muslim minority who are mostly situated on the island Mindanao in the southern part of the Philippines (Kaufman 2013). Much of the dispute has revolved around the Muslim minority wanting independency from the Philippine state. This has resulted in turmoil and fights breaking out between the military and the Muslims groups.

Most of the Muslim partners originate from the island of Mindanao and have been accused of exercising terror activities or being a part of terror organizations. Two of these groups are here of importance.

Abu Sayyaf is one of these groups and is the one, who has been most visible in terms of violent acts in the Philippines. Their terror activities in the Philippines started in the beginning of the 90ties, and were directed against non-Muslim communities, especial Christians (Sidel 2008). Their aim is to gain independence and create a Muslim theocracy. Their violent activities as well as their strong ties to other terror organizations have placed Abu Sayyaf on America’s official list of terrorist groups[[12]](#footnote-12).

Many of the Muslims, Balay are working with, have been accused of being part of Abu Sayyaf. However, all I have talked to through my field studies have denied any connections with the group. Instead they claim that The United States influence and money have functioned as a catalyst. Innocence Muslims are being apprehended, accused of being part of Abu Sayyaf, and thrown in jail, just so the police and the Philippine government can tell the U.S that the war on terror is moving forward, which will keep the money flowing. Many of these Muslims are poor farmers living on Mindanao with their families.

 How much of this is the truth is not what is of importance in terms of understanding the work of Balay. However stories about an unjust system, corruption and how being poor makes it impossible to prove ones innocence are stories the social workers from Balay are confronted with when talking to their clients, and as such part of their practice.

Although all of the Muslims I talked to denied any affiliation with the terror organization Abu Sayyaf many admitted to, that they hadconnections with MILF. MILF does not have the same reputation for using violent terror activities as Abu Sayyaf, although MILF, as Abu Sayyaf, fights for an independent Muslim state.

When the partners of Balay admit affiliation with MILF, they at the same time confess to a certain ideology and conviction. They support the struggle for an independent Muslim state, and often feel suppressed and mistreated by the Philippine government.

### 4.2.2 The Leftists

In the prison being focused on in this study, most of the leftist conceded to be part of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). It was especially during the regime of Marcus that the communist party grew in size and influence and the party had a central role in finally overthrowing the government. With Marcos gone and a democratic political system established, an internal dispute regarding how to continue the revolution started to threaten the party. The internal disagreement let to a split where the ones who stayed with the party called themselves reaffirmists and the ones who left called themselves rejectionists. The rejectionists disagreed with the rural-based protracted people’s war strategy that had been the trademark of the party since its establishment. They wanted to “modernize” the revolution and preferred a formation of a larger company- and battalion-sized units and urban insurrectionism (Santos et al. 2010) The group of leftists in the prison being focused on here define themselves as reaffirmists.

### 4.2.3 The partners – the pains of the past, present and the future

To understand the practice of Balay one must also understand the complex problems many of their partners are facing. A way of framing the situation the partners are in, is to understanding their problems as connected to either the present, past or future. As Jefferson argue, the life trajectory of prisoners offer a perspective on how and to what degree they manage to cope with prison life (Jefferson 2011: 15).

**The present**

The present situation refers to the partner’s experiences being imprisoned. Multiple studies have shown that being imprisoned have a deteriorating effect (Liebling and Maruna 2005;Sykes 1958). Sykes use the term *pains of imprisonment* and argue that it:

“(..) *cannot be viewed as being limited to the loss of physical liberty. The significant hurts lie in the frustrations or deprivations which attend the withdrawal of freedom, such as the lack of heterosexual relationships, isolation from the free community, the withholding of goods and services and so on. And however painful these frustrations or deprivations may be in the immediate terms of thwarted goals, discomfort, boredom, and loneliness, they carry a more profound hurt as a set of threats or attacks which are directed against the very foundations of the prisoner´s being”* (Sykes 1958: 78-79).

Being imprisoned carry with it different kind of losses. The loss of liberty and autonomy might be what at first glance is most striking but other, sometimes more subtle consequences can have just a big an impact. Accounts of prison life often generate a picture where fear, mistrust and physical as well as psychological violence is part of the often harsh and emotionally demanding prison culture (Crewe et al. 2014). The structure of the Philippine prisons, where cells are always shared between inmates also leaves little room for personal space. The term *forced intimacy* can be used to encapsulate the often problematic relational dimension of the partner’s incarceration. Cameras have been installed throughout the prison so also the prison officers can keep track of the prisoners. Being yourself and preserving the identity you had outside the prison walls becomes almost impossible as one always have to *perform*. Lack of nutritious food and healthcare also creates problems for the inmates in this specific prison. The food mainly consists of rice, a bit of vegetables and sometimes meat. Often the family from outside would bring food when visiting, to compensate for the lack of nutrient meals given. The partners I talked to often complained about not getting treated for various diseases ranging from diabetes to pneumonia.

A last point regarding their present situation has to do with their legal cases and the fact that they are still under trial. Most of them have been in prison for three to six years but there are cases of partners being imprisoned for eight years without a sentence. This leaves many of the partners in what Jefferson describes as judicial limbo. They are in a state of waiting where the experience of uncertainty is continually relived and reinforced with every court hearing and meeting with legal representative (Jefferson 2011: 18).

**The past**

Although these effects of imprisonment are rather general, how inmates experience being imprisoned can vary greatly. Jefferson points to how the effects of imprisonment are mediated through on what ground they were incarcerated and pre-prison experiences (Jefferson 2011). Many of the partners denied being part of any terror activities and such claimed their innocence. Studies have shown that long term imprisonment can have dire negative consequences, especially for people who have been unjustly imprisoned (Jefferson 2011). The feeling of unjustness, unfairness and despair seemed to be more prominent with the partners who claimed their innocence.

The past of many of the partners also entails stories of being tortured. In some ways many of their stories are alike. It is often immediately after they have been captured by the police. Some of them explain how they were tortured so they would give a confession while others explain how it was done to get them to disclose important information, the police thought they had. There has been no evidence that torture is being used in the prison focused on in this study.

The effects of torture have been explored from many different angles. It is a complex multilateral trauma that has severe physical as well as psychological consequences for the subject (Kira 2013). Some of the physical symptoms often connected to being tortured are muscle and joint pain, headache and hearing impairment. The psychological consequences are often related to the symptoms being connected to Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) (Isakson and Jurkovic 2013). Subjects who have been exposed to torture often experience reoccurring flashbacks to the traumatic event, sleep disorder, concentration problems and nightmares as well as heightened anxiety. Also the feeling of not being yourself, that life lacks meaning and purpose as well as a high level of mistrust in others, are symptoms experienced by many torture survivors (Hàrdi et al. 2010). Torture targets the person as a whole – physically, emotionally and socially (Williams and van der Merwe 2013).

**The future**

Thoughts about the future also seem to be as much a part of many of the partner’s experience being imprisoned as thoughts about their present situation. The imagined (positive) future is a significant mediating factor in terms of being able to cope with prison life. A word that quite early in my fieldwork became central was *laya*. It means freedom in Tagalog. One of the partners we interviewed talked about how, when he could not sleep at night, would think of how *laya* looked like (TI2). He would like to see his hometown again, and the changes that had been made since he got arrested. He also talked about his family. Especially for the Muslims the notion of freedom and what it implies is relational. It is about their family and the prospect and hope that they in the future will be able to be with them again. For the communist it is often about being able to continue the struggle.

When talking to the Muslim, and also during casual conversations with other partners, it struck me that these thoughts about freedom and the future seemed to be double edged. On one hand, it filled them with hope having these thoughts about a bright future, on the other hand the uncertainty, being stuck in judicial limbo, also tainted these dreams with hopelessness and despair.

Naturally, this *time division* is a somewhat crude separation as they are all interrelated and therefore not that useful as a way for the social worker to make sense of the partners problems which are quite complex. For instance, some partners will sometimes complain that they have trouble sleeping at night. Sleep disorder is a common sign of PTSD and as such it can be identified as connected to their past torture experiences. However being in prison can also be the cause of sleep disorder due to the pains of imprisonment or because of troubled thoughts about their future.

## 4.3 The focus Prison

As a part of introducing you, the reader, to the social work of Balay a description of the prison focused on in this study is needed. As argued the prison can be defined as what Berger and Luckmann describe as a sub-universe with its own internal logics which is important to understand if one wants to decipher the practice of Balay.

The prison itself is a high risk facility, housing around 425 inmates who are categorized as high risk prisoners. The term “high risk” has a rather broad definition here. The ones who Balay are working with have this label because they are accused of political crimes such as terrorism while other inmates have been incarcerated because they are charged of having committed other serious, sometimes gang related, crimes.

### 4.3.1 The prison architecture

The prison is part of a larger military compound and is a long rectangular four storey building. In the middle of the compound at ground level, is a common area which inmates living on this level as well as the 2nd level can access. A basketball net as well as a Ping-Pong table has been put up here. For visitors entering the common area you have to go through a gate leading to a zigzag pathway of bars. An alternative way is to go up the stairs that leads to the pathway between the two wings on the upper floors. The cells are approximately three by four meters and are situated on both sides on every level. Below is a rough sketch of the prison compound.



The Muslims occupy the first and second floor, while the communists are situated on the right wing on the fourth floor. The other floors and wings hold other groups of inmates. Especially different gangs occupy this space[[13]](#footnote-13).

### 4.3.2 Prison life

Just like people outside, prisoners have their daily routines they go through. These routines are to a large degree structured by the prison itself, and the rules the inmates have to abide to. For example water is only turned on two times a day, so activities such as showering and cleaning has to be structured around these periods. In the common area, mostly occupied by the Muslims, inmates will often during the daytime be hanging around, talking or playing games. If you arrive early in the morning you will see inmates doing their daily exercise, either weight lifting, or running up and down the hallways. The inmates on the upper floors who do not have easy access to the common area will usually roam around in the hallway. You will often see inmates standing silently looking out over the common area observing the inmates down below. Even though the inmates do not usually have free access to other sections of the prison than the one they live in, interaction between wings and floors is common. Sometimes you will see inmates trading goods between different floors with the help of a bucket and some rope, and other times small messages on paper will be transferred through bars and gates.

One of the most apparent activities in the prison is the Muslim praying sessions. Five times a day praying rugs are laid out in the common area as well as the hallways on the first floor. The Muslim will gather and the imam will conduct the prayer from the common area, usually using a microphone. During the prayers the whole prison will echo with the voice of the Imam, citing sacred passages from the Koran.

The daily routines also sometimes include activities made available from the prison management. When I was there the inmates had the opportunity to enroll in a computer class where basic computer skills were taught. The inmates also sometimes have access to the roof to get a bit of fresh air. They call this *sunning*.

Walking down the corridors you will see that many of inmates have their clothe hanging outside the cells. This is done mostly to give the inmates living in them just a small bit of privacy. Some of the cells have TV’s and you will often hear radios playing different kinds of music when roaming around the prison. Toilets can be found at the back of each cell. It is also here that the inmates get the water for their showers or cooking. A couple of cells have also been transformed into small stores, selling a variety of goods ranging from cup noodles to soap. The living conditions in the cells vary greatly. The poor inmates usually sleep on worn out madrassas on the floor, they might only have one fan for the whole cell, which can get suffocating hot during especially daytime. Other inmates, who for some reason or another, can afford it, have better beds, more fans and have even installed better toilets.

Like many other prisons in the Philippines, this particular prison suffers from overcrowding. That prison overcrowding is a major concern in the Philippines has been documented by Balay as well as other NGO’es in the country. The International Center for Prison Studies rated the Philippines to be among the five worst countries, with an overcrowding level at 300 percent[[14]](#footnote-14). This was especially evident when looking inside some of the cells. Bunk beds were often constructed as this is the only way there would be space for everyone.

### 4.3.3 Just another day at the office

The practice of the social worker from Balay entails more than just the actual activities and interaction with the partners. Working in the prison setting, with its rules, regulations and focus on security requires the social worker to go through more or less mandatory procedures every time they want to enter the iron gates. Understanding these routines are important as they also is part of what the social worker do working in the prison setting. In the next section I will describe what normally transpires when the social worker visits the prison

The prison itself is situated in the back of the military compound. Outside the prison a small “sari sari[[15]](#footnote-15)” store is placed. Often people would be gathered under a poorly constructed roof besides the store. It is normally the family of the inmates who sits here. Waiting to visit or going home.

The gate into the prison is a normal sized steel door. Next to it is a much larger gate used for mainly vehicles. When you knock on the steel door a small cover will be opened and you are met by the eyes of a guard asking for the purpose of the visit. Again Balay is well known so getting in is usually unproblematic. Other visitors, such as family, will be required to hand in their ID card, get a number and then asked to wait outside.

The first procedure when entering is to hand in ID’s to a guard behind a glass counter. They will also scan your fingerprint to confirm your identity. You are also required to hand in your phone and most other electronic devices before you are allowed to proceed further into the prison.

The next section is the frisking area. Here the personal belongings as well as other goods brought to the partners will get searched. There will often be a couple of guards roaming around this area, often just relaxing when only few visitors are present. It can be random experience at times, as the searching procedure as well as the thoroughness of it can change from visit to visit. It is very much dependent on the guards who are on shift. That this is often the case, in other prisons as well, has been documented (Mazza 2008). The time it can take for the social worker from Balay to actually get inside the prison can therefore vary quite a bit from time to time. Often the social worker will bring food for the partners, and if the guards are especially strict, it can take quite some time for them to go through it all. As I argue later one, uncertainty is an ever present problem that the social worker from Balay has to take into account when working in the prison setting. The entrance procedure is a concrete example of this.

In front of the entrance area is a small yard. Formal gatherings of the guards and officers are usually conducted here. During the fieldwork I observed a couple of training sessions. The guards would line up and train with different weapons like knives, guns and batons. It is a somewhat harrowing experience to have to navigate through the crowd of guards practicing with knifes just in front of the entrance area.

Before actually entering the prison it is custom to do a courtesy visit to the warden. His office is positioned on the opposite site of the entrance area, across the yard. The warden’s office is simple. The only thing that stands out is the elaborate wood carved nameplate standing on his otherwise usually empty desk. Often he will ask the social worker what the purpose of the visit is and who of the inmates she needs to talk to. Sometimes the social worker will also have requests for the warden, for example permission to conduct a group session with inmates from different floors.

After the visit it is time to enter the prison. You walk down a narrow path, through a gate and past a worn-down infirmary building. Another heavy gate symbolize that you are heading into the secure part of the prison compound. This one is electronic, so after we knock we have to wait for a beep sound before we can open the gate. On the other side, just before you enter the prison building, is a small area with a shop. Guards will usually be present here, sometimes just sitting, playing chess or eating. It is also here that you first notice the smell. You might think that it comes from inside the prison itself, but that is not the case. The half rotten smell is the smell of garbage being left just outside the compound. Especially on really hot days the whole prison will be enshrouded in the stench.

On some visit the social worker from Balay will make use of an empty cell to conduct the activities planned for the day. Benches and tables are therefore often needed before the cell can be used which will be brought and placed by inmates. Other times the social worker will visit different partners around the prison. After the activities have been conducted it is normal that the social worker will visit the warden again to say goodbye and let him know when they will be back.

# 5.0 Analysis – part three – section one

With a better understanding of the context in which Balay works, and their partners situation we can move towards the answering of the research questions. In this first section the first question posed in the introduction will be answered

***How do the social workers from the human rights organization Balay work with survivors of torture in a specific prison in Manila?***

## 5.1 Making sense of the practice of Balay

The nature of Balay’s social workers practice is much more complex and dynamic than what is briefly described in chapter one. As a way of highlighting the complexity of their practice, an example of how they themselves tried to make sense of their work will be presented.

During the internship at DIGNITY I was tasked to help with the development of the Praxis Papers. One of the components of this was to facilitate a discussion with the staff of Balay about their practice. The aim of the meeting was to create a space for a critical discussion about their work methods. As a part of the presentation I made use of the *discourse triangle* that Payne in his book about social work theory use to explicate three different views on how social work is practiced (Payne 2005: 10).



The three different corners represent three different views of what social work is, and what the role of a social worker should be.

The individualist-reformist views sees social work as an aspect of welfare services to individuals in the society. As such social work is about maintaining the social order and providing services to people in.

The reflexive-therapeutic view understands social work as a continual spiral of interaction between client and helper. Here problem-solving is seen as a co-developed process between the two parties as knowledge about the problems at hand is shared and generated in the relation.

The socialist-collectivist view emphasize that the social worker should strive to create change and transform the society for the benefit of oppressed groups or individuals. Here the goal is of an emancipatory nature.

Payne argues that it is possible to place all social work practices within this triangle.

During the seminar I asked the staff of Balay to place the practice of Balay inside this triangle. A discussion erupted as people tried to argue why Balay should be placed one way or another. Different activities and methods they use were brought up in terms of deciding how they fitted in. The staff seemed to be unable to come to a unified agreement.

This little assignment illustrates the challenges in describing what Balay actually does. Their practice is based on many different understandings of what social work is, and it seems difficult, even for Balay, to give an answer as to what their practice actually entails. In the next part the dissonance between Balay’s actually practice and how they talk about it will further explored. Also the activities being used by the social workers will here be discussed. Payne’s model will be referred back to here as well, as a way of reflecting upon the different methods used by Balay. After that other aspects of their actual work will be touched upon, aspects that to a larger extent than their formal methods, seems to be better able at capturing the key components of what constitutes their practice.

### 5.1.1 The practice of Balay on different system levels

As mentioned in the introduction, Balay argues that their overall approach is psychosocial, which in a basic form means that the social worker acknowledge that human experience is created in an interplay between the individual’s psychological conditions and the social environment (Howe 2009: 137). This understanding seems to be accurate . They do work with the understanding that the life trajectories, experience being imprisoned as well as the psychological wellbeing of the partners are all connected, which will be emphasized later in this section.

However as also mentioned, one of the first findings, analyzing the empirical data, was the dissonance between how Balay talks about their practice and what they actually do. During in-house discussions when describing what their psychosocial approach entails, terms such as psycho-education, psychodynamic theory were often used. Especially Erikson, and his psychodynamic developing theory regarding how subjects goes through eight stages from birth to death (Oltedal and Hutchinson 2006: 52) have been used when talking about their partners. When observing the practice of Balay it becomes clear that how they make use of theoretical knowledge is not easily defined. It is not the argument in this study that it is not used. It is not a smokescreen that has no practical use other than creating legitimacy for their practice, although legitimacy might be one part of the answer. Rather the way the use of theoretical knowledge reveals itself through their practice is often subtle, and as such a much closer look at their concrete practice is needed if useful knowledge is to be generated.

As a basis for an analysis of their actual practice a crude division of their different formal methods and activities can be useful. An easy way to make such a division is by looking at the activities and what system levels they belong too. Social work can be directed against different system levels ranging from the individual level to the societal and political level (Beckett 2006: 82). In the prison the social worker mainly operate on three levels; Individual, group and community.

The individual level

Balay use case management when describing their general work with individual partners. The first step is to assess the problems the partner is facing. These problems can revolve around anything from legal matters, difficulties in coping with prison life or past torture experience to health problems. The goal is to create a holistic view of the problems and challenges the partner is facing and let the partner be a part of the decision process in terms of where help is needed.

If the partner is new to the prison, either because he has been transferred or because he has just been arrested, special attention is given to *teach him the ropes* about prison life. Often the social worker will invite another partner to sit down with them who will help explain about the different groups of inmates and the rules and routines that exist behind the prison walls. For a newcomer being able to navigate the prison setting can be of outmost importance as ignorance can lead to trouble[[16]](#footnote-16).

Case management (or care management) has in many countries become an integrated part of social work practice (Holloway 2009). The National Association of Social work describes the goal of case management as to

*“optimize client functioning and well-being by providing and coordinating high-quality services, in the most effective and efficient manner possible, to individuals with multiple complex needs”.[[17]](#footnote-17)*

For Balay, assessing, together with the partner, in what areas help is most needed and will have the largest positive impact is important. Not only to the partner but also for Balay as their resources are limited and therefore must be put to best use.

Connected to the management of the individual cases of the partners is counseling. For the social workers from Balay counseling entails a variety of different activities. It is often the problems the individual partner articulates that the counseling will be directed towards. It can range from counseling regarding family issues or problems connected to their prison experience to concerns about legal matters or health.

Counseling in the field of social work is used in a rather broad term and can entail a variety of different approaches. Often the social worker will use counseling in an eclectic manner, and method of intervention is therefore chosen in accordance to the needs of the client (Brown 2009). This understanding seems to capture how Balay in their interaction with the partners make use of counseling. The partner is seen as the expert, and it is the role of the social worker from Balay, together with the individual partner, to come up with ways to deal with the problems they are facing. As one social worker said about her doing counseling:

*“the art is to listen and give options and let them decide about what to do about the problems*” (LG).

This understanding seems to correlate well with how social work is perceived from a reflexive-therapeutic angle.

During the time spent with Balay one type of what could be described as counseling have however seemed to occupy a central position. The judicial limbo (Jefferson 2011) most of the partners are in, creates a huge need for help in legal matters. When asking one partner about what the most important help Balay was providing him, he said that it was help in legal matters (TI2). Balay use a lot of effort in helping processing their partner’s cases through the often grindingly slow judicial system of the Philippines. They will sometimes accompany the partners when they have court hearings, plead their cases when possible and try to pressure the system to pace up the process. They have access to an attorney they occasionally make use of.

It was through the use of legal counseling that the staff from Balay noticed that talking about the cases with the partners also had a positive psychological effect on them. Being in judicial limbo created the need for the partners to be able to make sense of their current legal situation. The term psycho-legal was therefore implemented. The psycho-legal method entails that the law is seen as a therapeutic agent in itself (Agger et al. 2008). Having knowledge about the future plan in terms of for example court hearings seems to lessen the feeling of uncertainty. Also giving them an understanding of their rights and helping them make sense of the charges against them had a positive effect on their wellbeing. As studies also show, legally helping individuals in limbo can, at least partially, give them a sense of being in control (Germain and Vélez 2011).

However, it is difficult to say if Balay with their legal counseling succeeds in lessening the partner’s feelings of uncertainty. Although the partners did express that legal help is important, the dysfunctional and sometimes corrupt legal system in the Philippines makes it hard to predict or make any plans in terms of future legal matter. As such, Balay’s use of the term psycho-legal has to be sensitive to these matters, as it might be limited how much such a method is useful in a Philippine context.

However Balay’s engagement and commitment in helping with legal matter, even though the struggle can sometimes seem hopeless, sends a strong signal to the partners. Balay supports them, and is standing up for their rights. As a political prisoner in the Philippines, being supported that way is rare, and having the feeling of not being alone in their struggle might have a positive effect on their wellbeing.

Another central method they talk about is psycho-education. As described, most of the partners have been exposed to severe traumatic events in their past that have left both physical as well as psychological scars on their body. Psycho-education is a method used to help the subject make sense of the psychological, physical and social reactions to a traumatic event (Berliner and Mikkelsen 2006). This is done by normalizing the symptoms often accompanying the exposure to a traumatic event.

For the partners who have been tortured, problems such as sleep disorder, nightmares, flashback as well as irrational emotional outbursts are sometimes evident, and as such helping the partners in dealing with these might be useful. However, when it comes to psycho-education the dissonance between talking and doing seems quite prominent. During the time spent with Balay, both as an intern and during the fieldwork, I only bared witness to one formal session where the social worker conducted psycho-education. There also seems to have been some confusion as to what psycho-education is at Balay. During my internship at DIGNITY I was part of a retreat for the STOV team to discuss their work. Here it became quite evident that some of the staff members understood the term in different ways. Some had a quite broad definition of what psycho-education is, while others used it more in line with how it is defined in the literature (RS4). As such there is little evidence that psycho-education as a formal method is being used on a general basis at Balay.

One way of explaining why this is, is to examine the actual needs of the partners. During the time spent in the Prison there are very few incidents where past torture experiences seem to be brought up by the partners. This could be linked to the fact that it is a traumatic event which subjects have a tendency to want to suppress (Andersen and Levy 2009). However it might also tell us something about that, what matters for the partners, is not so much to deal with their past traumatic experiences, but rather to get help with present challenges and problems, especially connected to being imprisoned and their legal status. The social workers therefore do not use psycho-education much, simply because it is not what is needed of them the most.

The last aspect of the work Balay does on an individual level have to with the dealing of requests. Not many field visits has been conducted without any partners approaching the social worker requesting material or economical help. The nature of these requests can vary greatly. It can be anything from medicine, a new pair of glasses to money so that the family of the partner can afford to visit him in prison. As the resources of Balay are limited all of these requests cannot be approved. However, Balay does acknowledge that being in prison also means that the partners are economically and materially deprived. Often these matters are just as important for the partners as psycho-social interventions and as such Balay try to help the partners in these matters as best as they can. This understanding of social work seems to be positioned within what Payne define as the individualist-reformist view as it is about maintaining the partners during their time of imprisonment

Group level

Doing different activities in groups is regularly used by the social workers. Many of these activities are the same that are used on an individual level. As Balay is working with two different groups of prisoners, Muslims and leftists, the group sessions are mostly carried out with only participants from one group or the other. During my internship with DIGNITY I participated in a group sessions with the Muslims concerning their legal cases where each partner had the opportunity to share any updates or frustrations they might have concerning their ongoing trials (FN11). The underlying reason for the social worker to make use of group activities appears to be of a somewhat pragmatic nature. As Balay have many partners in the prison it can sometime be difficult for the social worker to attend to each and every one of them. Group sessions are less time consuming than individual counseling and make it possible for the social worker to interact with more partners. Another underlying assumption which can be said to be a part of why many social workers make use of group sessions is that bringing people together who, in some way or another, share circumstances or experiences is beneficial (Payne 2005: 48). It is certainly the belief of Balay that this is the case. Group work with the partners has the potential of creating a space where mutual experiences and values are recognized and shared. This can help in breaking down the barriers of isolation and loneliness for the participants (Ward 2009). This seems to make particular sense in the prison setting. Durkheim made use of the word *anomie* to describe the feeling of loneliness and alienation while among other people, which could be argued is part of what constitute the pains of imprisonment (Mazza 2008: 252).

Community level

Even though Balay does not work with the whole prison community as such, the livelihood projects they conduct are based on an understanding of the prison as a community. This activity usually involves partners from both the Muslim and leftist communities.

The livelihood programs are a big part of the work done in the prisons. During the fieldwork I participated in two livelihood activities. One concerned the making of soap while the other taught the partners to make jewelry, bags and purses out of beads that they then could sell to outsiders for a small profit. It was clear from attending these activities that the partners present were quite interested in learning these crafts. During one of these sessions the social worker brought with her a friend who had experience making jewelry out of beads. She brought samples with her and helped them in regards to economic questions (FN10). Balay also lend the partners money for beads that they were required to pay back when they had the money. These forms of micro-loans are quite normal for Balay to use as a way of supporting the partner community. Many of the partners problems revolves around them having very few economic resources and it is the aim of Balay that these projects can create an, although limited, sustainable income.

It could be argued that this reasoning is based on what in Payne’s model is termed the socialist-collectivist view and as such entails a form of empowerment approach to social work. Empowerment as a concept is considered rather fragmented and does not correspond with a single existing method and is therefore not easily applied in social work (Adams 2008: 4). A general way of defining empowerment is as building

*“the capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives.”* (Adams 2008: 17)

For the partners being able to support themselves seems to be of importance. I have several times experiences partners proudly showing off their crafting skills and products, and also try to sell them. Being able to craft sellable items also has the effect of giving the partners something meaningful to occupy their time with. As one partner during a livelihood workshop said

*“it is not only about the money, it is also so we don’t get bored”* (FN10)

Even though these livelihood projects only involve the partners of Balay and not the whole prison community, one social worker did express that it was the intention that the partners who had learned these skills would pass them on to other prisoners as well, so that everyone would benefit from the work that Balay is doing (FN10). The social worker also acknowledge that the partners are a part of a bigger prison community and although they do not have the capacity to help all the inmates they do, to some degree, incorporate reflections about how they can creating better conditions inside the prison, that everyone will benefit from, when planning activities with the partners.

As a last point the welfare assistance will be touched upon. A couple of times a year the partners receives food items as well as a small amount of cash. As mentioned, materialistic and economic deprivation is part of the partner’s prison experience and the need for food can sometimes be of importance. Balay recognize this need and try to accommodate it with the limited resources they have. The food is divided equally between all the partners. However there seems to be a general understanding inside the prison that you share what you have with everyone. As one Muslim partner said to me during a visit:

*“If you have open arms to share, the other will have open arms to share, if your arms are closed, their arms will also be closed (...). You must not become selfish, you are useless guy here if you are selfish.”* (TI2)

This logic seems to be shared by most inmates. That being unselfish is needed if you want to survive in the prison setting. As such the food program not only benefit the partners but also especially the Muslim and communist communities as a whole. Much as with the livelihood projects Balay is aware of the fact that the food given is often beneficial for the prison community.

### 5.1.2 Working with the different groups: Muslims, leftists and the prison authorities

As described in the context section there are some differences between the two groups of partners Balay is working with in the prison. These differences also have an impact on how Balay works with the two groups. Also the relation Balay has to the prison authorities needs to be unfolded as it is important for their work as well.

The topic regarding differences between the Muslims and the leftists came up during a reflexive seminar (RS3). Through the discussion a general picture of the nature of these differences started to take form. The main point was that the two groups are quite distinct in terms of what matters to them. For the Muslims the family is of big importance. As such counseling as well as informal conversations frequently revolves around family issues. Also the requests they turn in will often be about economic help to their families. That family is what matters most to many of the Muslims is also evident when walking around the Muslim quarter of the prison. As the visiting rules in this particular prison are quite lenient there will often be many visitors here, often family members. Sometimes you will hear a baby cry from one of the cells or see children running around the common area playing with a ball while the wife’s of the Muslim inmates are sitting on benches talking. Balay recognizes that the wellbeing of especially the Muslim partners is tightly connected to how their families are doing outside the prison, as well as their chance to see them. As a Muslim partner we interviewed said

*“(…) like I said before, the only diamond here in jail, is our family”* (TR2).

As many of the families are poor and live in the southern part of the Philippines they often do not have the means to travel to Manila. Balay will help financially so the Muslim inmates can have their family visiting them. Balay also help the family of the partners in other ways. They provide financial support, so the inmate’s children can get an education and every year they have a summer camp for all the children of the partners. They also do counseling with the families about the hardship of having a husband and a father in prison. The profound impact this has on the Muslims ability to deal with prison life was underpinned when an interviewed Muslim partner said that, the main reason for concern and stress inside the prison was not prison life itself but worries about his family (TR2).

For the leftists the priorities are different. For them it is the fight against what they perceive as an unjust system that is of importance. A fight they to some degree have taken with them inside the Prison. When interviewing them, they mostly talked about exposing corrupt wardens and complaining about poor living conditions inside the prison (TR1). For the social workers this means that the approach they have when working with the leftists is different than with the Muslims. One social worker explicated this, by arguing that the leftists have no interest in talking about their feelings, and conducting counseling targeting their emotional wellbeing. are of little use or interest to them (RS3).

For them it is mostly about their legal situation and that their human rights are not violated inside the prison. However when talking to the leftists they do not mention Balay when it comes to legal counseling. They get help from another NGO, Karapatan, which unlike Balay is political active and therefore more in line with the ideology of the leftists (TI1). As such, being apolitical in this situation seems to make it hard for Balay to connect with this group. This group also seems more or less indifferent about the material help Balay offers. As one leftist partner said about receiving goods from Balay:

*“sometimes we can get that but other times it is not the most important thing for us, there are more important things for us, number one the fight for justice and freedom - human rights”* (TI1)

It can be argued that what Balay is able to provide in terms of services match the needs of the Muslim partners more than the needs of the leftists. It is also often the Muslim partners that will hand in requests to the social workers, not the leftists. This does not mean that the leftist partners see no need for Balay, but their relation is different, and perhaps not as strong in the prison being focused on in this study as with the Muslim partners.

While the Muslims and the leftists are the main target groups the work of Balay cannot be understood without also mentioning their relation to the prison authorities. The closed nature of the prison setting requires that Balay has the support of the prison management, even just to be able to see the partners, as they are the gatekeepers.

“*In prison, the essence of advocacy is gaining access to the client” (Mazza 2008: 255).*

As such Balay is obliged to develop positive relations with the prison authorities. It can sometimes be a time consuming endeavor nurturing these relations to the authorities. In section two I describe how prison visits often entails meeting with the warden. This is one example of a routinely activity conducted with the aim of strengthening the relationship with the authorities. However, for Balay cultivating these relations are not only done for the sake of access or because it makes it easier for the social workers to get permission to conduct activities with the partners. It is also done as it allows them to lobby for change in terms of better prison conditions that does not only benefit their partners, but the prison as a whole. This understanding also fits well with their community program. Their overall approach to the prison authorities is in a sense quite strategic. They are aware of the importance of being in good terms with them, but they also do not hesitate to use the good-will generated to press for change. One example of this was the therapeutic community (TC) seminar held together with staff from the bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), which I attended during the internship at DIGNITY. The aim of this seminar was to further strengthen their relationship with the jail management but also to support the development of a TC program which could be implemented in the prisons.

As such Balay works with the prison authorities, not only when visiting the prisons, but also as part of a larger advocacy program aimed at effecting policy and rules that could be said to have a negative impact on not only their partner’s wellbeing but the prison community as a whole.

### 5.1.3 Intertwined roles

As unfolded above, the social workers from Balay make use of a variety of different tools and methods when working in the prison setting. However, it is very rare that these activities are conducted separated from each other. The social workers are constantly switching between different positions and roles when working. During one field visit where we were giving out food assistance to the partners I wrote\_

*“Suddenly I realize that the social worker have left her seat and is sitting at another table talking privately with one of the partners. On the way home we ask what they were talking about. She said that he was having problems with his wife who was kind of having an affair with a young guy. He was really distressed about it and was asking her for advice. Amazed of how many different “hats” the staff of Balay has to take on during one visit. One minute she is giving out food, the next she is taking requests about medicine, then she has to do some legal counselling and in the end she has to act as marriage councillor. It is not little that is required of the staff of Balay when going on field visits” (FN2)*

This particular incident is from another prison than the one being focussed on in this study, However, it is clear from analysing the data, that being able to navigating between different roles seems to occupy a central position in any of the prisons they work in.

It can be argued that having the skill to seamlessly change roles *on the go* is a requirement when working with a target group with as complex problems as the partners of Balay. Their work demands it. It can also be argued that it shows something about the conditions under which their work. As described earlier, much prison social work, especially in the west is specialised in the sense that it targets specific problem areas of the inmate’s lives[[18]](#footnote-18). For Balay this is not an option, or even desirable. There is no social safety net helping the partners with legal or health issues, and as such it falls to Balay to occupy these different roles, when interacting with the partners.

It also emphasizes their holistic approach as well as the understanding that it is the individual partner that is the expert in his own life. It is often the partners, and the problems they choose to share with the social worker that becomes the catalyst for these shifts in roles. During one prison visit this was quite apparent. The reason for the visit was never really explained to me by the social worker. I was told that we were to talk to the partners about different stuff. When we entered the prison a bench was placed outside an empty cell on the second floor. We sat down and waited. Not long after partners started to show up. They would stand patiently in line waiting for their turn to talk to the social worker. The first couple of partners were there to hand in different requests. One needed money for some medicine, another talked about buying books for his daughters’ education. The next one showed pictures of his daughters’ graduation. It was obvious that he was very proud. The social worker would take her time with each of the partners, listening, joking with them, having casual conversations or answer specific questions they had. The atmosphere was calm and friendly (FN9).

The understanding that the meeting between client (partner) and social worker should be based on mutual trust and recognition, and that the needs the clients articulate themselves should be the entry point when discussing possible interventions, is part of what some described as good social work practice (Høilund and Juul 2005). It entails that the social worker position herself curiously and open towards the client, not presuming to know what the best approach or course of action is.

Looking at social work and therapy through the lens of social constructivism the importance of understanding the client as an expert in his own life is of importance. Here the argument would be that knowledge is socially constructed and therefore fragmentary, context-dependent and local. How one perceives and makes sense of the world is thus tightly linked to the historic and social reality one is embedded in. For social workers this means being curious, aware and incorporate the perspective of the client as their interpretation of their life might be radically different than the social workers own presumptions. For the social worker from Balay this means that they have to be open towards the chaotic and unpredictable.

I see similarities between how the social worker from Balay meets the partners and the notion of positioning yourself *un-knowingly* when meeting the client (partner). The main point here is that the social worker, when meeting the client for the first time, will always only possess knowledge of the client that is of a general character. The social worker must be aware of this and ready to mentally abandon these preconceptions. She must consciously adopt a position of *un-knowing* (Blom 2009). For the social workers from Balay, meeting the partners un-knowingly is to a certain degree important every time she enters the prison. The dynamic nature of the prison setting and the ever changing problems and challenges the partners are facing, makes it difficult to predict or create some kind of static understanding of what matters to the partners. As such the uncertainty that in many ways define the partners prison experience continually challenge the social workers understanding of what the prison is really all about.

The uncertainty requires that the social worker is able to change the plan accordingly to the prison setting, and the needs of the partners. It was very rare that things went as planned on the field visits I participated in. A partner might show up with an urgent problem that needed attention or there would be problems inside the prison that the social worker had to deal with. It should however be argued that an *un-knowing* approach to social work is not only valid or important working in the prison setting. Working with people is per default a complex and dynamic practice that always entails uncertainty.

Another way of framing the encounter between the social worker from Balay and the partners is to make use of the term *reflection-in-action*. In his influential book Donald Schön describe how the modern western world has been greatly influenced by what he calls technical rationality. This form of rationality is based on the assumption that methods and theories in themselves will lead to the truth (Schön 1983). This discourse has especially made it hard for practitioners working with people to construct a new theory for the unique case (Schön 1983: 68). The argument is that using intuition, tacit knowledge and yourself when working with other people is of profound importance. It is through reflectivity and curiosity that a meaningful relationship is build – one that in the end can lead to positive change for the subject in need.

For the social workers at Balay seeing the uniqueness in each of the partners seems to hold a central position in their practice. They make use of general knowledge about the past of their partners, and the deteriorating effect prison life can have, but it is through face-to-face encounters with partners that knowledge about what matters to them is generated.

It could also be argued that their use of the term *partner* instead of the more formal *client* in many ways mimic this understanding. The relationship between Balay and the partners is to be understood as a partnership. What is connected to the term partnership is values such as respect and equality and as the discussion above shows, it is values as these, the work of Balay is founded on.

### 5.1.4 Relations as a tool

The ability to talk to a partner about past torture experiences one moment, and then the next have an informal friendly conversation must necessarily say something about the kind of relationship the social worker from Balay has with the partners. Most professionals working with people, from psychologists to social workers, would probably agree to some of the arguments posed in the last section. The encounter between client and helper always takes its departure in them meeting each other as human beings. The client does not see methods and theories when discussing his or her problems with the professional. The parameters the client use in terms of deciding if the help of the professional should be accepted is often of a much more relational nature.

For Balay this is also something they discuss. The understanding of the relations to the partners as a tool in itself has been part of how Balay have reflected upon their own practice. During one of the field visits I observed the following interaction between a Muslim partner and a staff member from Balay:

*“The partner is laughing saying that she (the female Balay staff) should convert to Islam and then he would help find her a man. The way it is said, I think he actually means that he will help find her a man inside the prison. She is laughing. I think it is great how they can make jokes like this with the partners. I mean the joke is not totally innocent in a sense so I would imagine that being able to joke like that requires a rather good relationship”* (FN1)

Another example of this was during a visit when a partner came up to the social worker requesting Viagra. He said that his wife was coming so he needed it. Both he and the social worker were laughing while having this conversation (FN9)

Incidents like these can be found in abundance when going through the field notes. The relation is not just professional in the sense that all interaction has some kind of therapeutic aim. The good relation in itself seems to be of importance, as it is as crucial a factor in the therapeutic relationship the social workers have with the partners, as what methods are used. As a staff member from Balay said about their relationship with the partners during one of the reflexive seminars:

*“You're a friend, you a counsellor, you are a social worker”* (RS2).

This quote seems to capture the essence of what prison social work is for Balay. It entails not only being a professional councillor. It also means developing a relation to the partners that sometimes transcends the professional boarder and become almost a friendship.

With this understanding Balay seems to position themselves closely to Psychologist Carl Rogers who argued that theoretical models and methods are futile and inconsequential:

*The most they can accomplish is some temporary change which soon disappears (…). The failure of any such approaches (…) has forced me to recognise that change comes about through experience in a relationship”* (Rogers 1967: 33)

This understanding resonate well with social constructionism, where the understanding that social problems are created through social relations also hints at the idea that it is through relations that positive change can occur. It is very much such a conviction that seems to be evident, when observing the practice of Balay’s social workers.

The above examples of informal encounters between Balay and the partners also highlight a concrete aspect of their relationship – humour. Being able to laugh together and making jokes about each other in a friendly manner seems to play a vital role in the interaction between social worker and partners. How to understand the role of humour in social relations is complex. In an article about humour in prisons the author regards humour as

*“a dynamic social device with transformative potential; a device that may shape social positioning, interaction and social structure and that may transform the real into the unreal.” (Nielsen 2011: 502).*

With this understanding in mind the sometimes humorous back and forth play between the social worker and partner is part of what constitute their relationship. It also gives both the partner and the social worker the opportunity to discuss real matters in an unreal way. There was no doubt about the partner wanting the Viagra, but by framing the request as a joke he was able to deliver the request to the social worker without having to deal with such a sensitive topic in a real and formal way. The social worker responded by, on the surface, categorizing it as a joke, but also she was well aware of the fact that he meant it. This form of *humorous dance* often occurs between the social worker and partners, where very real matters are dealt with in an unreal way.

The informal conversations are often situated around the sharing of food. The social worker from Balay will often bring food when visiting the prison and share it with the partners during lunch time. Here small talk and jokes will be heard around the table. It has usually been during these moments that I would sometimes forget that I was sitting in a prison. The giving and sharing of food, which in many cultures has symbolic values, has been found to also have a significant meaning in prisons (Godderis 2006;Valentine and Longstaff 1998). The partners often used the term *casalo* which for them was the act of sharing food and eating it together (TI2). As discussed access to food is often limited for inmates and as such sharing and giving food becomes an important and symbolic ritual. For the partners, sharing food with the social worker therefore seems to be just as much a part of being a partner as doing the formal activities.

As the above discussion shows, it seems as if the informal encounters between the social worker and the partners play a pivotal role in establishing the somewhat intimate relationship they have. However, when discussing their practice with Balay the informal aspect rarely became a topic. This is somewhat striking considering how much time is being used on these informal activities during prison visits. I am hesitant to argue that the reason for this is that the social workers of Balay do not attribute meaning to informal encounters with the partners. Rather it should be seen as a taken for granted and tacit form of knowledge that eating together with the partners and sometimes just talking to them, without any formal therapeutic aim, is needed if a relationship based on trust and recognition is to be developed.

Being able to engage the partners in an informal way, to joke with them, and gain their confidence and trust must necessarily require relational skills. These can hardly be learned only from books or theories. They are of a much more subtle nature in the sense that they are often tacit and inexplicable, much as Schön describe reflection-in-action. Mørck and Nissen make use of the term *anti-method* when analysing how a specific street level social worker works with young street children in a vulnerable area in Denmark (Mørck and Nissen 2001). Their use of the term *anti-method* does not imply that the social worker refrain from using methods and theories all together, rather it suggests a conscious choice to not objectify clients through the use of standardised methods. The social worker in the specific context matters much more than the use of abstract knowledge (Mørck and Nissen 2001:36).

This understanding is similar to what the data shows. The social workers have been able to develop the close relationship with the partners, not because they are social workers or because they have extensive theoretical knowledge, but because *they are who they are*. Although the social workers cater to their need in a variety of different ways, the almost friend-like relationship has been established because the partners simply like them. This understanding does however not mean that the reason why they are liked can be boiled down to personal qualities. Being able to work with the partners in such a close way is a skill that has been taught through their work. It is learning by doing process and as can characterized as a form of practical knowledge (Närhi 2002).

The close relationship between social worker and partner raises some important questions regarding social work professionalism. During the fieldwork, situations occurred, where there seemed to be some clashes between how the social workers were behaving and what could be described as professionalism, especially in a western context. The popular notion of professionalism in social work has to a large degree revolved around empiricism, instrumental reasoning and objectivity (Leung 2010). As Fook so rightfully puts it:

*“The rationale for professional objectivity may be the belief that clients are best helped by someone they see as a respected authority who is not emotionally involved with them. Like many functional myths, this has true and false components” (Fook 1993: 63)*.

Looking at the practice of Balay with this understanding of professionalism in mind it seems difficult to argue that they are acting in a professional way. They are constantly breaking down the gap between the client and the helper by being emotionally attached and by persistently pursuing a relationship based on equality and confidentiality.

However a more postmodern view stretches the boundaries for what professionalism is, as it acknowledges that we are fundamentally social beings, and always intertwined with the world which we live in. As such social workers could be said to move along a continuum between the role of an expert at one end, and a friend in the other. The position the social worker chose is deliberate and influenced by the context and the concrete situation (Green et al. 2006).

This understanding correlates better with what define professionalism at Balay. Being able to attend to the needs of the partners demands a certain kind of relationship where the boundaries between being the professional expert and in lack of better word, friend, is blurred and dynamic. The reason why the term friend might not be the best one to use, is that although the social workers seem to emotionally involve themselves in the lives of the partners, they still maintain some boundaries concerning how much they involve the partners in their lives. It was very rare to hear the social workers disclose much information about their lives with the partners. As such the client/helper dichotomy is maintained as the relation revolves the needs of the partners.

The staff of Balay is aware of the challenges connected to having such a close relationship with the partners. During the first reflexive seminar quotes from the fieldwork was presented as a way of raising interesting topics about the practice of Balay. In one of the quotes an inmate speaks very fondly about Balay, and especially one of the social workers, saying that they are like family to him (RS2). The social worker he mentioned responded very emotionally saying that she was overwhelmed. She however also said that

*“It is the mandate but we still have the boundaries that are important in the helping profession, but then again (…) clinical social work only does counselling for one hour. I don't do that – i also let them unload and such”* (RS2)

On one hand she seems to argue that having a close relationship with the partners and letting them unload is important, on the other hand she also mention the boundaries important in the helping profession and as such also touch on the dilemma of what professionalism is.

The supervisor responded in a similar way when she said that

*“We should not look at it in a negative way but we need to be cautious. One on hand I am really happy to hear that but also cautious about it. (…). Our relationship with them is not only professional.”* (RS2)

Here she quite clearly states that it is her belief that especially the social worker sometimes cross the boundaries in terms of professionalism and that they need to be cautious of that. In some literature concerning ethical issues in mental health professions, the term *dual-relationship* is used as a way of describing a situation where multiple roles exist between the therapist and client (Johner 2006). This is to a large degree seen as something to be avoided, as it can create ethical conflicts such as co-dependency. These issues are also of importance to Balay as their often close relationship with the partners demands that they are constantly assessing the ethical challenges connected to this approach.

However, as some practitioners and researchers have voiced, creating connections with clients that in some ways resemble that of a *dual-relationship* is sometimes unavoidable (Halverson and Brownlee 2010)*.* This seems to be the case in the prison setting. The kind of social work they are doing demands flexibility in terms of how professionalism is perceived. The needs of the partners is not to have an objective distanced social worker but rather to have somebody they can confide in and who in earnest shows compassion. Being a political prisoner in the Philippines, entails that you are objectified, as a prisoner, and often a terrorist. Having a relation to an organisation and social workers that treats you as a subject with rights and value is therefore a rarity that is treasured, as it is often only the families of the partners that show any concern for their wellbeing.

### 5.1.5 Knowledge and action – intertwined concepts at Balay

The last aspect I want to touch upon has to do with the different kinds of knowledge the practice of Balay is based on. Theory of knowledge is not only relevant and important to philosophers and alike who originally have been interested in this concept. Also Social scientists as well as practitioners, working in the field can benefit from reflecting upon their own knowledge, what constitute it, and how it is shared between subjects or groups as it has a profound impact on the actions we choose to take.

Based on the analysis above it could be argued that the theoretical knowledge that Balay make use off is of an eclectic nature, as they make use of a variety of different methods and theories when working with the partners. It is widely accepted that an eclectic approach is what most social work is based on (Payne 2005: 31). The analysis also points to the understanding that a bulky part of what constitute the knowledge the social worker rely on, is in fact not based on theories but on what could be described as relational-bound knowledge (Blom 2009). It is through the relation with the partners and their encounter with the prison setting that much of the knowledge they make use off is generated.

A good example of this dialectic relationship between practice and the theory is their use of the term *psycho-legal* which was discussed earlier in this section. What they had noticed, and apparently discussed at length was that the partners benefited positively psychologically from talking about their cases. They wanted to explore this notion further and during the internship with DIGNITY I was tasked to find literature about this topic and present it to them so they could further evolve their practice in this direction. Although as argued, there are limits to this approach, the example is still valid. It is often through practice and the use of contextual knowledge that Balay’s work methods are developed.

This understanding of the relationship between action and learning is quite different than how these aspects to a large degree have been perceived as dichotomous. Learning has mostly been connected to the educational system while practice has been seen as the place where this gained knowledge is put to use (Kvale and Nielsen 1999). However a more postmodern understanding of this relationship has emerged as a counter theory. In their work, concerning what they describe as situated learning, Lave and Wenger argue that learning is always present in social situations. As such the development of knowledge takes place through social co-participation (Lave and Wenger 1991). This understanding is much in line with social constructionism. Learning becomes an everyday activity, and a feature of the practices we engage in. It is situated, as the knowledge we generate through participating in different social practices is linked to the specific context in which it is embedded. The prison can be viewed as such a specific context. It is through the social workers engagement with the partners and the prison setting that the co-generation of much of the knowledge the social worker makes use of in her daily practices, takes place.

In the literature regarding what kind of knowledge social work is based on, similar arguments have been posed. Nygren and Soydan writes that:

*Social work is considered to be an activity that is not and cannot be based on book knowledge. Its success depends on personal talent, and it can be taught through learning by doing and by imitating experienced social workers.” (Nygren and Soydan 1997: 218)*

Here it also becomes evident that much of what constitutes the knowledge social work is based on is of a situated and practical nature. Being a successful social worker requires talent that is acquired through *doing* social work. Just like the social worker from Balay learns to navigate the prison setting from going there.

### 5.1.6 Partial conclusion

In the above analysis the aim has been to answer the first research question

Through the use of empirical findings the dissonance between what Balay say they do and what they actually do when working in the prison is illustrated. While they often talk about therapy and psycho-education, the use of these methods are not that evident when taking a closer look at the situated practice of Balay. One way of making sense of this is by looking at the needs of the partners, as they are often of another kind, that what for instance psycho-education caters to.

It is also discussed how Balay works on different levels, ranging from the individual to the community level. However the complexity of their work only really first becomes apparent when looking at how the social worker is required to be able to perform and act in many different roles, from marriage counselor to nurse, to friend. All depending on the needs of the partners. The social worker seems to position herself un-knowingly towards the individual partner as a way of acknowledging the unpredictableness of working with people.

The ability to shift between these different roles seems to be tightly connected to the close relationship the social workers has with the partners. The term *anti-method* and *reflection-in-action* is used to highlight the almost embodied aspect of their work, as the ability to connect with the partners seem to derive more from intuition and tacit knowledge gained through their practice, than from abstract theories. However, the close relationship with the partners creates some ethical dilemmas in terms of professionalism and boundaries that the social workers must be aware of.

Being able to perform in different roles as well as having the skills in navigating the prison setting requires that the social worker makes use of different kinds of knowledge, from theoretical to situational knowledge generated through practice. It is arguable the situated form of knowledge which emerges as the most visible one when analyzing the actual practice of Balay.

# 6.0 Analysis – part three – section two

This section revolves around the second research question

***What are the obstacles, challenges and dilemmas the social workers are confronted with working with this target group in the prison setting?***

Like the first part of the analysis it will be structured around the empirical findings. As such different themes connected to the challenges the social worker face in the prison setting have been identified, and it is these that will be unfolded and analysed in this section. The themes chosen are all connected to the prison context specifically, and as such I do not claim that the discussions I raise, exhaustively deals with all the challenges Balay face in their work. In a broader scope, many more general dilemmas and challenges can be said to be connected to the practice of social work. For example different forms of ethical dilemmas are often raised as an important aspect to reflect upon when doing social work, no matter the context (Goldstein 1998).

## 6.1 Navigating prison space

The first theme I want to explore has to do with the prison architecture. Both the physical space as well as the effects this can have on the ordering of the people living inside the prison can at times prove challenging for the social worker.

The question about how the physical structure of the prison affects the work of the social worker was brought up during a reflexive seminar. Here the social worker argued that a main problem is that it can be hard to find private places to conduct the activities with the partners (RS3). Sometimes rather sensitive topics are to be discussed, and sitting on a couple of benches on one of the hallways with other inmates walking by, is therefore not an option. Often the partners will help in finding a vacant cell. There are a couple of cells that are used for different activities but I experienced several times during visits that these were occupied. During one visit a barber shop had been set up for the inmates, and another time computer lessons were taking place. Also the problems with overcrowding could be said to further enhance the challenges in finding space where activities can be conducted.

When a vacant cell has been found, the problems with noise and commotion are still present. Often curious inmates will be observing the social worker conducting the activity from outside the cell. All this together creates a less than ideal environment for the social worker to be able to conduct the activities. This is especially true when it comes to discussions regarding sensitive topics. When I asked if the social workers thought that the partners would sometimes refrain from talking about certain issues, because of the activities being conducted in such a chaotic setting, they said that they did not know.

It is however possible to argue that the physical space does have an impact on the encounter between a professional, working with people, and the clients. A quiet and calm atmosphere is preferable, as it creates better opportunities for deep reflections. For instance conducting therapy in a bus among other passengers seems highly inappropriate, but that is to some extent the kind of environment the social worker from Balay is working in. The term sociofugality is useful here, as it encapsulate the understanding of a physical space that enhance alienation, isolation and works against the formation of interpersonal relations (Mazza 2008;Sommer 1967). This notion of the prison as a sociofugal space is not only valid when discussing the challenges Balay face when conducting activities with the partners, it can also be said to reflect what partly constitutes the pains of imprisonment for the partners themselves.

Another dilemma the social workers sometimes meet, related to the architecture, is of a somewhat more precarious nature. The first visit with a social worker to the prison this study is about was conducted with the aim of delivering food to all of the partners (FN1). When we entered the prison compound it was discussed where and how we should do this. The first option was to do it inside the prison in the common area. However, it was clear that the social worker did not approve of this idea. She said that bringing all of the food inside the prison could be the source of envy from the other prisoners. As discussed earlier, food has both symbolic as well as a real value inside the prison, and bringing in 45 bags of food for the partners was certain to be noticed by every inmate. It was therefore decided, with the approval from the warden, to conduct the activity in the same building that the warden’s office is in.

This decision had other implications. The room we were allowed to use is connected to the warden’s office, and as the walls are very thin the warden was able overhear what was being said. Also guards were constantly moving in and out of the room. This also posed a dilemma as it challenged the partners right to confidentiality. As discussed in the last section, the social worker often has to switch between roles, and the activity of handing out food often also entails more private conversations between the partners and the social worker. The partners might choose not to share sensitive information with the social worker under such circumstances, because of the risk of either guards or the warden also hearing it. For the social worker, the decision was therefore not easy as both choices had consequences.

Situations like these points to how very concrete problems for the social worker suddenly emerge as ethical dilemmas. In the example above, the social worker decided that the chance of having the partners confidentiality violated was more acceptable than the possibility of creating dispute and envy in the prisoner community. When I later asked the social worker why she chose as she chose, she smiled, shrugged and just said it was the best option (FN1).

Again we are confronted with the question about what kind of knowledge the social worker makes use of when navigating the prison context. In the last section I argue, with the use of the terms *reflection-in action* and *anti-method* that much of the knowledge the social worker makes use of is tacit and intuitive in its nature, and is generated through practice. In light of this understanding the, on the surface, empty response from the social worker can be seen as her struggling with explicating knowledge that for her is somewhat self-evident. There will probably be many other opportunities in the near future for the partners to be able to disclose sensitive information to the social worker, but the chance of creating dispute inside the prison could have very real consequences for the partners here and now.

The two examples discussed above relates to a much broader dilemma in social worker concerning confidentiality. As a social worker, one of the core responsibilities is to safeguard the confidentiality of the client, and many ethical dilemmas embedded in the profession has to do with this issue (Millstein 2000). However in the prison, where forced intimacy is always an issue, and where surveillance is of ever present concern, the ethical dilemmas regarding confidentiality become quite visible.

Other challenge arises due to the security issues that are always connected to prisons. The prison being focused on in this study is visibly divided into different sections compared to other prisons visited, where the inmates were able to move around more freely. All sections in this prison are divided through locked doors, and getting around as a social worker therefore entails constant help from a guard with keys. For the inmates, getting around is even more troublesome, as they do not possess the same privileges in terms of free movement as the guards or even the social workers. Conducting activities with partners from more than one section can therefore at times be challenging. Having them all gathered can take time, as a guard will have to help locate the partners in the different sections, and then escort them to the social worker through the locked doors. Sometimes this procedure is smooth while other times, for one reason or another, it can prove problematic.

These problems can be related to the understanding of Fiddler who argue there is a certain paradox in the way prisons are structured (Fiddler 2010: 5). One on hand they are remarkably simple. The layout is often quite easy to grasp and the boundaries between prison and the outside world are easily defined. However how one is able to navigate the prison setting is to a large degree connected to one’s role. The architecture, the iron doors and locks have different meanings depending on who you ask. As such how people occupy and move around behind the prison walls vary greatly. This also holds true for this particular prison. Within two minutes of being there you are able to understand its layouts, but the locks and gates create a complex maze one has to go through when moving around.

The rigid division between the different floors and sections in this prison also creates challenges in terms of Balay’s focus on community building. As discussed, Balay is very much aware of the partners being a part of a bigger community, and that the wellbeing of the partners is greatly influenced by how the relational aspect of the prisoner community as a whole functions. However, as one staff member from Balay said during a meeting, it is quite hard to do community work in a prison where the different groups of inmates have so little interaction with each other (RS3). Therefore there have been discussions about how to understand community work in this particular prison. Balay does have the opportunity to conduct activities with partners from different sections (the Muslims and leftist), but what is debated is if this has any effect on building up the prisoner community when they in their daily routines are so divided and rarely in contact with each other.

## 6.2 In the crossfire

The social workers not only have to navigate a complex physical space when working in the prison. Also the relational aspect can at times be challenging.

As argued earlier there are some profound differences between the values normally associated to social work and the values connected to prisons, often explicated through rules. These institutions are per definition confined spaces with a heavy focus on security and control. This creates an environment, where the differences between the rules made by the prison authorities and the needs of the partners, are explicit and very much in opposition to each other. The social worker is sometimes caught in the crossfire between these different groups and understandings.

An example of this occurred during a visit to the prison. The social worker had used a couple of hours talking to different partners about their cases, and a range of other problems they chose to share with her. It was around lunchtime and excruciating hot so we decided to leave the premises to eat. While we were eating the social worker shared that she was facing a dilemma. Some of the partners had asked her for food that they could sell for a small profit to other inmates. Although as mentioned, food is sold inside the prison, it is regulated by the administration and it would be against the rules for her to bring in food to them, well knowing that they had the intention of selling it. She said she wanted to help them. This particular group of partners were already having a hard time inside the prison, due to problems with the warden. On the other hand going against the rules of the prison could jeopardize the good relationship with the warden which would most certainly have some kind of consequences. She did not know what to do (FN9).

Having to deal with situations like these is part of being a social worker from Balay. In this particular case no decision was made while I was there, but the dilemma remains. Does the social worker choose to help the partners, which is the choice most in line with her own wish and her ethical responsibility as a social worker, or does she *play it safe* and say no because getting caught could make her future work in the prison harder.

Much has been written about the “crossfire” social workers occasionally find themselves in between the institutional norms and rules they are working under, and the needs of their clients. It is a core theme when it comes to dilemmas and challenges social workers face, and as such it transcends boarders and contexts. In most social work the concept of advocacy implies standing up for the rights of the client. However, the nature of the prison setting and the importance of staying on good terms with the prison authorities sometimes makes this difficult (Mazza 2008).

Lipsky writes about this dilemma using the term street-level bureaucrats. These are the front line professions, who are employed by the government, and who through their title have daily interaction with other citizens, such as social workers or the police do. One of his main points is that the street-level bureaucrats are often caught between ambiguous, contradictory and sometimes unattainable role expectations and that the way the individual professional cope with this issue becomes part of the actual practice (Lipsky 1969: 7). These contradictory expectations emerge as the professional is often caught between institutional and political demands on one side, and the demands of the subjects who the professional is meant to be serving on the other.

Juul makes a similar claim when he argues that the *actual judgment* the social worker make use off when meeting the client is influenced by both a *personal judgment* as well as an *institutional judgment (Juul 2010: 354)*. The term *personal judgment* is used as a way of capturing the individuals own ethical and moral convictions, which for a social worker is often connected to the profession itself. However it is rare that the individual social worker is able to act freely upon these convictions in their work, as rules and regulations from above (*institutional judgment*) often prescribe certain ways of acting that the social worker has to follow.

For the social worker in the example above, it was clear that her *personal judgment* is quite different than the one being dictated from the prison management, and as such she felt caught in an ethical crossfire between these.

Although the use of both Lipsky and Juul’s terms highlights some of the dilemmas connected to working in the prison setting, they do fall somewhat short of being able to capture the uniqueness of the challenges connected to the prison social work of Balay. For the social worker from Balay the demands and rules dictated from above are personified to a much larger degree than when Juul makes use of the term *institutional judgment*. Here the pressure from above is seen as deriving mostly from political discourses, institutional values and rules as well as law. These are somewhat more abstract forms of pressure than the social worker from Balay faces. Here the warden is always present, guards roam the prison hallways, and cameras are picking up every move the social worker makes. To make a bold argument, it could be compared to a situation in Denmark where the social worker’s superiors were always present in the room when the social worker had meetings with clients. This comparison also points to how the stakes are sometimes far greater for Balay and the social workers working in the prison setting than it is for many social workers in other areas. As discussed the relation Balay has to the prison authorities plays a vital part for their work and a worst case scenario for them is being denied access to the prison.

It is not always that the dilemmas connected to being in the crossfire are as clear cut as the above example. Often the dilemmas are of a more ambiguous nature as they are not merely about following or not following the rules. Inside the prison rules can sometimes be interpreted in different ways, sometimes they can be avoided by finding loopholes or changed if one has enough leverage. As one author argue, using Lipskys terminology:

*“More interesting is the way in which street-level bureaucrats use and interpret those rules and constraints that are externally imposed upon them to achieve their preferred ends. That is, they use the spaces between and the ambiguities within rules and systems to serve their clients in ways that might not always be strictly within the rules” (Rowe 2012: 11)*

The social workers at Balay often cope with the restrictions to their work the prison itself enacts, by being almost cunning at times, and poses what could be called *street-smarts*. Being *street-smart* alsoimply that the social worker make good use of the resources available.

One clear example of this emerged during a visit conducting a livelihood project. Here the social worker had brought a friend who helped facilitate the activity as she had knowledge about how to create jewelry and bags out of beads. After the activity had ended we went to see the warden. Here another reason for the social worker to have brought the friend came apparent, as the warden needed some help. The social worker’s friend worked at city hall, and was tasked to deliver a letter from the warden to some of her superiors. The warden needed permission to set up a tent outside the prison, presumably for the family members of the inmates who come to visit (FN10).

The social worker in this example made use of personal contacts in her prison work. She was able to not only receive help for the workshop, but also to strengthen the relationship with the warden. It is a clear argument that it is not atypical for the staff of Balay to use personal resources if it is deemed useful. The boundaries between personal life and their professional role seem to be less static than what would generally be deemed as professional. This emphasizes their personal commitment to their job. They are sometimes willing to go above and beyond duty in their pursuit to bring about change and to support their partners. This is not said to glorify the staff of Balay, but to highlight how working in the prison setting requires a personal investment.

Again we are also confronted with the question about what kind of knowledge the practice of Balay is based on. It seems highly unlikely that the skill of being cunning, knowing how and when to use your resources can be taught in a classroom or from books. It is a skill that requires intimate knowledge about that particular prison setting. The theory touched upon in the last section, regarding how much of the knowledge we make use of in our daily life is situated and generated through actions, again seems to be valid (Lave and Wenger 1991). The ability to be cunning and using the resources at your disposal in a productive way is also influenced by the relations you have with the different groups. As such it also becomes a skill of building relations, and through that generate knowledge about the different groups that can be used in practice.

The social worker who was implicated in the dilemma above, have a reputation at Balay of being particular good at working with especially the prison authorities. Not because she is a social worker but because she has the *know-how* and *know-who*. Through her time spent in the prison she has gained an almost intuitive understanding of how best to navigate the prison setting. It is a form of situated knowledge that is not easily explicated and as such tacit in nature. The term *anti-method* comes to mind in this regard, as it clearly capture the understanding of the *person in practice* as important to look at, when it comes to understanding why social workers do as they do (Mørck and Nissen 2001).

## 6.3 Being friends with everybody

It is not only between the social worker and the prison management that, what could be described as relational dilemmas and challenges arises. Sometimes the different groups inside the prison, their convictions and different understandings of what the truth is collide. As Balay’s work is often situated in the interface between these groups, questions about neutrality and how to intervene without compromising the good relationship with the different groups arise.

Just before the fieldwork was conducted a large scale conflict broke out inside the prison. The leftist group had sent a complaint to the department of Justice, the Commission on Human Rights as well as the National Headquarter for Jail Management. The complaint was mostly about, what they perceived to be an unjust treatment of them in the justice system. However the complaint also entailed a section regarding lack of nutritious food inside the prison. They claimed that they were not getting the amount of food they were entitled too. Because of these accusations, inspection visits were made from the different organizations the complaint had been sent to.

Although no action was taken against the management it did became the catalyst for dispute between different groups inside the prison. The warden was angry as his ability to govern the prison as well as his authority got threatened. Because of this he denied the prisoners some of the privileges he had given them, for example concerning flexible visiting hours, which the Muslims were especially happy about. As such also friction between the leftists and the other groups of inmates became a reality, and while we were there the leftist group had pretty much been isolated. They had very little contact with either the warden or the other groups. The Muslims said that they understood the leftists and their cause, but that they did not support it. Both the Muslims and the warden warned that this problem could have a violent outcome as especially the gangs showed very little understanding for the leftist’s point of view (FN3, TI2).

Balay was very much aware of the problems the complaint had created and that it potentially could lead to violence if the matters further escalated. It was however not an easy problem to solve, as Balay was caught between the different groups. On one hand there was the leftist. As argued earlier, much of what matters to them are legal matters and their ideological fight for justice, and supporting them in the complaint could be one way of strengthening the relationship Balay have with this group. On the other hand there were the Muslim partners, who value privileges more than the fight against a warden. It was not that they disputed the truthiness of the complaint, but the chance of losing their privileges was a too great a risk to take (TI2). At the same time Balay also had to take into account the warden and his position of power.

To bring forth Berger and Luckmann, these different groups behind the prison walls constitute different sub-universes, as they function accordingly to their different internal logics (Berger and Luckmann 1966). It is very much possible for different sub-universes to co-exist, as long as they are able to maintain their own boundaries. However, the prison setting creates a space of forced intimacy, where the wellbeing of one group is intimately linked with the others. As such the sub-universes are constantly entangled and colliding as they struggle to position themselves as favorable as possible. It is between these different sub-universes that Balay has to navigate when working in the prison setting.

Both during a reflexive seminar as well as a field visit the issue with the complaint was brought up (RS3, FN9). Both social workers as well as a supervisor expressed a wish to intervene and help reestablish a positive relation between the different groups. As Balay recognize the importance of a stabile prison community, taking action in such a case as this could be seen as an important part of their work. However in this case, the difficulty of the matter caused problems. No action was taken during the time the fieldwork was conducted. One explanation of why nothing was done could be that the complexity of the dilemma incapacitated Balay and the social workers. They simply did not know what to do. Another understanding is that they choose not to intervene as they deemed it better to stay neutral in this matter. Getting involved would be too risky and ultimately could compromise their relationship with one or more of the different groups. Knowing Balay it could be argued that the answer is to be found somewhere in between the two above. They did feel incapacitated which lead them to actively deciding not to get involved.

However, sometimes situations occur where the position of Balay is compromised. These situations often arise because of how Balay is put in a position where they more or less have to stay friends with everybody inside the prison walls.

During a reflexive seminar a discussion about the challenges in having to navigate between the different groups behind the prison walls were discussed (RS3). One staff member related an incident during a prison visit where she found herself in a rather awkward position. She was meeting with a female warden in her office when suddenly some of Balay’s partners walked in, as they had some issues they needed to discuss with her. She knew the warden quite well, who ended up greeting her with a hug and kiss on the cheek. This made her quite uncomfortable as she was afraid of what the partners were thinking. Did they see it as a sign that Balay is more loyal towards the prison management than to them, and could that potentially lead to them not trusting the staff of Balay anymore?

Although I have no basis for claiming that these kinds of situations occurs regularly, this example, like the other ones in this section, does speak to general dilemmas and challenges for Balay. It becomes clear that working in the interface between the partners and the prison administration is a delicate affair. It requires that the social worker stays more or less friends with everyone. This is less of an issue when the different groups are divided, so that the social worker can change roles accordingly to the situation. However in this example the staff member was caught in a situation where she against her will was positioned as something resembling a friend of the warden in the presence of the partners.

One of the strengths of Balay is that they by the partners are perceived as outsider, and as such not a part of the prison system. As discussed, prisons are characterized by being low-trust environments, and in a general sense the aversion many inmates have against the prison system and the people working in it makes it easier for outsiders to gain the trust of inmates than people already in the system (Mazza 2008). This is as touched upon earlier an issue that social workers in the west are often confronted with, as they are employed by the government. Balay’s position as an outsider is different, and they have used that leverage when building up relations to the partners.

However this position can be challenged. The fine line Balay always has to walk between helping the partners and advocating for their rights and staying on good terms with the prison authorities is an ever present challenge. One interesting point here are the similarities between the challenges conducting fieldwork in prisons as discussed in chapter two, and the problems Balay seems to have. Much as the researcher has to perform in different roles depending on the situation, so does Balay. This is as argued a skill that can be learned through action. However the entanglement of the sub-universes behind the barbed wired walls makes it impossible not to experience situations where *role-confusion* arise.

## 6.4 Partial conclusion

In this section the aim has been to answer the second research question by highlight some of the most prominent challenges and dilemmas Balay faces working in the prison setting. The first part deals with the physical aspect of the prison. Although it could be argued that all social work practiced in different context to some degree is challenged by the physical space itself, very few places creates as profound dilemmas and challenges as the prison building. Challenges in finding space to conduct activities as well as ethical reflections about confidentiality are too some extent connected to the physical space itself.

However it is not only the physical aspect that can cause problems inside the prison, as the social worker sometimes finds herself in the crossfire between the need of the partners and the rules dictated by the prison authorities. Much the same as Lipsky argue that *street level bureaucrats* often are. Being able to handle such dilemmas requires intimate knowledge about the prison setting and the different groups, living or working behind its walls. This knowledge constitutes what is termed *street-smarts*. The example with the social worker bringing with her a friend to help with the workshop and the request from the warden to the city hall is an example of how generated knowledge about the prison setting and the needs of the different groups is used. It also highlights how the social workers make use of person resources in their line of work.

The section ends with a discussion about the importance for Balay to stay on good terms with the different groups. The challenges concerning this are emphasized through the use of two examples. The first, about the complaint, shows how internal disputes in the prison sometimes can almost incapacitate Balay as taking sides or even trying to mediate between the different groups is a complex affair. The second example highlights how Balay is always required to walk the fine line between advocating for and helping the partners and at the same time staying on good terms with the prison authorities. However sometimes incidents occurs where these two different roles are entangles which can prove challenging for Balay to handle.

Chapter four

Conclusion

#  7.0 Conclusion

Standing here at the end of the road traveled, it is time to reflect upon what we can take with us from studying the practice of Balay. How can the findings generated in this study be of use in the larger scope of things? To answer this question it might be wise to start at the beginning.

The aim has been, through an action research methodology, to generate knowledge together with Balay, that somehow reflects what a human rights organization working in a Philippine prison with political prisoners actually do. The analysis itself have been framed around the research questions posed in chapter one.

***How do the social workers from the human rights organization Balay work with survivors of torture in a specific prison in Manila?***

***and***

***What are the obstacles, challenges and dilemmas the social workers are confronted with working with this target group in the prison setting?***

Through the use of examples taking from the data generated during the fieldwork, the complexity which to large degree defines Balay’s practice in the prison setting has been unfolded. The different methods that Balay makes use off have been discussed, and here it is shown how the social workers make use of a variety of different methods and skills when working in the prison. The first aspect discussed could be defined as the concrete methods used when working with individuals, groups and with the partners as part of a larger prison community. Central methods used are here counseling, case management and different livelihood projects. Even though these methods are quite diverse in terms of aim and execution they are too some degree founded on an already established theoretical and methodological framework that social workers in many different contexts makes use off. The dissonance between their actual work methods and how they talk about their practice has also been touched upon. As discussed in chapter one these differences have been a catalyst in terms of the development of the research questions. As a way of making sense of these differences it has been discussed how the needs of the partners are often of a different and much more relational nature, and as such the use of objectifying methods and theories are referred to the back seat in the encounter between the social workers and the partners.

By digging deeper it is unfolded how much of the practice of Balay is based on knowledge of a much more subtle character. The ability to be able to change roles accordingly to the needs of the partners is here of importance. Also much of the knowledge they seem to make use of when working in the prison setting seems to be situated and intertwined with practice. It is relationally bound, generated though their encounter with the partners and the prison setting. It is embodied and often tacit of nature.

The analysis of the social workers relations to the partners also highlighted important aspects of their practice. By actively choosing not to objectify the partners through the use of methods and theories they are able to create a rather informal and close bond with the partners. It is perhaps here we find our first, in lack of better words, lesson to take with us as we leave the work of behind Balay behind us. The use of methods and theories does not in itself create better social work. Juul argue that the dominant political and institutional discourse in the post-modern society is a form of *instrumental judgment* where the implementation of standardized tools and methods has become a goal in itself (Juul 2010: 273-280). Much as Schön does when he makes use of the term technical rationality (Schön 1983)

This discourse has also dominated the field of care professions and the practice of social workers and alike is often dictated by rules and supervision. This allows very little space for the social worker to meet the client as a unique subject, as the client is already objectified by being put in a specific category. By looking at the practice of Balay and how they meet their partners as unique individuals we are reminded of what the root of social work is. It is first and foremost a relational profession, as it always entails a meeting between two or more subjects. This is not to say that methods or theories should be abandoned all together, which Balay does not either. Rather what the practice of Balay highlight is that the use of theories and methods should always be done in such a manner that it allows space for the unpredictable to occur, and makes it possible for the social worker to engage the client on his or her own terms.

In part one of the analysis I argue that much social work done in prisons, especially in western society’s mostly target specific problem areas of the inmates lives. Also here the practice of Balay seems to diverge from the dominant discourse by embracing a holistic understanding of the partners and their problems. They are all connected. However this does not mean that Balay is able to help in all matters. As discussed, especially the judicial limbo creates a situation for the partners that Balay have very little chance of changing. Also their work with the leftist partners indicate that many of the services they can offer are of limited use to this group as their strong political convictions creates values and needs that Balay as an apolitical organization can not necessarily share or provide.

In the second part of the analysis the dilemmas and challenges connected to Balay’s prison work is discussed. In the prison setting, being able to navigate between the different groups is of paramount importance. The dichromatic relationship between security and control on one hand and rehabilitation on the other creates an environment where the social worker constantly have to perform in different roles depending on who the audience is. Also ethical dilemmas regarding confidentiality and rule-bending are touched upon.

On the surface it could be argued that many of these challenges are unique in the sense that that they only apply in the prison setting. After all, it is very uncommon that for instance the physical space plays such a pivotal role in terms of dictating the practice of a social worker. However, taking a step back and the bigger picture emerges. The challenges and dilemmas the social workers face in the prison are only unique in the sense that the way they reveal themselves is tightly linked to the prison setting. In a more general sense they seem to be of a more universal nature. Dilemmas regarding being in the crossfire between different expectations, ethical dilemmas regarding confidentiality as well as frustrations of not being able to help the client because of the rules and regulations dictated from above are matters that many practitioners in care professions are confronted with. The aim was to unfold challenges directly connected to the prison setting but the findings suggest that they are not that different from the problems social workers face in other contexts.

The argument is therefore not that most of the problems Balay are facing are unique in the sense that they only can be found when working in the prison. However, as described the prison environment function almost as a magnifying glass - the lines are blurred where they are normally more defined or more defined when they are usually more blurred. This constitute a context where the challenges becomes more apparent and explicit and therefore, the prison setting seems to be a prudent place to study the ethical and practical dilemmas embedded in social work.

In the larger scope of things is it therefore this authors hope that this study can be used as a mirror for other social worker when examining and reflecting upon own practice. It is also a hope that this study can challenge some of the preconceptions about what social work is, especially coming from a western context. Social work is not a static entity but diverse and always changing.

But more than anything it is a hope that this study can be of use for Balay. Working in such a demanding context where the days are often long and exhausting, finding time to reflect upon the work you are doing can sometimes be difficult. As such this study is meant to be used as a stepping stone for further reflections and discussions internally at Balay, about their work and how they continually can succeed in developing their practice with the aim of helping tortured political prisoners in the Philippines.

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## Gathered empirical data

In this section an overview of the empirical data gathered will be presented. The data is divided into three categories: field notes from prison visits (FN), transcribed interviews (TI) and reflexive seminars (RS). The prison visits to the prison this study is mainly about are labeled as visits to high security prison. No names, dates or location is given to protect the confidentiality of the participants in this study.

**Prison visits and interviews**

1. Visit to high security prison

Also present: Social worker (Balay), Researcher (Balay), Liv.

Purpose: Providing food assistance for the inmates.

Data FN1

**2)** Visit to maximum security prison

Also present: Social worker (Balay, researcher (Balay), Liv.

Purpose: Providing food assistance for the inmates.

Data: FN2

**3)** Visit to high security Prison

Also present: Liv

Purpose: Observations.

Data FN3

**4)** Visit to provincial prison with

Also present: Social worker (Balay), Liv

Purpose: Providing food assistance for the inmates.

Data: FN4

**5)** Visit to provincial prison and office of the regional commission on human rights.

Also present: Social worker (Balay), supervisor (Balay), Liv

Purpose: Providing food assistance for the inmates and paying a courtesy visit to the regional human rights commission.

Data: FN5

**6)** Visit to high security prison

Also present: Liv

Purpose: Conducting interview with a leftist partner of Balay.

Data: FN6, TI1

**7)** Visit to high security prison

Also present: Liv

Purpose: Conducting interview with a Muslim partner of Balay.

Data: FN7, TI2

**8)** Visit to high security prison

Also present: Liv

Purpose: Conducting interviews with a Muslim partner of Balay (not transcribed) as well as an inmate from the gangs.

Data: FN8, TI3

**9)** Visit to high security prison

Also present: Social worker (Balay)

Purpose: Updating the partners on their cases.

Data: FN9

**10)** Visit to high security prison

Also present: Social worker (Balay)

Purpose: Livelihood activities with the partners

Data FN10

**11)** Visit to high security prison (during my internship at Dignity in the fall of 2012)

Also present: Social worker (Balay)

Purpose: Updating some of the partners on their cases.

Data: FN11

**Reflexive seminars**

 **1)** Reflexive seminar 1

Also present: Six staff members (balay), Andrew Jefferson (DIGNITY)

Purpose: I was to facilitate a discussion about the development of Praxis Papers

Data: RS1

1. Reflexive seminar 2

Also present: Five staff members (Balay), Liv

Purpose: To present my preliminary thoughts about my thesis and to have Liv present her preliminary findings.

Data RS2

1. Reflexive seminar 3

Also present: Seven Balay staff members

Purpose: To discuss the findings conducting the fieldwork.

Data: RS3

1. Reflexive seminar 4

Also Present: Liv and the prison STOV team

Purpose: to discuss their work methods

Data RS4

## Appendix 1

Appendix two: Example of an interview guide

- Short introductions?

Could you make a short introduction of yourself? Of course we already know something about you from our time with Balay and here in SICA, but what you believe we should know about you?

- How would a normal day inside SICA be for you?

- What kind of privileges do you have? (are they the ones you need? do you use them? Sunning, do you get it? How often?)

- What do you eat? How do you prepare your food?

- Visitors - how often do you get visitors? Who are your visitors?

- How would you describe being a political detainee?

- How is the life of a political detainee different from the life of other detainees?

- Do you think the other inmates look at you differently because you are related to Balay?

- How would you describe your relation to Balay? In what way does Balay help you?

- How would you describe you relation to the other inmates? Muslims? to the third floor? To Chinese?

- How would you describe your relation to the warden and the guards?

- Balay speaks of your group as the as the Christian partners in SICA, why do you think that is? How do you feel about being called the Christian partners?

- What are your values? How are they different from the ones you have outside?

Specifically for inmate 1:

- How would you describe the difference between being here as someone part of the struggle, or as someone randomly picked up, like Rolly?

- Are you prepared during your training, to handle being in jail?

- Do you see a difference between how the low-ranking and high-ranking political detainees handle being jail?

Specifically for inmate 2:

- Do you think your experience of being imprisoned is different because of your situation? How? (Not being part of a Communist group)

1. Internet source 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Internet source 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. (Internet source 3, internet source 4) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For more information about this project see the report “”Violence in Bagong Silang” (internet source 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Internet source 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “Partner” is the term used by Balay about the inmates they are helping. I will therefore make use of this term and not the term client when referring to the prisoners Balay is working with. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The use of the term *constructionism* and not the perhaps more common *constructivism* is deliberate as there are some fundamental differences between these. Constructivism focus is on the subject as an isolated knower whereas Constructionism emphasize that our subjective selves are formed through our interaction with the world (Raskin, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See appendix 1 for an example of an interview guide [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. (internet source 7) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. That corruption is a problem in the Philippines is also documented in the annually published “Corruption Perception Index”. The index for 2013 gives the Philippines a score of 36, where 100 is the best and 0 is the worst (internet source 8) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. (Internet source 9) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. (Internet source 10) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Gang communities are quite common in Philippine prisons (Narag, 2005), but as Balay does not work with these, my interaction with them have been almost nonexistent. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. (Internet source 12) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. ”Sari sari” in Tagalog means ”variety” and these small often family driven stores, selling simple groceries are a common sight in the Philippines [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For a vivid description of how the prisoner culture is often based on very distinct rules and logics that all inmates must abide too if trouble is to be avoided see “Games Prisoners Play: The Tragicomic Worlds of Polish Prison by Marek M. Kaminski (2004) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. (Internet source 12) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This specialized approach to social work practice in the west is not only the case when it comes to social work in prisons but a general tendency (Lundström and Sunesson 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)