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COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND SOLIDARITY ACTIONS IN THE TORAJA MAMASA CHURCH AFTER THE 2018 NATURAL DISASTERS

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Abstract

The natural disasters of 28 September 2018 had a multidimensional impact on the community of Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. Various responses emerged, including those of the congregation of the Toraja Mamasa Church, GTM Filadelfia Palu. Although the disaster events have passed, the experiences and testimonies preserved within the collective memory of the Filadelfia congregation remain highly significant, as they reveal the meaning of acts of solidarity in everyday life. This study aims to analyse the collective memory and acts of solidarity of the GTM Filadelfia Palu congregation following the natural disasters through the lens of the ethics of solidarity in order to examine the congregation's values and capacity to promote humanitarian principles. This research employed a qualitative case study design using an autoethnographic approach grounded in the researcher's personal experience, complemented by interviews with congregants who survived the Palu natural disaster. This research demonstrates that collective memory and acts of solidarity are clearly embedded within the life of the Filadelfia congregation. Shared memories of solidarity following the natural disasters continue to be sustained within the congregation's social life, shaping enduring practices of solidarity that persist not only during times of crisis, but also in everyday social relations. Rooted in the collective memory of the disaster, practices of solidarity within the congregation are expressed through five ecclesial dimensions: affirmative relationships that strengthen communal bonds, inclusive relationships that embrace others, transformative relationships that restore social life, cohesive relationships that foster unity, and reflective relationships that cultivate prayer and spiritual resilience. This study contributes to international scholarship in disaster studies, memory studies, and religious studies by showing how collective memory within a Christian congregation gives rise to and shapes enduring practices of solidarity after natural disasters.

Keywords: Collective Memory, Post-Natural Disaster, Solidarity Actions, Toraja Mamasa Church

I. INTRODUCTION

Natural disasters are phenomena that exert multidimensional impacts on social, psychological, and religious life. Affected communities frequently experience health-related problems, behavioural changes, and existential suffering associated with questions concerning the existence of a transcendent being. These experiences often challenge established beliefs and influence the way individuals interpret suffering and human vulnerability (Nole, 2025a).

Such impacts are particularly evident in regions that are highly vulnerable to natural disasters, including Indonesia (Hakim & Lee, 2020). One of Indonesia's most prominent natural disaster cases occurred in Palu City on 28 September 2018. Three natural disasters struck the city: an earthquake, a tsunami and liquefaction, causing the world to pay much attention to the city (Rajindra et al., 2019). Natural disasters make people suffer psychologically, but also the stress of losing loved ones and possessions can temporarily cloud the future. Nonetheless, the people of Palu responded to the phenomenon with efforts to recover from the devastation, including the role and involvement of the government (Nole et al., 2025). Another striking response after natural disasters is the actions of religious communities.

This research highlights that previous studies on the Palu natural disaster have primarily focused on psychological recovery (Dwiningtias & Rahmat, 2025; Sokang et al., 2024; Syam et al., 2025), Islamic perspectives (Darlis et al., 2020; Khairil et al., 2020; Taufik & Ibrahim, 2020), resilience (Hasbullah, 2024; Razy et al., 2022; Rusydi et al., 2023; Yulianto et al., 2021), and government responses (Fery & Dasril, 2026; Ismeti et al., 2022), whilst ecclesial perspectives, collective memory, and the ethics of solidarity have received comparatively limited scholarly attention. In the wake of the disaster, the Christian community played a significant role in humanitarian engagement, experiences that later became embedded within the collective memory of affected communities. This research offers a novel contribution by examining ecclesial perspectives on collective memory and the ethical practice of solidarity in the context of natural disasters.

The natural disasters of 28 September 2018 in Palu became a significant part of the community's collective memory. Memories of the past contain traumatic experiences that can resurface at any time (Levine, 2015). Then, we can remember traumatic memories collectively (Moulton, 2015). The term memory indicates that individuals have memories of events that occurred in the past. Nevertheless, memories related to natural disasters also leave moments for people to recall any experiences experienced directly from the event about trying to save themselves and being rescued. Shared memories involve collective memory as a subjective social trait that connects the past with the present as a reminder (Wertsch, 2009). These memories are not just part of what is individual but also collectively. Collective memory contains memories of things related to dark events, such as natural disasters. The people of Palu remember that they are resilient by experiencing solidarity actions. Essentially, acts of solidarity are people's responsibility, including when they experience struggles, such as natural disasters. The people of Palu performed solidarity to survive after the natural disaster as a form of social resilience.

The trauma experienced by the people of Palu as a result of natural disasters has not only exerted multidimensional impacts on individuals, but has also shaped the collective memory embedded within the community's social life. Shared experiences of struggle, fear, loss, suffering, resilience, and recovery have subsequently developed into enduring social memories expressed through voices, stories, symbols, monuments, photographs, videos, data, objects, places, and other phenomena within the public consciousness. This collective memory serves not only as a reminder of the traumatic events and the processes of recovery that followed, but also as a means of fostering a shared awareness of the importance of social bonds in confronting crises and overcoming adversity. Moreover, collective memory functions as a reminder of the social actions previously undertaken by communities during

times of crisis, whilst simultaneously encouraging the continuous preservation of solidarity, mutual care, and humanitarian engagement within social life (Nole et al., 2024, 2025). In this context, collectively remembered traumatic experiences are understood to foster empathy, compassion, and social responsibility among community members. Consequently, trauma embedded within collective memory acquires social significance as a foundation for the emergence of communal solidarity, manifested in mutual aid, humanitarian assistance, emotional support, and other forms of social cooperation that enable communities to remain resilient and survive in the aftermath of natural disasters.

This research investigates how collective memory and solidarity actions in the context of natural disasters are interpreted within ecclesial perspectives. The research was conducted at GTM Filadelfia Palu, a congregation within the Toraja Mamasa Church. In this regard, I argue that GTM Filadelfia Palu, as an ecclesial movement, has a collective memory related to life after the 2018 natural disaster, which has implications for understanding and implementing solidarity actions as a configuration of social resilience to date. Communities are unique in responding to natural disasters, one of which is a form of resilience referred to as social resilience, which is the capability of community movements based on joint efforts (Lucini, 2014). Thus, this research aims to analyse the collective memory and solidarity actions of the GTM Filadelfia Palu congregation after the natural disaster from a solidarity ethics perspective. This study contributes to scholarly discussions on the social and cultural perspectives of a Christian community within disaster studies, memory studies, and religious studies.

II. METHOD

This research used a qualitative method with a case study design and an autoethnographic approach. This approach explores personal experience during a sociocultural context with specific problems (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). With autoethnography, I engage with circumstances that are reflective but also critical of personal experiences (Au-Yong-Oliveira, 2020; Koopman et al., 2020; Lake, 2015). In this regard, I am a natural disaster survivor from Palu and a congregation member at GTM Filadelfia Palu. In addition, I have also collected data by conducting interviews with several congregation members to provide strength in answering the research objectives.

Furthermore, I have structured this research by first explaining collective memory. Then, I put forward the significance of solidarity actions. Next, I bring together the interconnectedness of collective memory and solidarity actions by analysing them into a specific description according to the reflection of GTM Filadelfia Palu, which remembers the past with meaning and explains social engagement that is not apathetic in the midst of complicated situations, thus displaying authentic faith and action.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1.Collective Memory

Humans can remember and bring up individual memories stored in the brain and operate them, or what is called memory. However, memory is not a system that relates to individuals alone but to social elements (Nole, 2025b). Sociologically, Barbara A. Misztal emphasises that memory has social and environmental influences. Although memory is an ability of the individual mind, remembering comes from a social context (Misztal, 2010, p. 27). It is shaped by social factors to create a memory with a collective character, which is scientifically called collective memory. What is remembered is strongly influenced by what has been shared with others, so what is remembered is always an ‘intersubjective memory of the past, of a past, lived concerning others’(Misztal, 2003, p. 6). Groups can remember what they are familiar with as facts that are included in the mental structure so that they make sense as actual information (Misztal, 2003). Therefore, memories that contain shared experiences are essential to the group or community.

Collective memory is situation-dependent and refers to the distribution across society of what individuals know, believe and feel about the past, how they morally value it, how closely they identify with it, and how much the past inspires them as a model for their behaviour and identity (Schwartz, 2016). One of the pasts that

made an impression on the community was the situation of natural disasters. Knowledge, beliefs and feelings about natural disasters enable people to have an opinion because they have captured and recorded phenomena that are visible to the senses and processed by the brain. In this regard, the community's talk about natural disasters is the framework of collective memory.

Collective memory is not like history that separates the past from the present and future but instead connects the two, continuously operating in the present as a continuous rewriting of the past for future use (Orianne & Eustache, 2023). As with the phenomenon of natural disasters, people remember the event and have shared experiences with others (Nole, 2024a). Memory is not simply understood as the capacity of human understanding but as continuity and cohesion in the collective sphere (Barash, 2017, p. 256). The shared involvement of others can be related to experiences related to natural disasters. People cannot survive on their own but need the presence of others to assist. In this case, the aftermath of a natural disaster signifies a significant impact on the community, so it thinks about it and feels the help. The collective memory of the community implies a sense of neighbourliness in the past that becomes a moment in the present. Activities that contain solidarity actions are important memoirs for the community and become a philosophy of life to be maintained.

Collective memory is a social mechanism that preserves the remembrance of acts of solidarity during times of crisis and beyond. In the context of Palu society, it functions as a 'social alarm' that continually recalls experiences of crisis and the practices of mutual aid that developed in response to the disaster, ensuring that solidarity extends beyond the emergency phase into everyday social life. In this way, collective memory becomes an enduring source of social cohesion and community resilience in the post-disaster period.

3.2.Solidarity Action

The resilience of the Palu community was influenced by social support from relationships with families who helped each other when responding to natural disaster phenomena. Then, people with disabilities were also strengthened by social support from all parties. Natural disasters also cause the human body to become disabled or a person with a disability. Although people with disabilities have physical limitations, they still perform resilience by being able to survive and adapt due to social support (Paseno et al., 2022). The act of solidarity is also evident in the existence of women among trauma survivors, as there are caring, enthusiastic and robust women in post-disaster life. Such a solid attitude signifies a relationship of togetherness amid suffering. Then, social support became one of the resilience factors of Palu residents, which can be found in community participation. In addition, there is also the involvement of the government, which is responsible for organising spaces that prioritise human rights, providing capital for evacuees to survive, and beautifying and making repairs to damaged roads and settlements (Allokendek & Ellisa, 2022; Ismeti et al., 2022; Wiwin & Nuraedah, 2022). Social assistance has essential benefits for communities after natural disasters. Therefore, solidarity actions are relevant in natural disaster situations.

Avery Kolers (2016) pointed out the significance of solidarity for humans: working together. People have an obligation of solidarity as the primary means by which citizens advance equality by collective actions that respect and associate with those who are marginalised (Kolers, 2014). Solidarity involves respectful and impartial actions that demonstrate rich connectivity and aim for justice (Kolers, 2016, p. 50). In the sense of solidarity, people's interactions with others are linked to justice as a form of equality. The affirmation of the value of solidarity rests on an understanding of the equality of all people and has a core virtue (Kolers, 2024, p. 136).

Kolers understands the core ideas of solidarity, namely manifest, consequence, autonomous, and unification (Kolers, 2023). Manifest means that solidarity can manifest in various ways, not only in the aspirations or sympathies of an agent. For example, the manifestation of solidarity is participating in collective action, but it can also manifest through imposition and

affirmation. Then, solidarity also has consequences based on the influence of decision-making. Next, solidarity includes autonomy, which is the freedom to do things as long as they are positive. Then, solidarity includes unification, which contains adhesion or teamwork, and diversity can become an integrated whole for identification or action.

Solidarity is deep if one views it as a behaviour that has a specific reason. Rebecca Todd Peters (2014, 2015) also sees solidarity as a path that relates to theological reasons as she departs from the teachings of Christ. The act of solidarity is relevant to ethics, according to Peters. The ethics of solidarity contains the nature and attitude of solidarity that is theologically characterised and applied in the community. In the Christian context, Peters (2014) asserts that one of the fundamental core Christian beliefs about the meaning of human existence is that God created us as social beings in relationships. Social action becomes significant and representative of solidarity.

Peters recognises that deep and accountable solidarity will spur people to action rooted in mutuality to display a lifestyle honouring God and God's creation in the contemporary world (Peters, 2015, p. 224). Peters also designed the ethics of solidarity through theological affirmation, called theo-ethics of solidarity. According to him, this approach guides economic and social relations in transforming the world based on two theological principles: sustainability and social justice. Furthermore, solidarity means the implementation of efforts to build brotherhood, such as the description of the life of faith of the early Christian community who considered others as family. When people implement solidarity, it becomes a relevant part of responding to the world.

Solidarity ethics, according to Peters, is concerned with understanding social location and personal privilege (risk), building relationships with people who are different (change), and engaging in structural change (action) (Peters, 2015, p. 224). Furthermore, Peters posits four tasks on living, doing, and achieving life in a theologically characterised solidarity ethics: *metanoia*, respect for difference, accountability, and action (Peters, 2014, 2015). Peters affirms that solidarity acts as a transforming action.

Solidarity arises from a sense of shared emotional experience among community members who perceive themselves as participating in a common struggle; this fosters empathy, initiative, and a sense of responsibility to support those affected by natural disasters. Such experiences become embedded within the community's long-term collective memory and continue to be sustained over time. Collective memory therefore functions as a social bond that enables communities both to remember and to enact practices of solidarity. In this regard, religious communities are not merely passive victims of natural disasters, but also active agents in recovery, community rebuilding, and social transformation.

3.3. The Ethical and Theological Meaning of Solidarity

GTM Filadelfia Palu is a church of the Toraja Mamasa tribe that was established based on the background of families who migrated and had long settled in Palu, then formed and built a congregation (GTM Jemaat Filadelfia Palu, 2024). When viewed from the church service activities, many members attend, but some are not permanent members or sympathisers. They are considered participant members who want to have fellowship with other members. A sense of family exists among all of them, even though there are different ethnicities. They live by the high value of brotherhood, as faith lives when accompanied by deeds (Nole, 2023c). In this case, they still have diversity and accept that difference in a particular tribal church.

Suppose people from outside the city come to Palu, namely people who have an identity with the Toraja Mamasa tribe. In that case, they usually participate in worship at the tribal church. Although this church has an identity with one particular tribe, it does not close the possibility of the presence of other tribes. This church does not only consist of one tribe but there are also several tribes with different backgrounds. In this case, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ unites all people from various diversities (Nole, 2023a). The congregation's united life is seen in everyday situations and situations after natural disasters. They

remember their post-natural disaster experiences and collectively endeavour to move on.

As a form of continuing life after the natural disasters, the congregation must evacuate out of town for a while. They evacuate for several reasons, including family invitations, an attempt to calm down and seek work and education outside the city. Nevertheless, some remained in Palu for specific reasons, such as trying to find family members, keeping personal possessions that could not be left behind, and needing access outside the city. Society who stayed evacuated within the city, at specific locations or points, such as in the yards of their homes and evacuation centres. The collective memory of natural disasters connects agents of the Filadelfia congregation with diverse backgrounds.

The collective memory of GTM Filadelfia Palu contains experiences and testimonies of organising solidarity actions, which have become a habit that has survived until now. They remember that life after natural disasters contains acceptance and giving in spiritual and material forms. Essentially, life after natural disasters does not make people apathetic; instead, it prioritises togetherness and a sense of neighbourhood to support each other based on solidarity actions. In a community, every opinion comes from the mind of a given individual, and when opinions are collectively gathered or combined, they take on new meaning (Schwartz, 2016, p. 11). In this regard, the congregation, when opening, found meaning in life after natural disasters, namely the existence of solidarity actions. The term solidarity is suggestive because it evokes an ethos of brotherhood, which intuitively brings to mind notions of unity, togetherness, and mutual relationships that feel and fulfil the needs of others as we feel and fulfil our own (González, 2020, p. 287). By living in solidarity, congregants pay great attention to their neighbours suffering after natural disasters by providing spiritual and material assistance.

People who implement solidarity daily strive for the common good at all times and in all spaces and live their faith with concrete actions (Kelly, 2020). Faith and deeds are images of solidarity that show conditions that remember God daily, as the essence of solidarity is always centred on Christ (Muers, 2020). With solidarity, people implement the good news with social characteristics (Hinson-Hasty, 2016). Solidarity is not just a matter of social ties. Nevertheless, there is also a complex combination of emotional connection and commitment to an individual and communal belief that tends to have the same beliefs, and there is emotional involvement in a goal or idea (Müller, 2020). Based on this, the Filadelfia congregation remembers their solidarity actions after natural disasters and is still valid today. The post-natural disaster response in the context of GTM Filadelfia Palu reflects five aspects: affirmative, inclusive, transformative, cohesive, and reflective, carried out collectively.

Affirmative means that the congregation empathises to strengthen those struggling after natural disasters. This concern becomes important when accompanied by awareness. Individuals conduct *metanoia* to renew their hearts, minds, and souls to move towards behaviours that blend with other human beings (Peters, 2014, p. 61). In this regard, people saw that when natural disasters significantly impacted them, they recognised the need to support each other in uncharacteristic situations and worked together to sustain each other. Engagement with others is an attempt at cooperation. People with sufficient economic and material means of consumption naturally help those with limitations. This is in line with Paul's emphasis on helping those in need. In particular, solidarity with those closest to us, family and friends, manifested in the willingness to help and in the familiarity experienced (Laitinen & Pessi, 2014, p. 291).



Figure 1. Command post location
Source: Congregation documentation

The congregation's solidarity configuration also has an inclusive aspect that refers to actions that embrace people in distress (Nole et al., 2024), just as Filadelfia's embrace is also directed at different people, namely the arrival of other refugees after natural disasters. In other words, the congregation views no distinction in carrying out humanitarian values after natural disasters. Such a thing displays the meaning of solidarity actions that appreciate and respect differences in intersubjective relationships based on principles united with the same goal, namely living human values (Peters, 2015). This is because people with different backgrounds struggle and become targets for assistance. In tents or refugee camps, there are people of different faiths, too, when invited, and the congregation assists them in meeting their physiological needs (Nole et al., 2024, p. 83). The congregation sees no restriction for any particular party, even emphasising that such situations are no longer about thinking exclusively but inclusively (Figure 1). Each acts reasonably and regards equality regarding human dignity as a living trait. If Christians help people from different backgrounds, then they not only display solidarity but also authentic faith (Groody, 2015). People do not separate themselves from each other but mingle and engage because they have a sense of neighbourliness and a goal to embrace under challenging situations.

Transformative is the endeavour to rise and adapt to social transformation through action. Urban communities have a role to play as transformative agents of urban vulnerability (de Beer, 2021). As for transformative, it signifies helping others collectively to have hope for the future. Christians are responsible for realising what it means to be authentically human to others by overcoming suffering (Cruz, 2021, p. 17). They must witness as well as act. Living together with others and engaging in actual mutual development certainly illustrates accountability (Peters, 2014, p. 65). Nevertheless, the atmosphere of togetherness does not pass away but is consistently carried out. Over time, life certainly improves because of the development transformation based on action.



Figure 2. Evacuation centre
Source: Congregation documentation

A deep understanding of solidarity will lead to action. By acting together, the community creates a thriving and sustainable environment (Peters, 2015, p. 231). In this case, there is a cohesive aspect that signifies action. For example, the attitude of visiting other members is to ask how they are doing while encouraging and comforting those who have lost family members. Then, there is the attitude of inviting each other to stay together in tents or refugee camps to increase togetherness and make others feel less alone (Figure 2). A high level of empathy in interactions certainly affects the foundation for building a stronger community (Berardi et al., 2020). In addition, there is also development that refers to receiving social assistance to improve the order of life again.



Figure 3. Material aid
Source: Congregation documentation

There are three types of humanitarian assistance they receive, namely from government participation and certain social institutions. The congregation received financial elements from the government related to basic needs, temporary shelter, which has now transitioned to permanent housing for those who lost their homes, and house renovations. The government, also a servant of God, shows solidarity with the people (Nole, 2023b). Meanwhile, from the synod and social institutions, people received diaconal service assistance, which was handed over to the church and distributed, including logistics. The relief supplies were temporarily stored inside the church building (Figure 3). Young people also participated in the distribution of relief supplies to communities affected by the natural disaster at another location (Figure 4). In essence, such cohesive aspects aim to make growth experience social welfare.



Figure 4. Youth participation
Source: Congregation documentation

Another exciting aspect of the solidarity of the Filadelfia congregation is the reflective aspect. The congregation remembers that they pray for and support each other in faith. This togetherness includes the endeavour to carry out spiritual activities collectively by praying. Sociologically speaking, prayer is not just about individual hopes and requests but rather encompasses social nature and relationships because its content speaks of other subjects or agents as well (Froese & Jones, 2021). Prayer is part of religious rites and is always related to the church's interaction with the transcendent (Nole, 2024b). In this case, prayer is an attempt to remember others to ask for the common good and be part of a spiritual act of solidarity (Nole et al., 2025).

After the 2018 natural disasters, the Filadelfia congregation prayed for people struggling to survive, suffering from loss, and experiencing distress. Their solidarity in prayer (reflective) had a significant and supportive influence on the aspects done before and going forward. Prayers to God resulted in answers for their lives so that they could recover from the impact of natural disasters. In this regard, the togetherness of the congregation remains harmonious as they pray for each other after the 2018 natural disasters, through the pandemic, and even today.



Figure 5. Open-air service in 2022
Source: Congregation documentation

Acts of solidarity are manifestations of the Christian faith and constitute a foundational aspect of congregational life. In this regard, the Filadelfia congregation embodies these values in practice. For example, as illustrated in Figure 5, the congregation held an open-air service in 2022 aimed at strengthening communal solidarity. Furthermore, the solidarity demonstrated by the Filadelfia congregation also reflects an ecumenical dimension, as evidenced by its participation alongside other congregations in an open-air service in 2026 (Figure 6). This illustrates the enduring sense of community cultivated within the Filadelfia congregation in the wake of natural disasters. The Filadelfia congregation not only remembers natural disasters as tragic events, but also interprets them as opportunities to strengthen faith, communal unity, and social responsibility. Solidarity therefore constitutes a vital

expression of humanity in the aftermath of natural disasters, and indeed in all circumstances.



Figure 6. Open-air service in 2026
Source: Congregation documentation

IV. CONCLUSION

Natural disasters are natural facts that make humans suffer. Nevertheless, they also further awaken, remind, and teach humans to understand what it means to be human and why being a good human being is so significant. People who experience natural disasters understand that suffering is unpleasant, so they try to be kind so that others do not suffer more. The collective memory of church members serves to cover up dark experiences with memories of various social activities. Various good deeds emerge when everyone holds memories that continue to inspire positivity. This is a form of resilience in life, whereby people always live socially, even in circumstances that require them to rise up. Through the experiences and testimonies from the collective memory of GTM Filadelfia Palu, solidarity action is a very striking social resilience behaviour in the effort to continue life after natural disasters. There are five ecclesial responses: affirmative as a strengthening relationship, inclusive as an embracing relationship, transformative as a repairing relationship, cohesive as a levelling relationship, and reflective as a praying relationship. Ultimately, the post-natural disaster life of Filadelfia congregation displays the meaning that humans are social beings who continue and always need and experience correlated solidarity. God reveals His work for humanity through the framework of cooperation in the community.

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