Inter-Village Dispute: A Phenomenological Study

Irving Domingo L. Rio[1], Renia F. Dela Peña[2], Kareen Jay D. Lozada[2], Ma. Corazon G. Nievales[2] and Bernadine T. Baliguat[2]

ABSTRACT

Several village disputes in Central Panay have created untold sufferings to indigenous communities due to their violent nature. Some disputes of this nature have escalated to bloody village raids that claimed several lives and untold dislocation of families. Vengeance is considered as a collective village or clan undertaking and is strongly embedded in *Panay-Bukidnon* culture. It is considered as a shared community obligation rather than a personal pursuit (Rio, 2016). This study aims to understand the lived experiences of those who have experienced violent village disputes and qualitative phenomenological research method was utilized to fully explore the phenomenon. Face-to-face unstructured interviews were conducted in their natural habitat. There are five emerging themes: (1) disbelief that they were able to survive years of village disputes; (2) rationalization of vengeance; (3) the necessity to be brave; (4) sufferings endured in the forest; and (5) the importance of peaceful dispute settlement. Exploring and understanding the phenomenon of village disputes will enable the local Government Units (LGUs), the National Commission on Indigenous People**,** and Non-government organizations to formulate a more realistic means of **maintaining** social order in the hinterlands of Central Panay.

Keywords: inter-village dispute, Panay-Bukidnon, indigenous people, phenomenological study

INTRODUCTION

Placing the law in the hands of its citizens is considered illegal in modern states, although this practice is deeply rooted in the culture of some tribal communities. The enforcement of law and order requires government institutions to constantly make and implement laws in order to address disputes among the people before they reach a level that may threaten social order ((National Institute of Justice 2015).

Vengeance is encouraged in the Panay-Bukidnon culture. The value of a person is expressed in a person's ability to keep his honor in the community (Brandon and Richard 1999). Vengeance has a very important role in the justice system in the Panay-Bukidnon culture. For most members of the tribe, the penalty of incarceration cannot compensate for the loss of a family member. The bereaved family considers vengeance as a shared community obligation rather than a personal pursuit. Failure to avenge can create an impression of the crime committed as just and predisposes a family to abuse by other members of the community. Retaliation that results to the death of members of the other tribe or family provides a counterbalance for the loss. For the Panay Bukidnon, vengeance sustains morality and serves as a control mechanism to regulate human conduct and strengthen social order in the community (Rio, 2016).

Whitman (2004) argues that people need to rationalize their actions of committing violent acts of vengeance by anchoring it on self-defense or extreme emotional disturbance. In the case of the Panay-Bukidnon, committing acts of vengeance is justified as a community obligation. The culture of vengeance is greatly influenced by the perception of bravery as a desirable virtue that brings many advantages to a person.

The phenomenon of the violent village dispute in this study is anchored on Cohen's Subculture Theory of Violence. Cohen's subcultural theory draws attention to the fact that criminals, in their view, do not act criminally at all. As members of subcultures, they are subject to different behavioral requirements based on values and norms that deviate from those of mainstream society. According to Cohen, these delinquent subcultures are characterized above all by their deviant values and morals, which enable their members to gain prestige and recognition. The behavior that is displayed within the subculture is

fundamentally different from that outside the subculture because of these new norms. For society as a whole, they seem deviant, often criminal (Cohen, A. and Short, J. (1968).

This phenomenological study will focus on the violent village dispute between the two villages in the province of Antique from 1996-1998. The said dispute started when the elders of one village accused residents of the other village of stealing some of their water buffalos. This accusation led to a raid conducted by men from the village of the accusers that claimed the lives of 14 residents and was later followed by a series of retaliatory raids that claimed the lives of 38 people from both villages.

Studying their experiences has significant importance in enriching the body of knowledge of Social Sciences and Social Work programs.

Epistemological and Theoretical Perspective of the Study

Epistemology is defined as the study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge (Martinich and Stroll, 2014). This study is anchored on the epistemology of constructivism which refers to the process by which reality is created by the observer. (Jonassen, 1991). In this study, the participants create their subjective meaning based on their experiences

during the violent dispute in their villages.

Interpretivism is a philosophical doctrine which holds the belief that reality and knowledge are socially constructed by human beings. For interpretivists, researchers assume that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social construction such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments (Myers, 2008). The position of interpretivis in relation to epistemology and ontology is that interpretivists believe that reality is multiple and relative (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988, cited in Edirisingha (2012).

Purpose of the Study

This purpose of this study is to examine and understand the lived experience of identified survivors after the violent dispute that erupted between two villages in Valderama, Antique from 1996-1998.

Statement of the Problem

The researchers would like to answer the research question: "What does it mean to experience violent dispute? and (2) What is the essence of these experiences after surviving the violent village dispute?"

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may contribute to the limited literatures on *Panay-Bukidnon* culture and hopefully provide deeper insights into the dynamics of their way of life, which is oftentimes stereotyped by lowlanders as barbaric and violent.

The results of the study may also offer valuable information to local government units, national government agencies, non-profit organizations to formulate more culture-bound programs and projects without threatening the survival of their indigenous culture.

Delimitation of the Study

This research was confined to an inquiry of information with the members of the elders of a village that was involved in the inter-village dispute in the Province of Antique. Qualitative research does not aim to generalize but to describe in depth the participants lived experiences.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Qualitative research offers the opportunity to focus on finding answers to questions centered on social experience, how it is created, and how it gives meaning to human life (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). A qualitative approach will allow the participants to richly and accurately describe the phenomenon through their personal views.

Methodology

The nature of this phenomenological research is to understand deeper the essences and the lived experiences of participants based on how they described their real life experiences as survivors of violent village dispute, hence, this research adopted the descriptive phenomenological methodology.

Descriptive phenomenology involves direct exploration, analysis, description of particular phenomena, as free as possible from unexamined presuppositions, aiming at maximum intuitive presentation (Siegelberg, 1975).

Study Participants

The study participants were only the elders from one village who expressed their willingness to be interviewed by the researchers; hence,

clan war survivors from the other village were excluded. The researchers have chosen the purposive sampling which is considered by Welman and Kruger (1999) as the most important type of non-probability sampling in identifying the primary participants of this research.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in one of the two villages in the Province of Antique, in order for them to be comfortable in articulating their experiences.

Data Collection

Hiligaynon was used to interview the participants in order for them to fully express their experiences.

Ethical Consideration

The participants were assured of privacy and confidentiality of their identities. The contents of the ethical consent form were explained to them before they signed at the start of the interview. The right to withdraw anytime was accorded to the participants.

Data Processing and Analysis

Interviews with the village war survivors were recorded using a digital recorder. The researchers transcribed the interview using Hyner's (1985) method. The researchers conducted the interviews until the saturation point was achieved. The documented interviews were reviewed by listening again to the recorded interview in order to ensure clarity of words. Units of general meaning were delineated and units of meaning relevant to the research question were again delineated. Units of the same meaning related to violent village dispute experience were clustered and the determination of themes was derived from clusters of meaning. A summary was written for each individual interview and the result of each interview was checked with the corresponding participant. Summaries were modified as needed, so with the themes.

Credibility and Dependability of the Study

The researchers applied the techniques of triangulation of sources, member checking, reflexive journaling, and an audit to establish the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, dependability, and conformability (Erlandson et al, 1993).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Themes and Subthemes

After the collection and analysis of the data, five major themes were identified that described the experiences of clan war survivors. The five themes are: (1) Disbelief in Being Alive; (2) Rationalizing Vengeance; (3) Necessity to be Braved; (4) Extreme Distrust to Strangers; and (5) Sufferings Endured in the Forest; and (6) Overwhelming Desire to Settle Disputes.

Emerging Theme #1: Disbelief in Being Alive

People who experienced the pains of the violent village dispute are in disbelief that they were able to survive its brutality. All of the participants have claimed that they were in a state of helplessness and have feared losing their elders. However, it was God's will for them to survive the village war.

Subtheme #1: Will of God

In the words of participant OL "If God decides to extend your life, even if your enemies are going to use many firearms that are enough to bury you, you will not die". This feeling is similar to the findings of a study conducted by Penner (2012) wherein the participants talked about their God and how their beliefs and religious practices were important in the struggle to survive the Congolese refugee experience. A participant in that study claimed the he was able to escape from his captors because God had given him courage to escape and created the needed distractions to his captors.

Subtheme #2: Fear of Losing the Elders

One participant, had stated that his greatest fear during the massacre was losing the elders of the clan who have protected them from several village raids in the past. He was in near tears when he said "The elders did everything just for us to survive, and where will we go if they are dead and who will take care of us?"

Sub-theme #3: State of Helplessness

Dal narrated "I cannot think properly because I was in shocked because all the houses were burned and I cannot do anything". However, CAN while

crying says "We cannot do anything because they have firearms, after the massacre, some of my brothers and sisters have decided to live in other places and all of us used to live happily in our village". In the study of Almoshmoush (2016), the negative effects of these experiences are more likely to worsen when survivors are displaced or end up seeking refuge in unfamiliar places.

Emerging Theme No. 2: Rationalizing Vengeance

Failure to avenge the death of a family member can create an impression of the crime committed as just and predisposes a family to abuse by other members of the community. For the *Panay Bukidnon*, vengeance sustains morality and serves as a control mechanism to regulate human conduct and strengthen social order in the community (Rio.2016)

Subtheme #1: Justice through Vengeance

Those who have experienced the village war wanted to seek justice through revenge. YOK stated "since you attack a peaceful village, it is just right that you die. I am happy that we killed a member of their

family because they also killed a member of our family and we are now even". KAP added "It's good that we have taken vengeance because they completely destroyed our lives".

Subtheme #2: The Joy of Taking Revenge

In the words of YOK **"***I* felt great when my family has finally taken vengeance for the damage and pain that they had caused us, it is just right for them to also experience the horror brought by our vengeance because they deserve it". It agrees with Gollwitzer (2010), that there are some situations wherein those seeking revenge have experienced satisfaction of doing the act when the offender knows the connection between the original insult and the retaliation.

Emerging Theme No. 3: The Necessity to be Brave

People residing at the mountain village and experienced violent conflict have developed strong courage to survive.

Subtheme #1. Bravery as Det'ente against Oppression

The devastating effect of violent dispute caused the villagers to stand up and become brave to fight for themselves and their family. Most of the participants said "*Our sense of bravery became dominant over being fearful and terrified, we will not allow them to call us cowards*".

The need for bravery and the necessity to resort to war also correlates with the study of Sheffer, D. (2009) that Americans believed that war could be necessary and inevitable, the only solution to conflicting viewpoints.

Subtheme #2. Willingness to Kill

"*We found ourselves in need to become more audacious and firm to fight back,*" OL said. His statement correlates to Col. John Rietzell who conducted a seminar on "War on Terror" at the University of Redlands in 2007. He highlighted that the natural human instinct for any person in the situation of war is to fight for their life. The villagers developed in them the desire and willingness to take life because they believed that either they'll fight back or not, they will still be killed.

Subtheme #3. Collective Self-defense for Survival

Most of the participants said that, "w*e value our family that's why we have to fight for them..* It is the same as to the work made by Nixon, R.M, (1985) entitled A World Threat; All Nations Must Fight Terrorism, Fourth Edition; Seattle Times. It states: "We must recognize that where our interests are clearly involved, we must take risks to protect them."

Emerging Theme No. 4: Extreme Distrust to Strangers

Victims of violent crimes demonstrated that the effects of violent crime were persistent. (Shapland, Wilmore, & Duff, 1985).

Subtheme #1: Fear of Reprisal

OL further added, "when we were working in the fields, someone has to look-out for the presence of the enemy by climbing a tree and scouting the environment". However,

KAP said "I can never trust them because I feel they have a grudge on us because we also killed some of them".

Karina Schumann and Michael Ross consider blood feuds "retaliatory cycles of violence between warring families or clans, it may endure for generations, with one act of blood revenge being followed by a retaliatory act of revenge in an endless cycle of violence (Schuman & Ross, 2010).

Subtheme #2: Unexplained Anxiety

Fear and anxiety were closely related. Potentially unpredictable situations led to feelings of anxiety or paranoia related to a fear of re-victimization.

"Even when I am asleep, I experienced waking up in the middle of the night and feeling afraid" said CAN. She feels very nervous every time she sees men in military uniform carrying firearms.

Subtheme #3: Very Limited Social Engagement

Children were prohibited by their parents to play outside the village for fear that they might be taken hostage by people from the other village. The memory of KAP is still vivid when he said "we don't play outside the village anymore because we fear that we might be taken hostage". Fear of crime can result in withdrawal from social situations, including avoidance of situations that increase the risk for delinquency and victimization (Yuan & McNeeley, 2017).

Emerging Theme No. 5: Sufferings Endured in the Forest

Subtheme #1 Seeking Shelter in the Wilderness

After all their houses were burned, some residents fled to the safety of the forest and not knowing where they will go. For CAN, the decision to leave the village immediately was done without any second thoughts when she narrated "we can never forget what we had experienced, what we normally cannot endure, we endured and what we normally don't eat, we ate just to survive". KAP also narrated "we fled to the mountains and

made shelters made of grasses and slept on the cold ground".

Subtheme #2 Pain and Hunger

YOK said "because of hunger, I was forced to eat uncooked rice in order to survive". Those could not endure the sufferings took the risk of going back to the village. KAP saw of them leave there hiding place when he narrated "some left and went back to the village while, we decided to stay and built shelters made of grasses".

The children were not spared from the ordeal, CAN narrated "the feet of the children were bleeding because they are not used to walk in this kind of terrain".

Emerging Theme # 6: Overwhelming Desire to Settle the Dispute

Dispute settlement takes the form it does because it is necessary to sustain a social order that is undifferentiated, multiplex, and integrated on the basis of a kinship structure. (Katherine S. Newman, 1983)

Subtheme #1: Initiative to lead

In the words of one villager, "I will take the responsibility to settle things when there will be disagreements in your midst. I want peace and unity to reign here in the village, just call me if you need somebody to meddle and resolve arguments and quarrel between families, I will take whatever it costs just to fix things) he further convinced the villagers.

Subtheme #2: Aspiration for peaceful resolution

When asked about how he managed to convince those who didn't want to convene, a villager answered: "I just didn't force them to follow what we wanted; we just convince them one step at a time because I believed that if we would compel them to do so, they would just continue disregarding our plea for settlement. When you can recognize the legitimacy of conflicting needs and become willing to examine them in an environment of compassionate understanding, it opens pathways to creative problem

solving, team building, and improved relationships.

Subtheme #3: Importance of Open Communication

In In the end, the villagers were able to live together in unity again for they chose to communicate to each other in order to solve the conflict. DAL *explained to us that* "One of the things I asked them to do in order to avoid conflict is to talk or communicate to one another first before they would react, I requested all the residents from our village to come back not only to get back to their own place to settle but also to resolve things and reconcile with one another in order to live together peacefully.

CONCLUSIONS

All of the participants have witnessed different levels of brutality and in fact, many of them don't know why they were able to survive. Many of them have endured for months the harsh environment and sufferings while hiding in the forest. The events forced them to be brave and seek

vengeance in order to express their desire to seek justice and retribution. Many have experienced unexplained anxiety and paranoia, this created among themselves extreme mistrust of strangers and the conscious effort that future disputes should be settled as soon as possible though peaceful means in order to avoid future sufferings of the people.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended to strengthen the indigenous dispute resolution, especially in villages located in far flung areas where the semblance of government is absent. The local government units and the National Commission on Indigenous People should hold regular dialogues with the indigenous people at least twice a year in order to know their problems and concerns and hopefully prevent disputes from happening;

The local police should make their presence known to indigenous communities and they should participate in dispute settlement on regular basis, and, invite tribal elders to attend LGU level discussions on local affairs in order to foster stronger relationship.

REFERENCES

Almoshmoush, N. (2016). The role of war trauma survivors in managing their own mental conditions, Syria civil war as an example. *Avacenna Journal of Medicine*. http://www. avicennajmed.com/article.asp?iss n=2231-0770;year=2016; volume =6;issue=2;spage=54;epage=59 ;aulast=Almoshmosh.doi: 10.410 3/2231-0770.179554.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Doro, M. E. (2005). *Case studies on Rido: Conflict resolution among Meranao in Baloi, Lanao del Norte*. Mindanao anthropology consortium research institute for Mindanao Culture Xavier University.

Edirisingha, P. (2012). *Interpretivism and Positivism (Ontological and Epistemological Perspectives*. https://prabash 78.wordpress. com/2012/03/14/interpretivism- and-postivism-ontological-and- epistemological-perspectives/.

Erlandson, D. A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B. L., & Allen, S. D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: a guide to methods. Newbury Park, CA*: Sage Publications, Inc.

Gollwitzer, M. (2010). Published research article on "What gives victims satisfaction when they seek vengeance? *Journal of Social Psychology*. Wiley Online Library. https://onlinelibrary. wiley.com/ doi/abs/10.1002/ejsp.782

Hycner, Richard H. (1985). *Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data.* https://www. depts.ttu.edu/education/our- people/Faculty/additional _pages/duemer/epsy_6305_class _materials/Hycne-R-H-1985.pdf

Jonassen, D. H. (1991) *Evaluating constructivistic learning educational technology. 31*(9), pp. 28-33. Published by Educational Technology Publications, Inc. https://www. jstor.org/stable/44401696

Cohen, Albert K. and Short, J. (1968). Research in Delinquent Subcultures. In: *Journal of Social Issues*, S.20–37.

Kottak, C.P. (2006). Cultural anthropology. Mc-Graw-Hill Education.

Martinich, A. P. & Stroll, A. 2014. "Epistemology," Encyclopædia Britannica

Rio, I.D.L. (2016). Indigenous dispute settlement: Learning from the Panay Bukidnon Tribe, *6* (11), *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*.

Salvatore, S.C. & Judd, M. (2005). *The Mindanao conflict in the Philippines: Roots, costs, and potential peace dividend*. Social development papers on conflict prevention and reconstruction series. CPR no. 24. Washington, DC: World Bank. http:// documents.worldbank.org/curate d/en/701961468776746799/The-Mindanao-conflict-in-the-Philippines-roots-costs-and-potential-peace-dividend

Sheffer, D. (2009). "No Sacrifice is too Great, save that of Honor": Honor, Death, and Psychological Combat Trauma in the American Civil War". https://www.semanticscholar. org/paper/%22No-Sacrifice-is-too-Great%2C-save-that-of-Honor%22%3A-in-Sheffer/ 7380676f96a74820651234223a18 e73de7495e38

Shepler, S. (2011). The real and symbolic importance of food in war: Hunger pains and big men's Bellies in Sierra Leone. *Africa Today. 58* (2), pp. 43-56. Special issue: Everyday life in postwar Sierra Leone (Winter 2011), Published by: Indiana University Press. https://www.jstor.org/ stable/10.2979/africatoday.58.2.4 3.

Spiegelberg, H. (1975). Doing phenomenology: Essays on and in phenomenology. The Hague:

Nijhoff. 1975. ISBN (s) 90247 17256/9789024717255. https://philpapers.org/rec/SPIDPE

Schumann, K. & Ross, M. (2010). "The benefits, costs, and paradox of revenge," Social and personality psychology compass. *4* (12), 1193-1205.

Schumann, K. & Ross, M. (2010). "*The benefits, costs, and paradox of revenge," Social and personality psychology compass*, *4* (12) 1193–1205, at p. 1193. 7.

Welman, J.C. & Krugger. S. J. (1999). Research Methodology for the Business and Administrative Sciences. Johannesburg: International Thompson Publishing.

Whitman, J. Q. (2004). "Symposium: Twenty-Five years of George P. Fletcher's rethinking criminal law: Between self-defense and vengeance/between social contract and monopoly of violence," Tulsa law review.

Yuan, Y. & McNeeley, S. (2017). Fear of crime and behavioral adaptations: Testing the effects of fear of violence on unstructured socializing with peers. *Journal of Deviant Behavior, 38* (12), 1633-1646. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/ full/10.1080/01639625.2017.1410 625.