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Problem Statement

This paper deals with twin problems: the social dilemma and the theoretical debates. The social problem according to which intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts are some challenges with which indigenous peoples are confronted.   For one, colonizers and settlers confiscate and occupy the ancestral domains of indigenous peoples in all parts of the world for which the First Nations struggle for their right to self-determination. For another, intra-ethnic conflicts are a parallel concern among the indigenous peoples. This paper contributes to the body of knowledge about First Nations, as there is a paucity of literature on indigenous peoples in the Philippines. A co-author of this paper has written about a participatory action research of indigenous peoples in the Philippines (Ty, 2009) and the history of the struggles of indigenous peoples in the Philippines(Ty, 2010). This research is warranted, as there is a paucity of basic and applied research on the Aeta First Nation in central Philippines as well as of the theoretical tensions between domestic law and indigenous customs.

Research Questions

This case study, which involved the Aeta indigenous people in central Philippines, answered the following queries.

1. How do the Aetas view conflict?
2. What are their peacebuilding strategies with both intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts?
3. What is the impact of their traditional practices in conflict resolution and peacebuilding?

Purpose of the Study

Based on the foregoing, this paper seeks to analyze the views and practices of Aetas on conflict, intra- and inter-ethnic peacebuilding strategies, as well as the impact of their beliefs and actions. This research is warranted, as there is a paucity of basic and applied research on the Aetas in central Philippines.

Literature Review

This section presents the literature that deals with the resolution of conflicts in general and conflicts in which different cultures collide: national and international law on the one hand and indigenous customs and practices on the other hand. Fixed international standards are necessary but not sufficient to deal with all types of conflicts. The problem with the majority of the literature on conflict and peace studies is that they mostly present one set of universal or international approaches to deal with conflict for peacebuilding. In general, customary practices are devalued in mainstream and postcolonial societies, while national and international legal mechanisms are highly valued and imposed on the rest of society. See Figure 1 below.
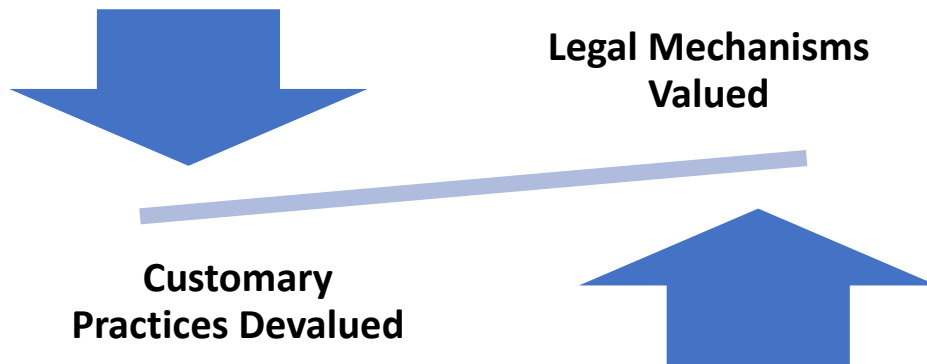
Figure 1: Legal Mechanisms vs. Customary Practices

Conflict resolution and peacebuilding are two sides of the same coin. Conflict refers to clashing relationship between two or more persons or groups with incompatible urges, ideas, perspectives, or principles ("Conflict | Search Online Etymology Dictionary," 2021). Peace means a whole range of phenomena, among which are freedom from civil disorder, reconciliation, silence, compact, agreement, absence war, agreement, friendly relations, cessation of hostility, agreement to refrain from further hostilities ("Peace | Search Online Etymology Dictionary," 2021).

On the one hand, by conflict resolution is meant the different ways by which verbal, psychological, or physical tensions between at least two individuals or groups are settled. On the other hand, peacebuilding is a neologism. Peacebuilding involves a process to resolve and prevent conflicts as well as build a comprehensive strategy to ensure lasting peace. As such, it refers to a whole gamut of activities that occur before, during, and after hostilities have erupted, including interpersonal, economic, social, diplomatic, political, and consciousness-raising efforts to ensure the smooth and just social relations intra-ethnically as well as inter-ethnically. Thus, peacebuilding encompasses all efforts to build and sustain peace across the peace continuum that deals with all the dimensions of conflict (United Nations, 2021). As actions aimed to solidify peace and avoid relapse into conflict (United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, 2010), peacebuilding includes capacity building, reconciliation, and societal transformation (The Canadian Peacebuilding Network, 2021). These measures aim to avoid conflicts through support relationships, governance modes, structures and systems, capacities and resources (The Canadian Peacebuilding Network, 2021).

Presented below are the "usual suspects" as well as some non-standardized customary practices for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. First, internationally, Articles 33 to 38 of Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations has enumerated several conflict resolution methods, among which include, among others, negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements (United Nations, 1945). Nationally, under normal circumstances, conflicts are settled through judicial settlement in general. Measure short of war are discussed in Articles 39 to 51 of Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, which include, among others, economic sanctions, embargo, boycott of the aggressor member state, and collective self-defense. In the event that international war breaks out, international humanitarian law applies, specifically the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their additional protocols (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2016).

Second, ethnographers doing thick-description field research (Geertz, 1973) among the indigenous peoples have observed the latter practicing conflict resolution methods, which fall outside the domestic legal system. There is an imperative to put culture back into peacebuilding work (Avruch, 1998, 2002, 2006; Bräuchler, 2015; Galtung, 2002; Lederach, 2014). Intercultural conflicts are complex (Galtung, 2002). First Nations in different parts of the world have their own methods by which to settle conflicts. These methods are made invisible, forgotten, or outrightly rejected, though they have utility in situations of conflict that affect the indigenous peoples. Some major peaceful methods of conflict resolution include avoidance, cool down, public opinion, claims, counter claims, community action, negotiation, mediation, ritual reconciliation—apology, oaths, ordeals, apology, adjudication, courts, and codified law (Ember, Ember, & Peregrine, 2015). Other peaceful methods include the central role of shamans, oracles, and tribal chiefs in the resolution of conflicts (Scupin & DeCorse, 2016) as well as the use of moots in villages (Spradley & McCurdy, 2011). In the southern Philippines, royalties called *datus* (Datumanong, 2005) and sultans (Atar, 2009) play a key role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding up to the present time.

Aside from the above, empirical studies of different societies reveal that other conflict resolution methods work: dialogue in Morocco and Yemen; mediation space and diapraxis in Tajikistan; culturally-balanced co-mediation in Denmark; local mediation in Algeria; ombudsperson in North Africa; and early warning and rapid response mechanism in Egypt and Kenya (Frazer & Ghettas, 2013). In addition, First Nations also resort to violent resolution of conflicts, such as individual violence, feuds, raids, large-scale confrontation, warfare, political and social change (Ember et al., 2015).

There ae many causes of ethnic conflicts, some of which include the following: historical conflicts over land, resources, exploitation, and political domination; ethnocentrism; dehumanization; and outgroup-ingroup dynamics, for which education can play a role to overcome inter-ethnic biases and hatred (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2017).

In summary, this literature review revealed that there are at least two sets of methods for conflict resolution and peacebuilding: the legal mechanisms and the customary practices. Oftentimes, only the international and national legal mechanisms are used to the detriment of customary practices. However, there are valid reasons for which customary practices must be brought to fore to solve intra-ethnic conflicts, which mainstream societies neglect and reject. The presence of one set of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, in this case, legal mechanisms, does not necessarily have to negate the existence of another set of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, in this case, customary practices. See Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Analytic Framework of Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Model

Methodology

As far as research methodology is concerned, this case study employed a qualitative ethnographic research design to gather thick description (Geertz, 1973) which resorted to purposive and snowball sampling from which seven participants joined the research, limited participant observation, and public records for four months for data collection. Research ethics were observed, following the guidelines of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines (NCIP), including the free and prior informed consent of the research participants who remained anonymous.

Findings

Concept of Conflict and the Existing Conflict Situation among the Aetas

This section responded to the first research question. Aetas in Mabinay used the words *panagbangi, kagubot*, *bikil*, and *sumpaki* interchangeably to refer to a conflict, though these terms are contextually different. *Panagbangi* is an open clash between two opposing groups or individuals whether in persons, ideas or interests. *Kagubot* is chaotic, turmoil and intractable conflict. *Bikil* is provoking a person to a fight, might be shallow, and short-term conflict. *Sumpaki* is disagreement but can be categorized as confrontational in nature.

Aetas view conflict as inevitable part of human life. In an appropriate situation, it can be succeeded, prevented and resolved in a healthy manner. Conflicts present are cross -cultural in nature. the intercultural conflicts are categorized into two: the first is intra-conflict or conflicts within the tribe. Intra-ethnic conflicts are about relational and value conflict such as hearsays and misperceptions. The second is inter-conflict or conflicts with the outsiders or the lowland Cebuano migrants, whom they call *tumawo or ubusanon.* Inter-ethnic conflict arises out of economic and political nature such as theft, discrimination, inter–tribal war *(magkamog)*, and land disputes or claim for the ancestral land or (*yutang kabilin.)*

Peacebuilding Strategies

This section responded to the second research question. Amongst the Aeta community, during intra-ethnic conflict, the Tribal Council of Elders (*Binungbungan*) is the authority that presides over conflict resolution. Elder women and men form part of the Tribal Council of Elders. For a reported conflict, the tribal chieftain *(Kabubungan)* will call the two parties to come together for a talk called *"orong*". This *orong* is a mediation process moderated by the tribal council. The community choses 10 members to sit as the tribal council of elders. They are arbiters regarded by the community with utmost respect and credibility. However, in special cases, other members of the community aside from sanctioned leaders are permitted to amicably resolve conflicts. This exemption is especially applicable when the parties involved are members of a family. In this case, a well-respected relative is permitted to mediate on family matters in the hopes of avoiding scandal. If during the *"orong",* the two conflicting parties arrived at a mutual and peaceful agreement, they set a dancing ritual called *"kinalasag"* which is an expression of victory and happiness.

However, if the two parties would not come into peaceful agreement, another dance ritual called *"amamaliw"* is performed, which is an expression of injustice and hatred. If conflict remains unsettled, the tribal council (*Binungbungan*) will advise both parties to flee and be silent (palayo'g kahilom). Part of their customary laws is flight, avoidance, or separation, until the conflicting parties "cool down." Based on field research, cooling down is one conflict resolution strategies recognized in standard anthropology textbooks (Ember et al., 2015). The tribal council ensures that the rights of the victims in each case are always respected. If the conflicting parties are not satisfied with the decision of the council, discussions indefinitely continue until consensus is reached. All parties then agree to abide by the council's ruling. This system of conflict resolution is approved and respected by the members of the tribe. Minor offenses such as stealing, insulting, failure to pay debts, deception that causes damage to another person, and disrespect towards another property are punishable. Common conflict within the tribes are usually theft and physical assault resulting from drunkenness. Punishments are settled by imposition of fines and in some cases, physical punishment.

However, if the conflict is serious or non-indigenous people are concerned or both, the village government leader *(Barangay Captain)* is requested to settle the dispute. Forms of conflict resolution depend on the nature of parties involved. In most cases, conflicts are settled within the tribe before brought to the village level for amicable settlement. Inter-ethnic conflict like land disputes between Aeta and lowland migrants are brought to the village level, and are dealt according to the existing laws that the Philippine government has enacted.

For land disputes, peacebuilding strategies that took place were seminars and training on the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Acts (IPRA Law). With assistance from universities and other private non-government organizations (NGO's), Aeta are initiated into programs designed to settle upland occupants, and reorganize into Integrated Social Forestry Program (ISFP) administered by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). Most recent, the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claims had been awarded by the DENR to the Aeta Community in these two tribal communities in *Cangguhob* and *Cansatian*. Presently, based on records, there are 1,709 IP right holders in an area of more than 4,000 hectares of land (ADO, 2018). Despite of this positive development, the struggle for land occupancy continues.

With regards to the inter-ethnic conflict, such as tribal wars (*magkamog*), religious education that Christian churches spearhead also contributes to conflict resolution. In the distant past, the Aetas practiced indiscriminate killings. Death in the family due to old age, diseases, or accident is considered as curse upon them. To cut this curse required killing someone from their tribe or from the outside tribe, in this case, the *Bukidnon*. This killing (*magkamog* or tribal war) becomes a ritual act, a cyclical pattern of vengeance. When educated by the Christian faith and converted into a member of the Christian church, they recognized that life and death is from a powerful Creator God, not from any human curse. In communal relationships, they emphasize justice and fairness, acceptance, compassion, and coexistence.

Impact on and Contribution to Peacebuilding

This section responded to the third research question. As peace-loving people, the Aeta avoided committing acts that contribute to the problem in the community. The two village government leaders (past and present leaders) expressed that seldom have they encountered serious problems among the Aetas. In fact, they were very thankful for the presence of the Tribal Council of Elders (*Binungbungan)* for their great contribution in the peacekeeping agenda of the community. Dance rituals and context-specific symbols and functional practices are unifying factors among the Aeta community. Peace is viewed as a communal concern therefore, seen as events in the rhythm of social life. Resolution processes are culturally prescribed which inclined towards rituals to promote a peacemaking community. Ritual dance is a form of healing of emotional wounds created by conflict and in some areas, a restoration of social relationships. The incorporation of indigenous methods of conflict resolution and cultural values could greatly contribute to rebuilding of peace, security, and firmness and pleasant relations among peoples and cultivate peace among peoples in the whole region.

Conclusion

Summary

     Response to Research Question One. The Aeta indigenous people are peace-loving people but consider conflict as part of human existence. They avoid it as much as possible. They are confronted with both intra-ethnic as well as intra-ethnic conflicts. The Council of Elders

     Response to Research Question Two. The Aetas practice traditional justice for inter-conflict for both major and minor conflicts, which include corporal punishment, apology, forgiveness, monetary settlement, and peace dance. War dance is enacted when conflict is not settled. For inter-ethnic conflicts, the Aetas resort to amicable settlement of disputes, local government, or municipal-level court.

     Response to Research Question Three. For the most part, the Aetas are successful in settling intra-ethnic conflicts using customary practices and settling inter-ethnic conflicts through local government mechanisms.

Based on the findings of this study, a grounded model of the conflict resolution and peacebuilding model of the Aeta indigenous people of central Philippines is synthesized and presented here. See Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Grounded Model of Aeta Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Model

Policy Implications

Cultures are not forever, as they change with time and in different contexts. First example: corporal punishment was a universal practice in all cultures in the historical past. However, cultural values and norms changes, which led to the abolition and prohibition of physical punishment in most parts of the world. Hence, policy makers need to recognize that while punishment takes different forms in different cultures, there is room for dialogue and change in the type of punishment meted out. For instance, imprisonment was once viewed as punishment pure and simple. However, it is also viewed as a way to reform, educate, and train individuals so that they could reintegrate back to society as productive individuals and citizens who contribute to society. Hence, libraries, GED courses and vocational training programs are now provided in some U.S. prisons.

Second example: refugees, stateless persons, and migrant workers from different home countries bring with them their own varied cultures in host countries, say in Australia, Brazil, the United States, Western Europe. Clearly, on the one hand, there are situations during which cultures clash, which can cause psychological, verbal, social, or physical tension, conflicts, and hostilities. Kurds and Turks in host countries can bring in their own biases and animosities. On the other hand, that is not always the case. There are many instances which reveal that people of different cultures who heretofore had negative stereotypes of each other in their home countries do not harbor the same prejudices in the host countries, as the conditions, time, and space are totally different. Co-author Rey Ty's friends in Chicago shared the information that many Muslim and Jewish immigrants to the U.S. have formed intentional organizations to foster interfaith unity, celebrating each other's holy days, with Muslims serving Seder meals and Jews serving the end of Ramadhan Eid meals. Evidence-based multi-country quantitative studies reveal that Muslims who study in western countries have integrated western culture to some extent, with their newly formed social values falling between the cultural values of their host countries and home countries (Norris & Inglehart, 2012).

Recommendations

For community-level disputes affecting indigenous peoples, local customs and traditional conflict resolution methods are oftentimes effective in solving intra-ethnic conflicts. A more inclusive governance system would allow for the resort to the use of either indigenous customs or local laws in peacebuilding efforts (Backstrom, Ironside, Paterson, Padwe, & Baird, 2007), where necessary and appropriate.

Outside "experts" must not only impose their own assumptions when they are deployed in conflict situations and zone, as they might prove to be ineffective. Rather, to be effective, they must of necessity involve and listen to the voices of the different ethnic groups on the ground on the ways by which they view the conflict and how to resolve their differences. Knowing, understanding, and responding to the socio-cultural bases of conflict for conflict resolution and peacebuilding are necessary (Osei-Hwedie & Galvin, 2012).

Conclusion

Culture is complex and can play dual roles. When cultures clash, especially in multi-ethnic societies, conflicts arise. However, there are likewise opportunities in using culture for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Hence, culture must be incorporated in both intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic conflict resolution mechanisms and peacebuilding. However, culture must not be romanticized, as there are both positive and negative elements in culture. As culture is not static, it changes over time. In the past, when the Aetas enter into conflict with another ethnic group, they enter into revenge killings in inter-tribal wars. This cultural practice has stopped through education. However, the Aetas today still use corporal punishment as a way by which to settle conflict. This practice can also change through education over time. Through continuing contacts, dialogues, learning about each other, building trust, economic production, barter, trade, and education, the Aetas on the one hand and other ethnic groups and settlers on the other hand engage in multi-pronged unending peacebuilding work.

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