

A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Clan War Survivors in Central Panay

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Abstract

In remote villages in Central Panay (Philippines), the presence of government institutions is not yet institutionalized and some traditional practices are still dominant in their way of life. Vengeance is still viewed by many Panay-Bukidnon people as an instrument in seeking justice and this is collectively pursued by the clan or the whole village. This paper aims to delve into the lived experiences of those who survived a three-year-long clan war between two villages in the Province of Antique, Philippines in the hope of gaining a greater understanding and perspective thereof. Five survivors were chosen using criterion sampling, and the researchers used qualitative phenomenological research method and utilized face-to-face unstructured interview and observations. Most of the participants are still in disbelief that they are alive because of the extent of brutality of the clan war. They have rationalized vengeance and the necessity to be brave in order to survive the ordeal. Most of those who fled to the forest during the first massacre narrated their experiences with sufferings, hunger and hardship just to survive. Their sad experiences gave them the wisdom to settle future disputes peacefully and with open heart in order to avoid another clan war where there are no winners, but only losers.

The lived experiences of the clan survivors will serve as a basis for enhancing indigenous conflict resolution with the active participation of municipal, city and town authorities, organizations working for the welfare development of indigenous people, and the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP). They can also serve as a useful tool to harmonize some conflicting provisions in the Indigenous Peoples Right Act and the Local Government Code of the Philippines.

Keywords: *lived experiences, clan war survivors, indigenous people, collective vengeance, and Panay-Bukidnon*

Introduction

The state has always strongly encouraged peaceful and amicable settlement of disputes through the judicial process and whenever possible to have disputes resolved locally (Kottack, 2006). Seeking retribution through extrajudicial manner has always been looked upon as anathema by modern society despite the fact that said action is deeply ensconced in the culture of tribal people. It is also well-documented through the course of human history that bitter hostilities between families, clans or tribal groups can lead to a bloody form of retaliation and the senseless loss of lives. In some parts of the world, this situation still continues to exist (King, 1993 and Singh, 2000 as cited by Torres, 2007).

In the Philippines, members of different families and clans have been known to fight over matters relating to territorial boundaries, rights to the water source, and other conflicting interests related to livelihood (Rosaldo, 1980). In the island of Mindanao, the Maranao tribes resort to the settlement of disputes by way of the blood feud called “rido”. The latter usually results from a slight, harm or injury inflicted upon a person by an individual belonging to another clan or family. The family or clan of the wronged party then takes it upon themselves to seek vengeance not just upon the person responsible for the injury but also against members belonging to his clan or family. In turn, the members of the family or clan attacked will retaliate against the aggressors. This then evolves into a cycle of vengeance and retaliation among the families and clans involved (Saber, 1960; Caris, 1991 in Doro, 2005).

The Culture of Vengeance in Panay-Bukidnon Culture

Vengeance resides in the culture of Panay-Bukidnon people. A person’s worth is measured by how he is able to maintain his honor and standing in the community. The legal system of meting out punishment by putting the person who committed the crime behind bars is not looked upon by the family members of the deceased as sufficient compensation. The community as a whole not just the aggrieved party takes it upon themselves to seek retribution for the wrong committed to its member. Non-reprisal can lead to a mistaken belief that the death of the member was justified. For the Panay-Bukidnon people, the need to exact vengeance is necessary to counteract the vacuum created with the death of the family member. For them, the act of taking revenge upholds the principles of what constitutes desirable and undesirable behavior, and deters actions which can be disruptive to the community. An act of retribution against the wrongdoers is seen as necessary in order to maintain and foster stability in the community (Rio, 2016). Acts of vengeance are borne out

of a fundamental need to defend a person's life, honor and integrity or in some instances; they can be the by-product of the emotional trauma suffered by a person (Whitman 2004).

The End of Peaceful Negotiation

Negotiations between warring clans or communities can sometimes be an exercise in futility as both sides come to the negotiating table with widely divergent goals. There is such a wide chasm between what each party hopes to achieve that it is difficult for any possible solution to be reached by the negotiating parties. Ultimately, the talks will collapse and in most cases, both sides will seek to take recourse in armed confrontation to settle the matter. Such conflict will have detrimental repercussions not just on security but also on the economic activities of the clans involved in the conflict (Rio, 2016). Among the unique customs of the Panay-Bukidnon people are *Kantang* and *Ugkhat*. They are traditionally practiced when a family member dies as a result of a crime committed. Justice cannot be obtained for the deceased until he is avenged by his kinsmen. In *Kantang*, the dead body is left outside the house of the deceased until such time it can be joined by the dead body of the perpetrator of the crime or anyone who is related to him. In *Ugkhat*, the deceased is placed inside the house in a sealed casket. The appeasement of grief can only be through committing violent acts against those who were responsible for it, directly or indirectly (Ibid).

This phenomenological study is designed to examine and take a closer look at the lived experiences of identified survivors after the clan war that erupted between two villages in the province of Antique from 1996-1998. The clan war between these two villages started when the elders of one village accused a resident 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 more people from both villages. The phenomenon of clan war in this study is anchored on symbolic interactionism formulated by Blumer (1969), which will be described in great detail in Chapter 2 of this study.

Research Questions

As an avid mountaineer, the researcher had heard stories from those who had experienced the clan war between the two villages in the Province of Antique. This occurrence gave rise to the research questions: "What does it mean to experience clan wars?" and "What is the essence of these experiences after surviving the clan war?"

Purpose of the Study

Studies with regard to the Panay-Bukidnon culture are few and far between; thus, this phenomenological study will probe the nature of the Panay-Bukidnon clan war from the

perspective of those who had actually experienced it with the goal of understanding the lived experience of the subjects.

Importance of the Study

With limited literatures on Panay-Bukidnon culture, the findings can hopefully provide deeper insights into the dynamics of their way of life, which is oftentimes stereotyped by lowlanders as barbaric and violent.

Furthermore, the findings of the study may offer invaluable information to local government units, national government agencies, and non-profit organizations in how to promote the general welfare of the indigenous tribal people and help formulate more culture-bound programs and projects without threatening the survival of their indigenous culture.

Review Of Literature

Philosophical Underpinning of the Phenomenon

The philosophical underpinning of this study hinges on the movement started by Edmund Husserl (1857-1938), best known as the founder of 20th century Phenomenology. Phenomenology involves discovering insights and understanding about a phenomenon from the first person point of view of those who actually experienced it. It is concerned with the study of phenomenon that arises from experiences of being in the world.

The phenomenon of clan war in this study is in accordance with the theory of symbolic interactionism put forward by Blumer (1969). According to this theory, human actions would make sense if one considers how human beings perceive the things around them and how they assign meanings to the things or symbols according to their understanding. According to the theory, people will give their own interpretation and meaning of the symbols when interacting with others in society. This theory is best suited for this kind of research because it examines how society is formed from the interpretation that people attach to objects, events and behaviors from their personal experiences, beliefs, and opinions. These interpretations are called the “definition of the situation”. A qualitative-phenomenological researcher must be keenly observant and creative in asking probing questions in order to generate quality responses. The lived experiences of the clan survivors are highly subjective and that is why understanding their life is very important to find meaning of the phenomena.

Key Concepts of Clan Wars

The existence of clan conflicts and the resulting vengeance killing is not confined only in the Philippines but has also been found to exist in other places around the world. (Dozier, 1966). It is to be noted that this phenomenon is typically observed in areas where there is a lack of

state mechanism in place to deter and prevent such occurrence and where the authority predominantly resides in family and kinship ties; hence, the coercive power of the state is exercised by the local population (Torres, 2014). Among the Panay-Bukidnon tribes, some highly respected elders in the community even exercise pseudo-judicial authority and their decision to wage an all-out revenge killing is final and executory. (Rio, 2016).

Collective Community Revenge

Any injury or bodily harm committed against a member of the community is perceived by the community as a challenge to its ability to maintain peace and order and defend itself. It befalls upon the community to take the cudgels on behalf of the aggrieved member not just to maintain its reputation in the eyes of the other villages but more importantly, to show its strength and defensive capability (Prill-Brett, 1987). Thus, vengeance becomes a community obligation that everyone in the community is committed to pursuing (Rio, 2016). This means that failure to avenge the death of a family member can engender the idea that the crime was justified and leave the members of the family open to abuse by other community members. Vengeance therefore is seen as a powerful tool to uphold moral values and standards and as an effective means to control human actions and behavior; at the same time, it also solidifies the social order existing in the community.

Kantang and *Ugkhat* are two practices exemplifying the collective revenge taken by the family members on behalf of one of their slain kinsmen. The family of the deceased member will not bury the dead body unless there is a corresponding dead body of the person responsible for his death or anyone belonging to the assailant's family placed next to the deceased. Whether the dead body is placed outside in the open to decompose (*Kantang*) or placed inside the house in a casket (*Ugkhat*) only serves to demonstrate the depths of despair that the family members feel about the loss. Their grief can only be assuaged by exacting vengeance through violent means against those who were responsible for it, directly or indirectly (Ibid).

Resolution of Clan War

Generally, conflicts are resolved within the framework of the legal system. An individual can bring his case to the courts for adjudication, or seek the assistance of the local executives, police, military and/or elected village officials (Torres III, 2014). Minor offenses that are punishable by imprisonment of six years and below are brought to the *katarungang pambarangay* (village justice system) for amicable settlement first and only when that fails are they brought to the jurisdiction of the court. The barangay *kapitan* (village chief) and *punong barangay* (village council members) are duly elected by the village residents and they

are in charge of settling community disputes within a prescribed period before unsettled cases can be elevated to the regular courts.

Due to the utmost respect accorded to the elders of communities, matters which can escalate into serious misunderstanding and conflict between communities are first brought to them for a peaceful settlement. It is expected that by applying their extensive knowledge of local laws, beliefs and practices, they can come up with a solution to repair the strained relationship before it deteriorates any further (Torres III, 2014). In the hinterlands of Central Panay Island, only the recognized elders who have proven their skills in settling disputes are allowed to facilitate the resolution of disputes. An elected village official who is not a recognized elder may find it difficult to discharge his duties and functions related to conflict resolution (Rio, 2016).

In their natural setting, the recognized elders, also called *magurangs*, play a pivotal role in conflict resolution. Because of their age and experience, community members turn to them to resolve disputes. In some remote villages, these elders even exercise pseudo-judicial authority and in effect, order the clan to proceed with violent raids or reprisals.

Methodology And Research Design

Research Design

This study utilized qualitative research design to have a deeper insight of the lived experiences of the clan survivors as seen through their point of view. Through qualitative research, the possibility of getting answers to questions related to what experiences people have within society, how these experiences have been molded, and how social experience has enriched and made human existence meaningful can be realized (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). How a person's sense of reality is created through the social experiences he has lived through becomes a key element in developing science. Thus, there is a need to utilize methods which can unearth knowledge of the foregoing idea. A qualitative approach to this study allowed the participants to richly and accurately describe the phenomenon through their personal experiences.

Methodology

Phenomenology has been defined as “the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences” (Merleau-Onty, 1962). Furthermore, “Phenomenology is inductive and descriptive in its design and the central focus of this qualitative method is the lived experience of the world of everyday life” (Blumensteil, 1973).

As aptly put, “Phenomenology will seek to gain the truth of these experiences through the consciousness of the experience” (Zeek, 2002).

Descriptive Phenomenology

Descriptive phenomenology is a research method which is widely used to explore, analyze and describe phenomena, without unexamined presuppositions in order to maximize intuitive presentation (Spiegelberg, 1975). Three steps are set forth for descriptive phenomenology: (1) intuiting; (2) analyzing; and (3) describing. In the intuitive stage, the researcher looks into a phenomenon and gathers information about the phenomenon from the descriptions given by the participants. It is in this stage where the researcher becomes fully immersed in studying the phenomenon as described, ignoring opinions, criticisms, and evaluations about it. (Ibid). The second step, phenomenological analyzing, involves recognizing the distinct qualities of the phenomenon which gave rise to its existence as gleaned from the data collected and its presentation. At this stage, the researcher will break the phenomenon apart into elements or constituents and try to establish a connection or relationship with other nearby phenomena (ibid). Through listening to the participants’ description of their lives and experiences, certain common themes or essences will become apparent at this stage. The third and final step is phenomenological describing which aims to communicate distinct, essential elements of the phenomenon through written and verbal description. The description is arrived at through classification and grouping of the phenomenon. It is imperative that the researcher steer clear of describing a phenomenon precipitately (ibid).

Data Collection

The participants were informed that their identities would remain confidential and pseudonyms would be used to protect their privacy. In the presence of a recognized village elder, I explained to them the contents of the ethical consent form which they needed to sign before the start of the interview. I reiterated to them that they could withdraw from the interview anytime if they felt uncomfortable with the questions.

Interviewing the participants on their lived experiences as clan war survivors was conducted using unstructured interview at their natural habitat. The interview was scheduled on July 2-4, 2016 after the required clearance from the University Ethical Review Committee (UERC) was approved. This study utilized the voice of the survivors with the participants freely relating their experiences in their own words to questions like “Can you describe your experienced as a clan war survivor?” and Can you please further describe your feelings...?”. The follow-up questions probe deeper into the answers given by the participants. The

questions propounded to the participants were all firmly grounded on the questions that this study seeks to answer.

All conversations were audiotaped in order to capture the themes of the conversation and to ensure correctness and accuracy. The conversation was done in the local dialect; however, for the purpose of the research, I translated it into the English language.

Data Analysis

I used the methodological interpretations of Colaizzi (1978) to analyze the phenomenological data. I strictly observed the following steps: (1) give a description of the events or circumstances central to the study; (2) gather and collate detailed accounts of the event from the point of view of the interviewees; (3) peruse and scrutinize the collected descriptive information from the interviewees; (4) return the original transcripts and extract significant statements; (5) educe noteworthy meaning from the participants' utterances; (6) arrange the accumulated formalized meanings into groups of themes; (7) write a comprehensive account; (8) confirm and verify the validity of the description through meeting with the interviewees again; and (9) incorporate new information gathered from the process of verification for a thorough and complete description of the events that took place.

Results And Discussion

Themes

After all the findings were compiled, sorted and examined, five major themes emerged to describe what clan war survivors went through. The five themes are: (1) Disbelief in Being Alive; (2) Rationalizing Vengeance; (3) Extreme Distrust; (4) Sufferings Endured in the Forest; and (5) Overwhelming Desire to Settle Disputes.

The findings arising from these themes and their subthemes are presented herein. Included too are the significant statements from the survivors of the clan wars through interviews conducted to reinforce the findings and their interpretations. These findings are discussed in the light of existing literatures. A list of themes and subthemes are found in Table 1.a.

Theme #1: Disbelief in Being Alive

Those who experienced the pains of the village war are still up to now in disbelief that they were able to survive its brutality. In the words of Toto Beboy, "it was our belief then that we were going to die in the conflict and that most of us would meet our death very soon; however; if it's not your time and if God wants you to live, you will survive despite the firepower of your enemies."

All of the participants claimed that it was the will of God for them to survive the violent village war even though at that time, they all thought that it was already their appointed time to die. In the words of Oloy, “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.” In the case of Onyok, all members of his family were fortunately able to survive the massacre. From his viewpoint, “It is God’s will that the whole family survived the killings.” However, for Dalmacio, “If you are innocent of the crime, God will save you.” Some of the participants even believed that the early deaths of those who attacked their village was a sort of punishment from God who protects the innocent. For Panyang, the early deaths of those who attacked her village is a form of vindication of their innocence.

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. In a way, religion plays a crucial role in the conflict and its resolution since it seeks to deal with substantive and profound matters related to human existence (Said & Funk, 2001).

Before he narrated what he experienced during the actual raid, Kapitan stood-up and looked at me and said, “They were firing their guns indiscriminately and you could even weigh the bullets by the kilo.” He continued, “They burned all houses to the ground and herded all of us like animals to the chapel.” As a teenager, Onyok had never experienced raw fear and in his words, “the fear that I felt during the attack was unthinkable because I knew if you get hit by bullets you die...I cried so hard because I saw some of my family members got killed.”

Panyang, who was hit by a bullet in her right hip said, “There was so much gunfire and when we escaped, we endured the dangers of the trail at night and we knew that if we fell we would die.” It has been thoroughly substantiated that people who lived through the harrowing experience of war often suffer severe trauma as a result and it only gets aggravated when these survivors have to upend their lives and flee their country to seek safety in another foreign country (Almoshoush, 2016). Studies have demonstrated pervasive distress among children who experienced war, including coping with loss, attempting to reconnect with family members, expecting the worse to happen, worrying that they may not live to adulthood, and experiencing an unsafe world (Dyregrov, et al., 2002).

People from war-torn areas find themselves displaced and uprooted from their homes and loved ones. They have to fight for their survival amidst death and destruction. Strong beliefs

in one's religion enhance psychological coping with the unbearable and unpredictable. After the clan war, some of the original residents decided not to live anymore in the village because they believed it was God's will for them to relocate to new places.

Theme No. 2: Rationalizing Vengeance

It is a common rationale that denying victims the chance to have justice will perpetuate a series of violence. In the words of Onyok, "Since you attack a peaceful village, it is just right that you die." Before saying some words about the clan war, Kapitan paused for few minutes and said, "They were killing people indiscriminately during the massacre without any valid reason." He further narrated, "It's good that we took vengeance because they completely destroyed our lives."

Vengeance as a course in their indigenous justice system is based on the mutuality of violence. In his study, Rio (2006) found that the *Panay-Bukidnon* people view vengeance as a collective community obligation; hence, it is the duty of the community to ensure that retributive justice is obtained for the killing of one of its own members. The concepts of revenge and punishment are not interchangeable. The former wants the perpetrator of the crime to suffer the consequences of his action while the latter seeks to reduce a person's bad behavior or prevent the likelihood of said behavior from surfacing in the future (Schumann, Karina & Ross, 2010).

For the mountain people, the death of those who harm the innocents is subject to divine retribution which is locally called *gaba* (karma). Onyok, who was teary eyed when recalling the incident, believes that, "Because you have repeatedly attack a peaceful village, God has punished you." The notion that there is a god who does not hesitate to punish a person for a wrongdoing is a reason why order and traditions are preserved and enforced (Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008).

Emerging Theme No. 3: The Necessity to be Brave

The concept of physical courage which is an act of courage despite the presence of physical threat and this narrows down the spectrum of courageous behavior and strictly engages with acts that involve a serious physical risk to the actor (Putman, 2001). Among the Panay-Bukidnon people the necessity to be brave is so closely intertwined with survival (Rio, 2016). "We had no choice but to fight back so our family could live," said Oloy and reaffirmed by the other survivors. The participants of the study emphasized that they needed to force themselves to fight back especially since the lives of their families were at stake. "We found ourselves in need to become more audacious and firm to fight back," Oloy said. The idea of the villagers also agrees with the study conducted by Kling (2015) that it is the right of the

state to defend itself in cases of unlawful and unjust aggression. When state rights are infringed upon and violated, it is the state's duty to protect itself by whatever means it deems necessary to uphold its sovereignty and freedom, even if it means going to war and killing people.

“When we were working in the fields, someone had to look out for the presence of the enemy by climbing a tree and scouting the environment. Even a meaningless sound or noise made you think that it was already the enemy,” narrated Oloy. However, for Kapitan, he stated that, “I could never trust them because I felt they had a grudge against us.”

During the three years of clan war, residents from both villages were no longer free to participate in social activities for fear of reprisal. As a young man, Oloy's participation in social activities included going to cock-fights; however, this was curtailed during the three years of bloodshed and in his words “we didn't go and watch cockfighting anymore for fear of reprisal.” Children were prohibited by their parents to play outside the village for fear that they might be taken hostage.

There are instances where a person will shun social interaction with other people for fear of falling victim to a crime (Yuan & McNeeley, 2017). In the case of Vangie, the family decided to completely relocate to the town proper due to excessive fear and in her words while crying, “We decided not to return anymore to our village because I feared for the lives of my family members.” This kind of fear adaptation has been observed in a study wherein the victims became apprehensive of going to public and open places as there might be a likelihood of meeting their offender. Any possible scenario where there is a possibility of crossing paths with the offender will be avoided, and that includes going to public places. Relocating to another area would be the drastic action taken to eliminate any chance of running into the offender (Janoff-Burman, & Fieze, 1983).

Theme No. 4: Sufferings Endured in the Forest

The occurrence of violence should not be viewed only from the physical injury suffered by the victims but also on the impact it has on the emotional and psychological well-being of those subjected to it, causing destructive effects at both subjective and collective levels. Furthermore, as some anthropologists have addressed, social and cultural dimensions of inflicted acts of violence determine the power and meaning of violence (Hughes and Bourgois, 2004).

After all their houses were burned, some residents fled to the safety of the forest, not knowing where to go. For Panyang, 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." With trembling voice, she further added, "We stayed in the forest for more than a month because our enemy was looking for us."

Although the Panay-Bukidnon people are familiar with the forest trail, venturing deep into the forest without trails requires adequate skill. I have trekked Mount Baloy mountain ranges together with some local mountain guides; however, only a few of them are truly knowledgeable about the terrains located deep into the forest/mountains. No wonder some of those who fled to the forest got lost and according to Onyok, "we were scattered and lost in the forest and we had no direction as to where we would go. We simply rested under the trees." The group of Kapitan was fortunate because they stayed in the forest for only a week and in his story, "we fled to the mountains and made shelters out of grass and slept on the cold ground."

After the burning of their village, some residents fled for their safety together with a few of the expert hunters. For groups with no hunters to hunt for them, food was scarce for many weeks and this was experienced by Onyok who said, "Because of hunger, I was forced to eat uncooked rice in order to survive." Those who could not endure the sufferings took the risk of going back to the village. Kapitan saw them leave their hiding place and in his words, "those who were not able to endure the hardship went back to the village while we decided to stay and build shelters made of grass." When he narrated his experience of going hungry in the forest, I could see how emotional he was even though the event happened more than fifteen years ago.

Out of extreme fear, even the wounded were forced to walk to the inner parts of the forest. During the attack, Panyang, who was hit by a bullet in her right hip, said "my hip was covered with blood but we just kept walking amidst the gunfire." The children were not spared from the ordeal as she continued, "the feet of the children were bleeding because they were not used to walking in that kind of terrain and I was also carrying my child and at the same time pulling my pig to follow me."

Summary Of Findings And Recommendations

Summary of Findings

Some participants experienced hunger and pain while seeking shelter in the forest and endured different levels of sufferings in the forest for months. The participants shared that they survived the clan war because it is the will of God. Most of them experienced a state of

helplessness and found strength in their elders who helped them survive the ordeal. Many of the participants up to the present cannot believe that they managed to survive.

All of the participants actually experienced the brutality of the clan war and some of them were compelled to be courageous in order to prevent more oppressive and violent acts against them. Their collective self-defense was a natural instinct for them to survive, including their willingness to kill. The necessity for them to be brave was their only path for the survival of their community. Some of the participants viewed vengeance as justice and they took joy in taking vengeance to avenge the loss of loved ones and property and in doing so, they rationalized vengeance.

After experiencing the pain and agony of losing their loved ones and homes, most of them would rather take the initiative of resolving conflicts as soon as possible. They aspire for nonviolent means of addressing conflicts and the importance of open communications. The participants have shown overwhelming desire to settle future disputes through peaceful means.

Recommendations

The focus of the recommendation is to strengthen the indigenous dispute resolution, especially in villages located in far-flung areas where the mechanisms of government are weak. In some cases, clan wars were not made known to local government units because of the absence of reports. In this connection, the following specific recommendations are advanced:

1. The local government units and the National Commission on Indigenous People should hold regular dialogues with the indigenous people in their natural habitat at least twice a year in order to know their problems and concerns and hopefully prevent a clan war from happening;
2. Disputes that are settled through their indigenous dispute settlement process should be recorded by the local government units/NCIP and submitted to the regular courts so that the tribal decisions can be treated as judicial decisions;
3. The local police should make their presence known to indigenous communities on a regular basis and should actively participate in dispute settlements on a regular basis; and,
4. Tribal elders should be invited to attend LGU level discussions on local affairs in order to foster stronger relationships on a regular basis.

The presence of local and national government agencies should be seen by the indigenous people, even on a limited basis only. Interacting with government officials is always

considered as a pride among them. Instead of mainstreaming them, let us allow them to keep their cultural practices in the context of a nationally recognized framework of acceptable behavior

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