

Rido and Pangayaw: Evaluating the Non-killing Paradigm in Mindanao Revenge Killings

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Abstract

The non-killing paradigm, which gained momentum in 2002, is a proposed strategy for social change that envisions a society free from killing or threats of being killed. It claims that while conflict is inevitable, killing is not. This paper aimed to examine this discourse further by discussing four arguments from the framework in light of the *rido* and *pangayaw* revenge killings among indigenous groups in Mindanao through ethnographic and archival data. Common points of emphasis between the paradigm and a notion shared among the concerned indigenous groups include the notion of an inherent inhibition or lack of an innate tendency to kill and the need to support traditional resolution mechanisms that promote nonviolent fight responses. However, there is a crucial incongruence: while the non-killing paradigm considers killing as a problem to be solved, an examination of revenge killings in Mindanao requires attention to the socio-political and economic conditions that motivate marginalized groups to resort to revenge killing. The more important question then is not how to stop killing but how to address the conditions that made conducive such actions. The non-killing paradigm will not provide a productive framework in Mindanao unless it recognizes that these killings will remain as a self-help tool in marginalized and indigenous communities until repressive conditions are addressed.

KEYWORDS: Mindanao, peace, revenge killing, non-killing, *rido*, *pangayaw*

Introduction

One challenging aspect in the academic analysis of violence is the lack of a consensus as to what constitutes a violent act. In anthropological literature alone, violence has been viewed from varying perspectives. In the 1980s, David Riches (1986) focuses on its physicality and characterized a violent act as a “physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses” (p. 8). On the other hand, Arthur Kleinman (2000) argues that violence is mundane and that there are “violences of everyday life” taking numerous forms and dynamics which affect people across different socio-economic orders (p.239). For him, violence is multiple and mundane since it exists where there is power that shapes representations, subjectivities, and experiences. Another discourse on violence, meanwhile, focuses on how structural – social, economic, and political – changes underwrite violent acts among marginalized groups. This structural violence manifests in self-destructive behavior and community degradation which are forms of resistance that emerge in opposition to social, economic, and political marginalization (e.g., Bourgois, 1995; Scheper-Hughes, 1993).

While violence as a category continues to defy any general characterization, the non-killing paradigm made famous by Glenn Paige (2002) suggests a focus on something measurable: the number of killings. For this framework, a non-killing society is “characterized by no killing of humans and no threats to kill; no weapons designed to kill humans and no justification for using them; and no conditions of society dependent upon threat or use of killing for maintenance or change.” (Paige, 2002, p.1). It claims that a non-killing society could be realized given the existence of hunter-gatherer groups which are classified as non-killing societies since they do not engage in wars and killings (see Kelly, 2000). Hence, according to this paradigm, initiatives to transform a society for the better should gear towards the complete eradication of killings. In the Philippines, a campaign for a non-killing Filipino society has been put forth that calls for institutional innovations in implementing this paradigm such as in the form of nonviolent education-training institutions, non-killing leadership training corps, non-killing civil society institutions, among others (Abueva, 2004).

The optimism of the paradigm does deserve credit. Who would not want to develop a society where media men are not killed for having expressed their opinions or where women and children are not killed

in a military crossfire? However, the framework has to be evaluated through further examination. It is in this light that I will evaluate the primary propositions of the non-killing paradigm. This paper will discuss revenge killings in Mindanao, specifically rido and pangayaw. The discussions on pangayaw are based on the data I gathered through ethnographic fieldwork among the Agusan Manobo in a span of three years, while the discussions on rido among the Maranao are based on secondary ethnographic sources. Four arguments on the non-killing paradigm will be examined: 1. a non-killing society is possible due to an innate inhibition to kill among humans; 2. the fact that most humans have not killed or do not kill; 3. the need for nonviolent fight responses; and 4. the need to address killings which are the key problem.

In the Philippines, clan feuding is considered “the most common source of violence in the country” (SWS 2005). In the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) where it is most rampant, the phenomenon is commonly referred to as rido, a Maranao term for revenge killing, for it often involves fatal retaliatory attacks between warring groups. Since the 1980s, there has been a steady rise of revenge killings in Mindanao (Lingga, 2007, p. 56). Among the Manobo, pangayaw is used to refer to revenge killing as well as other forms of killing such as slave raid, prestige killing, and armed revolt. For the purpose of this discussion, focus will be on pangayaw in the form of revenge killing. In the succeeding sections, rido (as practiced by the Maranao) will be analyzed and pangayaw (as practiced by the Manobo) will be examined by contextualizing the practices in their respective socio-political and economic background. These discussions will be used in evaluating key points offered in the non-killing paradigm. This activity is relevant in gaining an understanding on both the non-killing paradigm and the revenge killings in the indigenous communities of Mindanao.

The Innate Inhibition to Kill

The non-killing paradigm opposes the Hobbesian view on human beings as an innately brute hunter or warrior. Rather, a human being is viewed as, by nature, peaceable. In line with this claim, there have been anthropological arguments that cite the emergence of war or violent acts due to external, rather than innate,

mechanisms (e.g. Ferguson, 1997; Gomes, 2010; Whitehead, 2007). For instance, Brian Ferguson (1997) argues that socio-political forces, especially colonial contact, made way to large-scale warfare as material interests between concerned parties led to intensified fighting (p. 342). In China, vast archaeological evidence of war starts in the last part of the Neolithic period, shortly after the rise of states (Underhill in Ferguson, 1997, p. 332).

This view on the lack of an innate tendency to kill is also shared among indigenous communities where *rido* and *pangayaw* are practiced. A shared understanding that an offense or a mistake was committed always precedes these retaliatory attacks (Torres, 2007, p. 16; Tampos, 2016).

If you feel the blade going through another person's skin, you will cringe. You will feel *keag* ("sympathy"). That's why you need the *tegbusow* (a spirit) to possess you, so you won't feel that [inhibition].

This was a statement from a 60-year old Manobo farmer who attempted to wage a *pangayaw* in the form of a retaliatory attack around the 1980s. He attacked the culprit as a response right after witnessing the murder of a dear friend whom he considered as his brother. He stalked the killer and planned on attacking him with a machete as soon as he would get a chance. But when he did, he could not strike a fatal blow. He explained that this was due to the absence of the *tegbusow*, a blood-thirsty spirit, who did not possess him since he did not perform the necessary ritual.

This pre-raiding ritual is referred to as *pangumpaja* ("to appease") or *panawag-tawag* ("to call upon"). Once the *tegbusow* possesses the body of the attacker, it is believed that he will turn into an invulnerable killer deprived of the natural inhibition to kill. In order to appease this class of spirit, blood (either from a brown pig or a red chicken) is offered and would have to be spread on the ground and smeared on the sharpened edges of the weapons. The blood may also be used to paint the attacker's face red or to place red marks on his cheeks and forehead. Tonic wine (usually Mallorca), candle, coins, water, and betel nut may also be offered to further appease the spirit.

This need to call upon a blood-thirsty spirit in order to get rid of the inhibition to kill implies a belief that man is not born a killer. In this regard, the proposition of the non-killing paradigm is compatible with how indigenous groups whose beliefs resemble the Manobo view the act of killing.

Most Humans Have Not Killed

The non-killing paradigm also proposes that a non-killing society is possible since majority of humans have not killed or do not kill. Jose Abueva (2004) further argues that if this is not the case, the Philippine population would not have grown so rapidly (p. 32).

While this is statistically true, it does not take into account the forms of structural violence wherein it is an institution, rather than a person, that “kills” or diminishes the chance of survival of an individual or a group. For instance, in his ethnography among the socially marginalized people of a ghetto neighborhood, Philippe Bourgois (1995) shows how the capitalist restructuring of the economy which led to the erosion of the working class base left marginalized people to participate in the underground economy. In turn, this leads to a culture characterized by self-destructive acts (e.g., substance abuse) and violent dynamics in the community that curtails the survival rate of its members. These structural conditions need to be taken into account since, in one way or another, these are mechanisms that efficiently take away an individual’s life.

Hence, the fact that most people do not kill does not have to be glorified since it reflects a disparity between the minority and the majority; that is, structural problems such as exacerbating economic poverty are more rampant in other communities than others. In Mindanao, poverty and the weak rule of law among marginalized and indigenous groups have been linked to the employment of revenge killings. In major discussions with different Moro groups, equal access to economic opportunities was often pointed out as a challenge in areas with the most number of *rido* cases (Doro, 2007; Durante et al., 2007; Husin, 2010; Tan, 2007). Very low employment rate and unproductive economic conditions “can lead to despair that can cause violence” (Durante et al., 2007, p. 121).

In the narratives about contemporary revenge killings in Agusan Manobo areas, poverty is commonly linked with revenge killings as a theme that would make sense why pain is expressed in specific ways such as *pangayaw*. As a 55-year old Manobo farmer pointed out, “Good livelihood is what can stop the *pangayaw* killings... If people can feed their children well, they will feel bad about the idea of killing or being killed.” A *pangayaw* case in 2012 similarly gained narratives linking the act with the economic conditions in the area. This was in terms of the lack of preoccupation in deprived areas where people lack the motivation to not kill when enraged. This same idea is reflected in the following statements of another farmer who once waged a revenge killing:

If you're poor, you only have very little to live for. If anyone messed up with the very few things you have left, that's it. If they [the government] can provide us with good livelihood, that's when these killings will stop. You won't bother yourself preparing to attack someone if you have a kid in college or a productive farm, would you? You will think twice before you do something, otherwise it will affect your kid who is in college or your successful farm. But, what do we have here? None of our kids go to school. They marry at such an early age and become maids in the city. The typhoons always damaged our farms. We have nothing.

Perhaps not coincidentally, indigenous areas with high number of revenge killing cases are among the most economically deprived regions in the country. The ARMM is named as the poorest region in the country (PBSP in Durante et al., 2007, p. 103). Meanwhile, between 1985-2000, the entire Northern Mindanao region in which Agusan del Sur is a part was also consistently identified as one of the poorest regions in the Philippines (Reyes & Valencia, 2004, p. 2). So, again, it is not a productive argument to point out that most people have not killed since it ultimately reflects disequilibrium between societies whose economic conditions either promote or avert killings.

Nonviolent Fight Response

The existence of societies that are weapon-free or whose weapons are nonlethal is another main argument of the non-killing paradigm that is employed to support the possibility of a non-killing society (Paige, 2002, pp. 109-113). Archaeological records of lethal weapons show that increased warfare only occurred late in human prehistory (Ferguson, 2002; Grossman, 2008; Kelly, 2000). Nonviolent responses such as the movements led by Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King, Jr. and the EDSA people power revolution may instead be used to address a perceived disequilibrium. It is in this light that the paradigm proposes that there should be a widespread use of nonviolent fight responses (Lopez-Reyes, 2013).

There is no question at all as to whether a weapon-free Mindanao characterized by nonviolent fight responses is ideal. The question, however, why is Mindanao heavily armed? In the context of revenge killings, this writer finds the notions of “self-help” and “flexible justice” helpful. In studying the security issues in an indigenous community in Bolivia, Daniel Goldstein (2005) explains that the practice of lynching in Bolivia is a self-help response to crimes in areas where the state no longer assumes its functions. This self-help mechanism operates when socio-economic and security aid from the state is absent or lacking, thereby people are left to implement ‘flexible justice’ by taking individual responsibility in addressing crimes that concern their safety and socio-economic welfare.

In the context of the ARMM where clan feuding is rampant, *rido* also appears to be a self-help means in responding to land disputes where the state fails to provide mechanisms for effective resolution (Kamilian, 2005, p. 3). In Lanao del Sur, home to many Maranao, crimes such as murder, homicide, and rape often remain unresolved (Matuan, 2007, p. 94). As Lara & Champain (2009) point out, the ARMM government does not have effective command over the provision of security and internal security reforms, hence it is not unsurprising that it could not play any relevant role in resolving *rido* and other community-level conflicts (p. 11). On the other hand, in the province of Maguindanao, the presence of competing authorities such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the state contributes to, rather than alleviates, the intensification of conflicts that relate to retaliatory killings (Lingga, 2007, p. 68).

Traditional resolution processes have become the primary venue in preventing and resolving *rido* and *pangayaw* in indigenous communities in Mindanao. Among the Maranao, *igma* and *taritib* which are founded on folk-Islam, all of *rido* cases were efficiently settled in the past decade (Matuan, 2007, p.79). In order to promote nonviolent fight responses, the role of traditional leaders who are the important figures in the traditional resolution processes needs to be further developed. This is challenging since the transition from the traditional to legal authority system in Maranao communities relegated the traditional leaders to supportive roles to dominant state politicians who have the monetary resources (Matuan, 2007, p. 94).

Like in Maranao communities, Manobo communities experience difficulty in preventing or resolving *pangayaw* cases especially when the concerned parties do not recognize a similar set of leaders. A traditional leader or *datu* serves as steadfast dispute mediators, but the prevalence of state-appointed tribal chieftains in Lumad areas today make it problematic. For a number of Agusan Manobo today, the inexperienced and young *datu* which the National Commission on the Indigenous People (NCIP) declared as chieftains on the basis of genealogy will not earn respect from their respective members especially in the context of dispute resolution processes. Made worse by the lack of access to basic legal services in indigenous areas, retaliatory attacks are considered to inevitably remain as the most effective retributive means to address grave offenses.

It is indeed an important concern then to identify mechanisms in concerned communities that promote peaceful means in addressing grave offenses. With this emphasis, the need to support traditional resolution mechanisms is highlighted. The need for nonviolent fight responses, therefore, is not simply a matter of disarming groups but to develop the processes that attenuate the need to use arms in resolving disputes such as the traditional resolution systems.

Killing as the Problem

Another proposition of the non-killing paradigm has to do with the notion that killing is the key problem. As Paige (2002) points out, “the time has come to set forth human killing as a problem to

be solved rather than to accept enslavement by it as a condition to be endured forever” (p. 145). The question then focused on how a society can eliminate killing and in understanding how other societies become “peaceful” (e.g., Gardner, 2002; Sponsel, 2002).

In Mindanao, revenge killings are considered a problem due to its consequences. Families have to evacuate to safer areas to avoid the crossfire during encounters. Encounters could also damage agricultural farms and livestock. Aside from displacement and economic rehabilitation for affected families, literacy rate is also hampered since schools would often be used as evacuation centers and only a very few teachers would accept an appointment in conflict-prone areas.

However, *rido* and *pangayaw* in the context of self-help and flexible justice in indigenous communities amid the lack of stable dispute resolution mechanisms serve as the last resort of marginalized groups to address offenses and deter future transgressions. Instead of focusing on killing as the ultimate problem, it is more important to highlight the need to understand the conditions that make revenge killings the last resort among marginalized communities. With these conditions, such as exacerbating poverty and weak leadership schemes, *rido* and *pangayaw* have become the last resort, not necessarily the primary option, to express pain and rage. Among different indigenous groups today (e.g., Manobo and B’laan), *pangayaw* may even serve as a response to advocate socio-political and socio-economic changes against impinging forces such as encroaching mining corporations and logging concessionaires (see Aksasato, 2011; Gaspar, 2011).

Hence, it is necessary to shift the attention from the notion of killing as a problem to the necessity of understanding the large-scale conditions that are promotive of killings in marginalized and indigenous communities. To address these issues will, in turn, address the need among indigenous communities to resort to killing.

Aside from economic poverty which has been pointed out in the previous section, another problematic condition that requires attention is the shift from the established and well-respected traditional leadership systems to the paradoxical loss of leadership amidst the multiplicity of leaders today. In many indigenous

communities in Mindanao, competing figures of authority include the state, either the MILF or the communist New People's Army (NPA), the traditional resolution processes among Moro groups, and the traditional resolution processes among Lumad groups. The existence of these multiple resolution bodies and the respective preferences of the people have to be considered in strengthening the justice system in concerned communities.

Today, indigenous groups such as the Agusan Manobo are well aware that their struggle especially in terms of land ownership and economic poverty requires them to engage in non-physical transactions such as education. However, physical forms of resolution such as armed revolt (e.g., against mining groups that trespass their autonomy and ancestral domains) and revenge killings will remain as a feasible option until their problematic socio-political and socio-economic conditions are addressed. Ample attention, then, should be directed to these problematic conditions that make conducive the killings.

Conclusion

While there are propositions of the non-killing paradigm that appears to be compatible with the underlying views in Mindanao communities wherein *rido* and *pangayaw* revenge killings are practiced, there are also crucial disparities. With regard to the notion that humans do not have an inherent tendency to kill, there are indigenous groups such as the Manobo whose beliefs seem to adhere to the same principle that non-killing is the natural state of relations among humans: no one is born a killer. A retaliatory attack, be it a *rido* or a *pangayaw*, would only be waged if a grave offense is committed. There is even a need for a ritual to call upon malevolent spirits (*tegbusow*) to possess an attacker in order to attenuate the inhibition to kill. The call for nonviolent fight responses that the non-killing paradigm promotes is also compatible with the need to highlight the role of traditional resolution mechanisms in indigenous communities which will prevent or resolve revenge killings.

However, the general emphasis on killing as the main problem in the non-killing framework does not appropriately capture the need for *rido* and *pangayaw* to be viewed through the lens of wider

socio-economic and socio-political conditions. In the context of Mindanao revenge killings, the more important question is not how to stop killing but how to address the conditions that make such killings the most feasible option for indigenous and marginalized groups. Framing the issue in this manner would take into account the status of *rido* and *pangayaw* as self-help tools until repressive conditions are addressed. A productive framework for a more agreeable Mindanao has to fixate on the wider large-scale conditions rather than the mere number of killings or lack thereof.

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