



Executive Summary

Case Studies on *Rido*: Conflict Resolution among Meranao in Baloi, Lanao del Norte

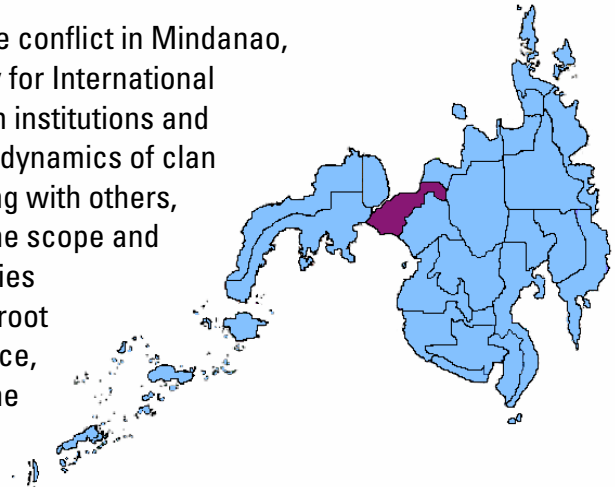
Monalinda E. Doro

Mindanao Anthropology Consortium, Research Institute for Mindanao Culture

Xavier University

June 2005

In an effort to create a clearer understanding of the conflict in Mindanao, The Asia Foundation and the United States Agency for International Development supported Mindanao-based research institutions and non-government organizations in investigating the dynamics of clan violence, otherwise known as *rido*. This study, along with others, provides a comprehensive conflict map showing the scope and magnitude of clan conflicts in Mindanao. The studies highlight specific cases of conflict, exploring their root causes and conditions for escalation and recurrence, their interaction with state-related conflicts, and the potential for conflict resolution.



STUDY OVERVIEW

Rido, or blood feud, is a cyclic system of vengeance which results in killing and/or retaliation among Meranao families and clans in Lanao. *Rido*, usually involving families, is characterized by violent initial reactions to a perceived insult or hurt caused by an individual to another. It is followed by retaliatory actions and counter retaliatory attacks by members of the disputants' families. Without any intervention, such acts may last for as long as three generations (Saber 1960; Caris 1991).

Rido has brought about serious problems, such as the loss of lives, destruction of property and disruption of peace and order, which become hindrances to socioeconomic, political and spiritual development in Meranao society (Caris, 1991).

These problems are experienced in many aspects of Meranao life, and require resolution to establish solidarity, peace and order in the society. Hence, this study was undertaken to document the occurrence of conflict and handling of *rido* among the Meranao of Baloi, Lanao del Norte. The focus was on the application of traditional law (*adat*).

This research aimed to describe and analyze the process of *rido* resolution among Meranao in Baloi, Lanao del Norte. Specifically, the objectives were the following:

1. To know the sociopolitical structure of the community;
2. To find out the common causes of *rido* and to identify the nature of offenses that result in a *rido*;
3. To describe the consequences of *rido* as experienced by the disputants and the community;
4. To describe the salient characteristics of those involved in resolving the *rido*;
5. To determine the methods employed in resolving the conflict; and
6. To examine the important factors that respondents consider in facilitating the resolution of *rido*.

This study employed a qualitative research design and focused on six barangays in Baloi, Lanao del Norte. Respondents included conflicting parties, mediators, negotiators, community leaders and elders (such as the sultan, *datus*, *Kali* or traditional judge, *Bae a Labi*, and other traditional titleholders), politicians, and influential women. Purposive and snowball methods of sampling were undertaken. Researchers analyzed primary and secondary data, interviewed key informants, undertook focus group discussions, observed participants, and utilized case studies.

A study on the processes of conflict resolution is important to understand how and why *rido* is prevalent in Meranao society, and how it is resolved. This can be used as a reference to understand the role of traditional systems in resolving such conflict. With this information, readers may realize that though outsiders have historically perceived Muslim Filipinos as lawless, the Meranao have a high respect for their traditional laws. An attempt to include here the roles of Meranao women in conflict resolution is also deemed important. Hence, the readers will be fully aware that the roles of the *Bae a Labi* (the female counterpart to the *datu*) are not symbolic but they have also contributed to establishing order in the society.

This study could also be useful to local government officials in handling and managing conflicts. It will provide information for policy-makers in bringing peace and order in the Meranao society. In that way, the cessation of conflict due to *rido* and its associated violence will be possible.

FINDINGS

The process of a mediated settlement flows as follows. Once a dispute arises, all parties quietly begin to assess possibilities for amicable settlement. However, they maintain a belligerent pose until settlement terms are agreed upon. One or more mediators, possibly at the instigation of one of the parties, begin to explore possibilities of arranging a settlement. If agreement on terms can be obtained, then the mediator will arrange a

public celebration at which the actual settlement takes place. In this ceremony, compensation (if any) for injury will be publicly handed over. All parties to the dispute, including the community as a whole, bear witness to the settlement and lend their weight to the peace it produces (Dumarpa 1983).

The Meranao can choose any of the following modes of settlement: the Philippine courts, the *Kitab* (Shariah Court), the *taritib ago igma* (consensus) or *kokoman a kambhatabataa* (law of the kinsmen). *Taritib ago igma* calls for the giving or paying of damages and other forms of punishment, such as a public reprimand of the offender, while *kokoman a kambhatabataa* refers to a peaceful mode of settling disputes which requires no damages. The principle behind this latter mode of conflict resolution is the maintenance and promotion of harmonious social relations between the parties in the conflict. This is common when the two parties in conflict are either consanguine or affinal relatives, in which case, reciprocity of aid and services should otherwise exist (Abdullah, 1982; 1997).

Most of the Meranao do not submit their *rido* cases to the Philippine courts, because it is a shame on their honor and dignity that they cannot punish the killer in their own hands. They prefer to avoid being called by demeaning words like "*da a orak iyan*", which simply means "coward."

Appeal to the Philippine courts is only done to imprison the killer. The *rido*, however, does not end there, because once the killer is released, he could still be killed by the other party. The possibility of *kasaop* (retaliation) is still at hand because of the pricked *maratabat* (honor/pride).

In a settlement, a considerable amount of money, or its equivalent value in the form of goods, passes from one disputant to another. The pattern of who receives or gives the amount is not always predictable. The person who presents the most convincing argument of having incurred more material losses and a greatly injured *maratabat* gets the payment.

The traditional and local political leaders contribute money (ranging from P10,000 to P50,000) for the settlement of the *rido*.

The aggrieved party demands confiscation of the weapon (usually an armalite) used in the killing. Thus, firearms in Meranao society continue to be widely circulated, allowing anybody from the clan to continue the *rido*. Since a weapon is a sign of power among the Meranao, anybody whose *maratabat* is trampled can use a firearm to avenge himself and his kin.

Cases handled by local political leaders can also be settled through traditional means: *taritib ago igma* (consensus) and *kokoman a kambhatabataa* (law of kinsmen).

The rituals of resolution prominently feature the disputants swearing on the Qur'an, to remind them that Islam admonishes its followers to show understanding, patience, and tolerance to all, including the enemy.

In the case studies investigated, the role of an influential leader can also be critical in putting an end to the *rido*. As stated by the informants, women are recognized by Meranao male leaders and the community as mediators. At the first occurrence of *rido*, they serve as shields as they are spared from retaliation. In the end, though, they serve as pacifiers. They are the first to work for settlement, since they are the most affected by *rido*. When *rido* takes place, men usually hide, and women must take over as financial providers.

To be effective, mediators to a conflict must possess *gees* (power) and influence and have a considerable following in the community. As described by the informants, mediators must be *maongangen* (wise), *maontol* (honest), *masabar* (patient), *kasarigan* (trustworthy), *mawarao* (brave), *malai paratiya ko Allah* (faithful), *tatamoken* (moneyed) and *daa a pagampilan iyan* (neutral).

Relation to the disputants, either by affinity or by blood, constitutes another factor in the leader's ability to resolve conflict.

Most of the causes of *rido* stem from land conflicts. These conflicts can be classified into three types: the *miyagagaw sa kawali* (conflict over a small parcel of land), *miyagagaw sa gapa* (conflict over a huge area of land), and *miyagagaw sa tamanaan* (conflict over a boundary). Other causes are *kapamagagawa sa kadato* (political rivalry), election fraud, enthronement of traditional leaders, heated argument, monetary debt, *kandaremet* (gambling), arrogance of those in power, carnapping, kidnapping, hold-up, stealing of domesticated animals and other household properties, jealousy, envy, expressing disrespect to a family or looking down upon one's line of descent, adultery, elopement, *leges* or *lobed* (rape), *katsismis sa di benar* (gossiping), and drug addiction.

The cases studied clearly indicate one fact: the trampling of one's *maratabat* or that of his kin is a very serious offence in Meranao society and culture. To a Meranao, nothing is trivial when the *maratabat* of a person or of his kin is assaulted or insulted. Any hurt or harm done and inflicted on one's *maratabat* or of his kin requires restoration. The only way to restore a damaged *maratabat* is to inflict harm through vengeance on the individual who has done the hurt. Therefore, even the slightest incident can result in physical violence, often killing, among Meranao disputants.

There appears to be a saturation point in the *rido* process, during which time the leaders make the crucial decision that enough is enough. Among the disputants themselves, this saturation point is also critical in their decision to seek a mediator. *Rido* can be settled

only when both parties to the conflict decide that they must put an end to it. If both parties to the conflict feel the need for peace, *rido* consequently terminates.

Among the consequences of *rido*, disputants typically experience financial burdens, property loss, non-performance of religious obligations due to constant hiding, disruption of children's academic life, and emotional instability resulting from constant fear and tension. These critical factors turn the *rido* around into a search for peace and the resolution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

An in-depth study is needed to understand why community leaders do not immediately intervene to resolve conflicts before they become serious. Among the questions that need to be answered are the following: (a) Why do leaders still wait for the *rido* to become extensive before they intervene and put an end to it? (b) How much of this phenomenon can be explained by the cultural norm which says that an injured *maratabat* must be given course and be manifested to the fullest before being stopping? (c) What child-rearing practices make the Meranao so sensitive to the slightest provocation and so violent in their reactions? (d) Can education help Meranao abandon the violent culture of *rido*?

It would seem logical to propose that peace education and peaceful means of resolving conflict in the context of Islam should be taught to Meranao as early as the kindergarten years. An educational program stressing non-violent ways of resolving conflicts may be a most welcome avenue to begin the process of change. Such a program should be given prominence in Meranao areas where *rido* tends to be prevalent.

REFERENCES CITED

- Abdullah, Intuas M. (1982). Conceptual Model of Dispute Settlement Among Maranao. An Alternative Approach in the Study of Conflict Resolution. *Arts and Science Journal*. January
- _____. (1997). Indigenous Methodology of Conflict Resolution Among Maranao: A Theoretical Consideration. *Proceedings Symposium on Peace and Development in Mindanao*. Edited by Dr. Luis Q. Lacar and Dr. Jaime An Lim.
- Caris, Amroussy. (1991). The Maranao Kinship group and Maranao Revenge or Saop. Undergraduate Thesis. Department of Political Science, Mindanao State University, Marawi City.
- Dumarpa, Jaime Jr. T. (1983). An Exploratory Study of Maranao Muslim Concepts of Land Ownership: Its Implications for the Maranao Conflict, M. A. Thesis, University of San Carlos, Cebu City.

Saber, Mamitua. (1960). The Maratabat of the Maranaos. *Philippine Sociological Review*. Vol. 3, Nos. 1-2, January-April.

The Research Institute for Mindanao Culture at Xavier University – Ateneo de Cagayan conducted this study in partnership with The Asia Foundation and with support from the United States Agency for International Development. The opinions expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Asia Foundation or the U.S. Agency for International Development. This document, and other rido research on Mindanao, can be found on The Asia Foundation’s website: <http://www.asiafoundation.org>.