



The Subanen: Their View of Peace in the Lens of their Belief-System based on Spinoza's Pantheism in Lantawan, Buug, Zamboanga Sibugay, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study emphasizes the recognition of the collective customary belief system of the Subanen community. The Subanen people originally inhabit the mountains of Zamboanga Peninsula. They are the people who believed in the undisturbed natural process happening in the universe and an environment rich in natural processes. The study was conducted in Lantawan, Buug, Zamboanga Sibugay. The study is purposive and intentional in that the data gathering procedure was done through a one-on-one in-depth oral interview with the key informant respondents through structured guided questions although most of the time unstructured questions relevant to the study followed naturally. The interview used the Bisaya dialect to facilitate understanding between the researchers and the respondents. The researchers gathered data from the input of 11 pure Subanens as key respondents. The study disclosed the following findings: their belief system is manifested in various rituals and celebrations: Their belief in the Magbabaya and performing of "daga" reflects their harmony with God, their belief in deities that is in trees, rivers, mountains, and well reflects their harmony with nature through offering animals depending on the ritual needed, their belief of being peaceful with other individual and celebrating Buklog symbolizes their unity within the family and the community. It had made relevant with Spinoza's Pantheism that they belong to the whole reality where respondents are conscious of their metaphysical communion with nature which leads to peace, they place a high value on the existence of beings other than themselves, believing that the supernatural world still exists within them. As a result, they have a strong desire to preserve their culture, as their unwavering belief in the supernatural will naturally be passed down from generation to generation through their language and traditions.

Keywords : Subanen, Belief-system, Pantheism, Harmony with God, Harmony with others, Harmony with all creation

1 INTRODUCTION

INDIGENOUS peoples in Mindanao are basically peace-loving people. They co-exist with other beings without unnecessary desire for hatred and war. In the event of conflicts, whether internal or external, they have a traditional way of resolving issues. (MIP-CPD, 2021). In the Philippines the Lumad is the largest indigenous people. This word is a Visayan term which means "born of the earth", there are 14 to 17 million indigenous peoples (IPs) belonging to 110 ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines (Rappler, 2017). Tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations (UNHR, 2013).

The United Nations Declaration, the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has set the limited standards for survival, self-esteem and well-being of the indigenous peoples around the world. It re-affirmed the Lumad right "to their distinct culture" and the right to their ancestral lands. Indigenous people communities are found in the forests, mountains, lowlands and coastal areas of the country and are in varied levels of socio-economic development. They engage in a mix of production system including swidden farming, settled agriculture, hunting and gathering, livestock raising, fishing and production and trade in local handicrafts. A common characteristic of indigenous people is their close attachment to the ancestral land, territory, and resources. The world view that "land is life" is deeply embedded in their existence

(Carino, 2012). The Lumad have been separated from the people below by more than simply terrible roads, ravines, and rough terrain. They have managed to maintain their rituals and traditions throughout the years, but disparities in worldviews with settlers and other outsiders have resulted in long-standing biases and misunderstandings. The Lumad (a term called for indigenous people of Mindanao) should kept their belief system in their tribe, in the sense that even there are new accepted world views and new adaptation of technologies they have preserve the significance of the culture they have as well to the generation to come though others misinterpret them. In one of the chapters, "The Subanen" shows how they resolve conflict and consider their land to be sacred (Masinaring, 2014).

The idea is that the indigenous people are naturally near to the natural environment. As they are attached in the environment it is also in them to take care of it. IPs wanted to maintain their land in their hands because it identifies them that they are indigenous. The IP communities are indeed rich in biodiversity, this is why they have this innate character to take care the nature. Aside from being close to nature, the indigenous people are also close to their ancestral lands. This is their basis of their collective identity. as well their means for survival. The laws embedded to the indigenous people, their rights as Filipinos and as human, as well their means for survival (Carino, 2012).

This study emphasizes the recognition of the collective customary laws of the Subanen community to protect their rights to their ancestral domains which ensure their economic, social and cultural well-being. This is in the premise that claims of ancestral domains and land titles has been the problem of most of the indigenous people in the Philippines (Molintas, 2004). Moreover, the Subanen is the second largest group among the indigenous peoples of Mindanao Island in southern Philippines in terms of population. (International Research Center for Intangible cultural Heritage in Asia Pacific Region, 2019) thus, this study sought to find out how the culture of peace manifested within the belief-system of the Subanen community through their rituals and other ceremonies that needed to be restored for the future generation. Due to this fact, the researchers realized the importance of acknowledging the existence of the Subanen community of Lantawan, Buug, Zamboanga Sibugay as an advocate of peace. This research is made relevance with theory of Benedict Spinoza's Pantheism. This is to prose that God is identical with nature. This does not limit Spinoza, he does not bring only God but also man under the universal rule of nature (Balint, 2007). According to Spinoza, each person's path to "blessedness" or "salvation" entails an extension of the intellect toward an intuitive grasp of God, the entirety of nature, and its rules. In other words, for Spinoza, philosophy is a spiritual discipline aimed at happiness and freedom which cohered with the Flower-petal model that has a framework for peace in the six categories of a culture of peace: 1) dismantling a culture of war, 2) environmental peace, 3) education for justice and compassion, 4) human rights education, 5) intercultural solidarity, and 6) inner peace. (Toh, 2004).

This study shows the account of the Subanen's view of peace through the lens of their belief systems and how these traditions af-

fect their state of peacefulness. Furthermore, these manners of culture is made relevant to Spinoza's Pantheism to understand that the peacefulness of an individual is in harmony with God, nature and other people in the community and thus they belong to the whole reality.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Site

The study was conducted in Lantawan, Buug, Zamboanga Sibugay. Lantawan is a barangay in the municipality of Buug, in the province of Zamboanga Sibugay. Its population as determined by the 2015 Census was 454. This represented 1.24% of the total population of Buug. It is situated at approximately 7.6974, 123.0739, in the island of Mindanao. Elevation at these coordinates is estimated at 202.5 meters or 664.4 feet above mean sea level. According to the Indigenous People Mandatory Representative, based on the census conducted, there are 54 Subanen households in the area with 222 individuals.

2.2 Respondents and Sampling Procedure

The researchers gathered data from the input of 11 Subanens as key-respondents. The key-respondents were pure Subanen. The researchers identified 5 young adults, 3 adults and 3 older for the purpose of the study. Above is the list of the Subanen who were interviewed

Respondent's Name	Age	Position
Respondent A	31	IPMR (Indigenous People Mandatory Representative)
Respondent B	23	SK Chairman
Respondent C	40	Timuay
Respondent D	45	IP Women
Respondent E	43	IP Organization
Respondent F	56	Member
Respondent G	52	Member
Respondent H	25	Member
Respondent I	34	Member
Respondent J	35	Member
Respondent K	77	Balyan

during the data gathering, the table shows the respondents' ages and their position in the community.

2.3 Research Design and Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering procedure was done through a one-on-one in-depth oral interview with the key-respondents through structured guide questions although most of the times unstructured questions relevant to the study were followed naturally. The interview used the Bisaya dialect to facilitate understanding between the researcher and the respondents. After the answers were transcribed in its original language, the researchers transcribed them to English.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Their belief on God

For Subanens, the divine is called the *Magbabaya*, a Supreme Being, the creator of the heaven and the earth. To show their gratitude to the

Magbabaya (God), the Subanen offered the Ginum Bonwa, a thanksgiving ritual. Since then, the Ginum Bonwa has become the largest thanksgiving ritual of the Subanen to the Magbabaya (Masinaring, 2014).

From this, we can determine that Subanen really believe in Magbabaya, who is the creator of all things, this belief of the Subanen is consistent with Spinoza's word, "...Whatsoever exists, expresses in a given conditioned manner God's power, which is the cause of all things, therefore an effect must necessarily follow." (Nadler, 2006). In connection with the theory of Spinoza, all the key informants believed in *Magbabaya*. This we can see that Subanen dwelling with nature under the supernatural force of *Magbabaya*. Other key informant asserted that they performed their "daga" when someone was elected from their community to give thanks and appease the curses uttered in her.

Harmony with God is acknowledging God as the ultimate Reality. The other aspects of one's life's reality are subordinated to God (PCBI, 2021). The Subanen's belief on God manifested in the way they respect the Supreme Being. This is strengthened by the assertion of St. Augustine of Peace between man and God is the well-ordered obedience of faith to eternal law. It is to recognize that believing in God is connected with eternal peace.

3.2 Their belief on Environment

Indigenous groups in Mindanao often use celestial bodies or the stars as their basis or guide for their farming, hunting, fishing and other livelihood activities, beliefs, practices and traditions (Polenda, 1989).

Respondent D: *Kanang punoan sa Balete, balete nga daghan ug aninipot kay naay nagpuyo kana sila ginarepetto ghaon na sila kay mga kuan man ghaon sila kinabuhi, ginaammpoan kung mangita ug baboy sa lasang. Magdala ug manok or bino kay halaran kay dli sayon ang magkuha ug baboy halas. Sa balete kay maghalad ka para mangayo sa ila, pero ug mangayo ka muahatag na sila.* (Balete that has many fireflies, it means there are supernatural beings that are unseen live there, they also must be respected, balete trees are being prayed when finding (pig) in the forest. Chicken or wine is also a form of sacrifice so that when you ask, they will give back.) Respondent J: "...sa kabukiran, naa man pud nag puyo dira.." (In the mountains somebody is living in there.)

Other key-informant stated that they do ritual called "magdiwata" means to offer a sacrifice depending on the mistake done by the individual. A ritual can be done with a bolian (shaman) but it has become a tradition for the Subanen to have a 'timuay' to officiate it.

Subanens believe in the deities of the spirits in the environment as the respondents asserted it. Self-preservation as a straightforward matter of prolonging one's life. Self-preservation for Spinoza means that every individual strives to persist its being (Youpa, 2003). Applying this idea to Subanens basic act to preservation, preserving their lands and their natural environment means preserving the whole tribe. Preservation is not a single act but it is collective.

This relationship of man to nature is considered a huge factor in maintaining peace of one's self and society. According to UNEP, environmental degradation affects the achievement of sustainable development thus affecting the peace of a person towards its surroundings (UNEP, 2021). The results above show that the Subanen's respect to nature is one of the attributes that the society should look forward in order to treat conflicts which undermine governance, in turn, generating further shifts in threats to ecosystems in a harmful socio-ecological feedback loop.

3.3 Other Individual

A tribal leader known as 'timuay' or 'gukom', who is authorized as a mediator to resolve problems, is in charge of maintaining peace and order between families in the village. However, if these disagreements entail grave offenses, they are overseen by the proper authorities in the region, such as the Barangay Captain. The "Timuay" is also knowledgeable about the tribe's traditional customs and local bees (Ethnic Group Philippines, 2016). One of the key-informants asserted that when she became the IPMR, people in their community asked for help. The key-informant added that one of the ways to pay respect to their "Timuay" after resolving the conflict is either giving a "panggasi" (traditional wine) or "tuba". Respondent B, disclosed in the community, it is common for them to share what they have. The researchers also experienced their hospitality, instead of giving them a token for the time they spared, they share the food with the researchers.

The Subanen community carefully celebrates Buklog as a symbol of being one with the other individual and able to deal with the conflict within the community. Buklog is the Subanen's extensive thanksgiving ceremony system, which includes various rituals. It is known for its elevated structure with a highly flexible platform that serves as a religious and social area for community dances and rituals. It is open to any and all members of the community. Community, and visitors are welcome to participate in most of the rites (Barbosa, 2002). This Buklog which composed with many rituals is the gathering to celebrate the good harvest from Magbabaya. It demonstrates the intricate rites and exemplifies the deep faith of the Subanens in their religious and spiritual beliefs. The entire process - from the construction of the platform to the gathering of the community to perform the dance ritual - holds a deeper meaning for the Subanens.

One of the key-informants stated that she had experienced to be bullied because of wearing their traditional costume, but in response to the bullying, she did not take revenge instead she took it as a challenge to showcase the culture of their tribe in order to prove to them that they are not worthy to be belittled. This finding is supported by the research paper presented by Dr. Rivera (2016) at an international conference on Subanen Simplicity As Counter to Suban-on Talk, she documented some racial expressions against the Subanens, like "Subanens are an ignorant race." She noted that Subanens were not only discriminated by non-Subanens but discrimination also exists within their tribe.

Respondents generally described their relationships with others as positive. They described themselves as people who value peace. The

researchers actually observed that their community is peaceful and clean. Their location has effectively isolated them from urbanization, allowing them to retain their harmonious personality. Even when they are not in commercial areas, they maintain harmony. Respondent K, a balyan or priest healer, strongly affirmed Subanen's good nature. Respondent K revealed and said that a balyan is well-liked in the community.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The Subanen's belief-system says that they are one with nature, God, and other individuals. Their belief system is manifested in various rituals and celebrations: Their belief in the Magbabaya and performing of "daga" reflects their harmony with God, their belief in dieties that are in trees, rivers, mountains, and well reflects their harmony with nature through offering animals depending on the ritual needed, their belief of being peaceful with other individual and celebrating Bukolog symbolizes their unity within the family and the community. It had made relevant with Spinoza's Pantheism that they belong to the whole reality where respondents are conscious of their metaphysical communion with nature, they place a high value on the existence of beings other than themselves, believing that the supernatural world still exists within them. Subanen do not have an individualistic sense. The trees, the rivers, the mountains, the other individuals are the part of the whole reality. Subanen treat nature not with mastery but with holistic harmony and leads them to a peaceful community. From the conception of Spinoza, there is only Substance in the universe, it is God or Nature and by this substance, everything exist. As well as to the Subanen, they believe that everything is will of the Magbabaya (God). Whatever they do, everything is God.

Since Spinoza asserts the absolute Substance—which is God, whom God reveals himself in nature and sustains of all the things that exist, including the spiritual things as a result, they have a strong desire to preserve their culture, as their unwavering belief in the supernatural will naturally be passed down from generation to generation through their own language and traditions.

This study suggests that the other Lumads are also capable to understand that they are also part of the reality, that this group of people are capable of preserving the environment because of their belief-system

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