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NAVIGATING CLAN FEUDS: EXPLORING EXPERIENCES, EFFECTS, AND ASPIRATIONS IN RIDO CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

Rido, or clan feuding, persists as a significant source of violence in Sulu, where kinship obligations and concepts of honor shape community relations and patterns of retaliation. Despite the presence of formal state justice mechanisms, many Tausug communities continue to rely on customary mediation led by elders and religious leaders. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences, challenges, effects, and aspirations of individuals affected by rido in the Municipality of Indanan, Sulu. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed, using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with victims, disputants, community members, and mediators selected through purposive sampling. The analysis revealed pervasive experiences of forced displacement, disrupted livelihoods, psychological distress, family instability, and reliance on survival strategies such as neutrality and relocation. Participants identified political rivalries, land disputes, intergenerational grievances, misinformation, and a culture of fear as the primary challenges hindering conflict resolution. Rido cases were found to last from seven to over thirty years, resulting in long-term trauma, educational disruption, weakened social cohesion, and generational transmission of hostility. Participants expressed strong aspirations for stable peace through strengthened traditional mediation, improved institutional support, clearer land governance, and alignment of customary practices with legal frameworks such as RA 8371, RA 11054, and RA 9285. The findings highlight the need for hybrid, culturally grounded, community-driven approaches that address both structural and normative dimensions of rido to achieve sustainable reconciliation.

KEYWORDS: *Clan Feud, Conflict Resolution, Indigenous Justice, Maratabat, Tausug Culture*

INTRODUCTION

In many traditional communities in the southern Philippines—especially among the Tausug, Maguindanaon, and Maranao—honor, kinship, and clan loyalty are central cultural values. While these strengthen group identity, they also give rise to **rido**, a recurring form of violent conflict triggered by land disputes, political rivalries, personal grievances, or affronts to honor. Rido has long hindered peace and development in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago.

Sulu, now part of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), operates within a socio-cultural and legal environment shaped by Islamic traditions and customary law. Here, justice emphasizes reconciliation rather than punishment. Community elders, datus, and imams use dialogue (*pag-agad*), compensation (*bang-bang/sipat*), and peace rituals such as *kanduli* and *tampat* to restore balance and preserve *maratabat* (honor). These culturally rooted mechanisms are often more effective than formal legal processes in resolving deep-seated clan disputes. Laws such as RA 8371, RA 11054, and RA 9285 recognize and support these practices, unlike the Katarungang Pambarangay, which is often insufficient for clan-based conflicts.

Despite these systems, rido remains widespread. The Asia Foundation recorded 145 cases in Sulu from the 1930s to 2005, and recent long-standing feuds—some spanning decades—continue to be resolved only through community-led initiatives. Its persistence is driven by socio-economic inequalities, weakened traditional leadership, and gaps between customary and formal justice systems.

This study aims to deepen understanding of these dynamics and to help develop culturally responsive approaches to rido resolution that integrate traditional practices with legal frameworks. It focuses on the experiences, processes, and aspirations surrounding clan conflict resolution in Indanan, Sulu.

Literature Review

Globally, studies show that clan-based conflicts often emerge in regions where state presence is weak and communities rely on customary systems for justice. Fearon and Laitin (2000) argue that in such contexts, disputes over honor, kinship, land, and resources are managed

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informally, frequently resulting in prolonged feuds. Boege (2006) similarly notes that traditional societies possess indigenous mechanisms for dispute resolution, yet these systems become strained once violence escalates to a community-wide scale. In the Horn of Africa, Abdi (2021) found that resource scarcity, political competition, and psychological factors among clans fuel inter-communal conflicts, reflecting patterns comparable to rido in Mindanao.

Nationally, rido is defined by Torres (2007) as recurring hostilities between families and clans driven by land disputes, political rivalries, crimes of honor, and personal grudges. The persistence of these feuds is frequently linked to delays in the formal justice system and its inability to offer culturally grounded solutions. Lara and Champain (2009) highlight how weak governance, patronage politics, and the involvement of armed groups further complicate conflict management, making families turn to traditional mediation despite its susceptibility to bias.

Locally, scholars emphasize the cultural foundations of rido in Sulu and other Muslim communities. Majul (1999) describes practices such as *pag-aad* (negotiated settlement) and *tampat* (peace pacts) as vital to preventing bloodshed, although retaliation may persist when negotiations fail. Abubakar (2017) adds that unresolved disputes are often "inherited" by younger generations, as pride (*maratabat*) and social expectations pressure families to maintain hostilities even when reconciliation is necessary for economic and social stability.

Despite extensive discussions on rido and indigenous justice systems, gaps remain in understanding its present-day manifestations at the community level, particularly in Sulu. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing culturally sensitive and effective frameworks for conflict prevention and resolution.

Theoretical / Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on Transformational Leadership Theory by James MacGregor Burns and Bernard Bass, which posits that leaders can inspire followers to achieve collective goals by demonstrating vision, integrity, and motivation. It emphasizes moral commitment, shared purpose, and empowerment, attributes crucial in academic administration.

The study also draws from the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), which identifies five modes of handling conflict: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. This model serves as a guide in analyzing how Criminology school leaders address disputes, communicate, and maintain institutional relationships.

The integration of these theories provides a dual lens: leadership as a proactive, motivational process, and conflict management as a reactive but constructive mechanism for sustaining harmony and performance in educational settings.

Significance of the Study

Globally, various theories explain how disputes emerge and how they may be resolved through structured mechanisms. Conflict Theory posits that disputes arise from competing interests and power imbalances, making conflict an inherent feature of social relations. In the context of rido, this theory highlights how unequal power, honor expectations, and resource competition fuel prolonged clan feuds. Game Theory further explains how disputing parties make strategic decisions, emphasizing cooperation, retaliation, and negotiation—patterns often seen in inter-clan dynamics in Mindanao.

Negotiation Theory, particularly the interest-based approach of Fisher and Ury, underscores the importance of finding mutually satisfactory solutions rather than focusing on rigid positions. This aligns with indigenous practices that prioritize restoring relationships over assigning blame. Social Exchange Theory also contributes by explaining why communities prefer ADR: quicker, less costly, and culturally acceptable processes provide greater perceived benefits than formal litigation.

Meanwhile, Mediation Theory provides a culturally relevant lens for understanding rido resolution. Moore (1986) describes mediation as third-party facilitation toward voluntary agreement—mirrored in Tausug practices where *tau maas* (elders) and imams mediate through *kanduli*, *tampat*, and *bang-bang*. These culturally grounded interventions function to restore harmony, preserve *maratabat* (honor), and prevent cycles of retaliation.

Collaborative Law Theory supports cooperative, non-adversarial approaches, emphasizing transparency and joint problem-solving—values aligned with community-based settlement processes. Complementing these theoretical foundations are legal frameworks such as the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (RA 8371), the Bangsamoro Organic Law (RA 11054), and the Alternative Dispute Resolution Act (RA 9285), all of which formally recognize customary mediation and legitimize traditional conflict-resolution structures in Moro communities.

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Together, these theories explain how ADR mechanisms operate, why communities rely on culturally grounded mediation, and how cooperative, interest-based approaches contribute to sustainable peace in clan-affected areas.

This study is anchored on the understanding that rido is shaped by socio-cultural norms, historical grievances, and institutional contexts. Clan feuds in Sulu are influenced by honor (*maratabat*), kinship obligations, resource disputes, and gaps in the formal justice system. The conceptual model positions rido as a multidimensional issue involving social, cultural, legal, and personal factors.

The framework integrates key legal foundations—RA 8371, RA 11054, and RA 9285—which acknowledge the legitimacy of customary justice systems and the role of elders, imams, and traditional leaders in mediation. These laws reinforce the significance of community-based peacebuilding and provide state recognition for non-adversarial settlement processes.

The study assumes that experiences with rido vary based on individual and familial circumstances, influencing well-being, livelihood, security, and community relationships. Four core components guide the inquiry: (1) lived experiences of rido, (2) challenges encountered during conflict, (3) effects on personal, family, and community life, and (4) aspirations for resolution and peacebuilding. Together, these elements offer a holistic understanding of how rido is experienced and addressed at the grassroots level, emphasizing culturally grounded and legally supported pathways toward sustainable reconciliation.

Objectives of the Study
To explore and understand the dynamics of rido (clan feuds) in the communities of Indanan, Sulu by examining the experiences, challenges, effects, and aspirations of individuals involved in such conflicts.

1. To describe the experiences of the informants concerning rido in their communities.
2. To identify the challenges encountered by the informants related to rido.
3. To determine the effects of rido on the personal, familial, and communal lives of the informants.
4. To explore the aspirations of the informants in preventing rido and achieving effective dispute resolution.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design
Phenomenology was selected as the research design because it focused on the essence of lived experiences, making it ideal for exploring how victims, disputants, and community members understood and responded to RIDO. The design allowed for an in-depth examination of the emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of conflict resolution as experienced by the participants.

Research Method
This study adopted a qualitative research method, specifically using the phenomenological approach, to explore the lived experiences, challenges, effects, and aspirations of individuals involved in RIDO or clan feuds. This method was appropriate for capturing deep, personal insights and meanings from the perspectives of those directly affected by the phenomenon. Through this approach, the study aimed to uncover the essence of RIDO-related experiences and how individuals navigated and made sense of conflict in their communities.

Population of the Study
Participants included individuals who had been directly involved in RIDO, such as victims, disputants, and their families, as well as community elders, religious leaders, and traditional mediators who had participated in resolving such conflicts. The study used purposive sampling to ensure the selection of individuals with rich and relevant experiences. The number of participants was determined by data saturation, or the point at which no new information emerged.

Inclusion Criteria
Victims: Individuals who have been part of conflict resolution processes for criminal cases in Sulu.
Offenders: Individuals who have participated in clan conflict resolution processes for criminal cases in Sulu.
Community Leaders: Recognized local leaders who are involved in or knowledgeable about clan conflict resolution practices.
Mediators: Professionals actively engaged in clan conflict resolution processes within Sulu.
Law Enforcement Officers: Officers who have referred cases to ADR or Katarungan Pambarangay Justice System or are knowledgeable about its application.

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Exclusion Criteria
Non-Participants: Individuals who have not been involved in clan conflict resolution processes or criminal cases in Sulu.
Unrelated Professionals: Professionals not directly engaged with clan conflict resolution in the criminal justice system.

Data Gathering Tools
Data was gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) using a semi-structured guide developed based on the research questions. Interviews provide individual perspectives, while FGDs allow the researcher to observe group dynamics, shared beliefs, and community sentiments related to RIDO. All interviews and discussions conducted in the local language (Tausug) and audio-recorded with permission. Transcripts were translated and transcribed for analysis.

Data Gathering Procedures
This study started with a proposed outline and submitted to the adviser for approval. Then, upon consultation with the researcher's mentor, the research problems were organized. Initial readings were done to gather potential sources of related studies and literature. The researcher, upon reading the available literature, decided that a qualitative design would best work on this study and also with the suggestion of his adviser.

Treatment of Data
For the treatment of qualitative data, the following data treatment methods were employed: In the analysis, it used coding of focus group transcripts to identify key themes and patterns. It also identified themes to group the codes into broader categories and analyzed common experiences and perceptions related to clan conflict resolution processes.
It used content analysis, such as categorization, in organizing qualitative data into categories based on recurring topics or issues discussed by participants. It also used pattern recognition to identify patterns and relationships within the data to understand the impact of clan conflict resolution.
For the data treatment, it conducted focus group discussions for the collection of data, and recordings were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were systematically coded to extract meaningful information and identify themes related to clan conflict resolution practices and experiences. Thematic and content analysis methods were used to interpret the data, offering a deeper understanding of how clan conflict resolution was perceived and implemented in Indanan, Sulu.

Ethical Considerations
An informed consent form was developed and used for all participants. It outlined the purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, and assured confidentiality. They were given sufficient time to read, ask questions, and consent voluntarily. Participants' responses were kept confidential and anonymous to protect their privacy. Participation was entirely voluntary, with no incentives or pressures applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the thematic analysis of data gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and individual interviews conducted among participants who have directly or indirectly experienced *rido* (clan conflict) in the Municipality of Indanan, Sulu. Through the phenomenological approach, the study sought to explore the lived experiences, challenges, effects, and aspirations of individuals affected by clan feuds. The data were analyzed using **Colaizzi's method**, which involves extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and synthesizing them into comprehensive descriptions that capture the essence of the participants' experiences.

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Profile of the Respondents

Table 1

Category of Participants	Description	Inclusion Basis	Number of Participants
Victims	Individuals who have experienced rido-related violence or displacement	Direct involvement in rido incidents; affected by clan cily	2
Disputants/Offenders	Individuals involved as parfies in rido conflicts	Participation in rido events or disputes	2
Family Members	Relatives of victims or disputants affected by the conflict	Possess firsthand knowledge of rido's impact on the house	1
Community Elders	Respected senior community figures	Recognized for knowledge of rido and customary prac	1
Religious Leaders (Imams)	Leaders engaged in reconci-liation and peacebuilding	Participation in conflict mediation	1
Traditional Mediators (Tau Maas)	Culturally legitimate mediators	Active role in resol-ving clan disputes	1
Community Leaders	Police officer knowledgeable about ADR/KP	Has handled or referred rido-related	10 Participants

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the thematic analysis of data gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and individual interviews conducted among participants who have directly or indirectly experienced *rido* (clan conflict) in the Municipality of Indanan, Sulu. Through the phenomenological approach, the study sought to explore the lived experiences, challenges, effects, and aspirations of individuals affected by clan feuds. The data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method, which involves extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and synthesizing them into comprehensive descriptions that capture the essence of the participants' experiences.

The analysis yielded four major sections corresponding to the specific statements of the problem: (1) experiences of informants concerning *rido* in their communities, (2) challenges encountered by informants regarding *rido*, (3) effects of *rido* on their lives, and (4) their aspirations to prevent *rido* and promote peaceful resolution. Each section is presented through themes supported by direct quotations from participants, followed by interpretation and discussion anchored in relevant literature.

Conclusion

This study explored the dynamics of rido in the Municipality of Indanan, Sulu by examining the lived experiences, challenges, effects, and aspirations of individuals directly affected by clan feuds. Findings revealed that rido remains a pervasive and deeply rooted social issue shaped by honor (*maratabat*), kinship obligations, political tensions, land disputes, and long-standing grievances. Informants described experiences of fear, displacement, loss, and constant insecurity. They also identified significant challenges, including threats of retaliation, limited trust in formal justice mechanisms, and the weakening of traditional leadership structures.

The effects of rido extend beyond the disputing families, disrupting livelihoods, education, mobility, and community cohesion. Many participants emphasized that rido is often inherited by younger generations, allowing conflict cycles to persist for years or even decades. Despite these hardships, informants expressed strong aspirations for peace, preferring solutions grounded in traditional mediation, religious guidance, community involvement, and the integration of these practices with supportive legal frameworks such as RA 8371, RA 11054, and RA 9285.

Overall, the study concludes that effective rido resolution requires culturally sensitive, community-driven, and legally supported approaches that address both the social roots of conflict and the structural gaps in the justice system.

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Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Strengthen Traditional Mediation Mechanisms

- Support *tau maas*, imams, and elders through capacity-building programs on mediation, conflict analysis, and peacebuilding.
- Document and institutionalize effective cultural practices such as *kanduli*, *tampat*, and *bang-bang* to preserve and standardize local approaches.

2. Enhance Collaboration Between Customary and Formal Justice Systems

- Establish clear referral pathways between barangay justice, religious leaders, and customary mediators.
- Ensure that provisions in RA 8371, RA 11054, and RA 9285 are fully implemented in rido-prone areas.

3. Provide Community-Based Peace Education

- Conduct awareness programs on nonviolent dispute resolution, early detection of conflicts, and the long-term consequences of rido.
- Integrate peace education in schools and community youth organizations to disrupt intergenerational transmission of feuds.

4. Improve Government and NGO Support Systems

- Offer livelihood assistance, psychosocial support, and relocation aid for families displaced by rido.
- Encourage the Bangsamoro Government and local LGUs to sustain localized peace interventions similar to the 2024 Panamao rido settlements.

5. Strengthen Local Leadership and Governance

- Empower barangay officials and community leaders with training in conflict mediation and public safety.
- Address governance gaps that contribute to rido escalation, such as weak documentation of land ownership.

6. Conduct Further Research

- Explore the experiences of women, children, and youth in rido situations.
- Investigate long-term peacebuilding models applicable to Sulu and other Moro communities.

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