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From No Man's Land to Promise Land: Narratives on Destigmatizing Marag Valley's Catastrophic War

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the focus was on exploring the narratives of Marag Valley residents and how they undertook the challenging task of destigmatizing the aftermath of the catastrophic war following the occupation of the Communist Party of the Philippines- New Peoples' Army (CPP-NPA.) Employing a qualitative research design with a specific emphasis on the narrative method, the research delved into the firsthand accounts and experiences of eight local participants. These participants, predominantly leaders within various sectors across the three barangays in Marag Valley, provided invaluable insights into the strategies and mechanisms they employed to destigmatize the war's impact.

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The analysis of the narratives led to the identification of eight prominent sub-themes that encapsulated the multifaceted nature of the destigmatization process. These sub-themes included the effectiveness of government peace agreements, the role of government interventions, the significance of inter-agency collaboration, the creation of a positive community image, the emphasis on the value of education, the utilization of Marag Valley as a tourist destination, the incorporation of ethical values, and the influential role of social media promotion.

The findings underscored the interconnectedness of various factors contributing to the destigmatization efforts, emphasizing not only governmental and institutional initiatives but also the pivotal role played by community values, education, and media in reshaping the narrative surrounding the war's aftermath in Marag Valley. This study provides valuable insights for policymakers, community leaders, and researchers interested in understanding the dynamics of post-conflict recovery and community resilience.

Keywords: *promise land, narratives, destigmatizing, war*

1. Introduction

War, in the popular meaning, is a struggle between political groups involving combat of considerable period and importance (Frankel 2023). In the use of social science, certain qualifications are added. Sociologists usually apply the term to such conflict only if they are initiated and conducted in accordance with socially recognized forms (Frankel 2023). They treat war as a tradition accepted in custom or in law. Military writers usually limit the term to belligerency in which the contending groups are sufficiently equal in power to provide

the result unsure for a time (Britanica 2023). Militarized battle of compelling states with isolated and helpless people are usually called pacifications (Deinla and Hall 2019), military campaign, or investigation; with small states, they are called interventions or reprisals; and with internal groups, insurrection or rebellion (Duignan 2024). Such incidents, if the opposition is sufficiently strong or drawn-out, may achieve a magnitude that entitles them to the name “war”.

In all ages, war has been an important topic of analysis (Britanica 2023). In the latter part of the twentieth century, in the effect of two World Wars and in the shadow of nuclear, biological, and chemical devastation, more articles were written on the subject than ever before. Undertaking to realize the cause of war, to develop some theory of its causes, doings, and prevention, are of great value, for theory shapes human expectations and determines human behavior (Levy 1998, 139). The various schools of theorists are generally aware of the intense power they can exercise upon life, and their writings usually include a powerful standard component, for, when recognized by leaders, their ideas can expect the characteristics of self-fulfilling prediction. The effects of war on humanity include, the changing of ethical motive (Moseley 2024), the displacement of people, mental sickness developed by war, and the separation created between humanity (WHO 2021).

In the Philippines, since the Communist Party was founded in 1968 and its armed affiliate, the New People’s Army (NPA), established an armed endeavor against the government (Stanford University 1), tens of thousands have died. The conflict peaked in the 1980s, under the restrictive regime of Ferdinand Marcos (De Dios 2017).

One of the most salient cases of salvaging, massacre, and forcible evacuation occurred in Marag Valley, Luna, Apayao (Belarde et al 2016). It was once troubled by the leftist – the Communist weaponed unit called the New Peoples’ Army. The area became an asset base (battle ground of) and a training ground of Communist rebel in Northern Luzon (Refworld.org 2011). In the 1980s, it was proclaimed a “no man’s land.” The worsened peace and order conditions prompted some of the dwellers to leave their residence and farming area and move to Luna and Pamplona. Part of information of the war

years scattered in the area – booby traps, onslaught or burned houses, man-made tunnels, caves, and even land mines abound in the Valley. There are dozens of more new stories of inhumaneness, human tragedy, and crime. Residents said that they still feel the trauma, pain, and hardship of the war years. But being chased around the mountains in the tri-boundaries of Apayao, Cagayan, and Kalinga by contending forces have taught them precious lessons in survival and resilience. Literatures have been written on the stories of survival of Marag Valley residents during the catastrophic war in the 80's and early 90's. The current study delved on the experiences of the residents of Marag Valley on how they destigmatize the ill effects of the catastrophic war.

Statement of the Problem

The primary objective of this study was to analyze the narratives on how the people of Marag Valley destigmatized the mark of the catastrophic war during the CPP-NPA occupation.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

A narrative research design was used to address the research objective. Although narrative research embraces many theoretical approaches, several assumptions are shared. One of these is a consensus on the pervasive nature of stories and storytelling. Under this assumption, human beings are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Although storytelling has historically been accorded a marginal position in research, it has emerged as an approach with considerable potential (Berman et al. 2006).

2.2. Participants of the Study

The researchers used snowball sampling in identifying the participants. In this sampling technique, one interviewee gives the researcher the name of at least one or more potential interviewees. The identified interviewee, in turn, provides the name of at least one more

potential interviewee, and so on, with the sampling growing like a rolling snowball if more than one referral per interviewee is provided. Finding the right people at the right time is crucial in collecting data that are usable, viable, and valuable. Identified participants were leaders in the *barangay* to include *barangay* officials, women and youth who were vital to the development of Marag Valley. Eight (8) participated in this study, five (5) of which were women and three (3) were men.

2.3. The Role of the Researchers

In order for the researchers to be able to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants in qualitative researches, they had to perform various roles. During the implementation of the study, they had to be the interviewer, recorder, transcriber, translator, and encoder. To reach more profound levels of understanding, as interviewers, they had to ask probing questions, listen, think, and then ask more questions. As transcribers and encoders, they would record transcribe and translate in English responses of participants in the interview.

2.4. Collecting Data

Data collection was planned and had been undertaken following several phases. Practical and ethical issues limit data collection. Data collection aims to capture a range of contexts, perspectives, and timeframes, and includes transcripts, interviews, field notes, memos, elicited texts, questionnaires, documents, and scholarly literature. Hence, posts from social media such as the Facebook and the like were also considered and treated as sources of data. The constant cyclic and combined processes of data collection, analysis, coding, memo writing, and direct theoretical sampling were used to identify further contexts and relevant data in this study.

2.5. Empowering Participants

During the interview, the participants and the interviewer were treated as equals. The participants selected the time and location of the interview (Bates 2004) and led the conversation. Interviews can be either individual or group (Muylaert et al. 2014). The researchers

asked broad open questions, without preconceived issues, listened to the participants, let the conversation unfold, and empowered the participants to share experiences and perspectives. The researchers recorded field notes describing the context and any nonverbal clues. Despite the power bestowed on the participants, the researchers were not passive and remained facilitative to direct the course of the interview to the main topic.

2.6. Coding Data

Open coding was used line by line throughout the interview transcripts. Selective coding was used to identify core categories and themes.

2.7. Achieving Saturation

The research processes continued until a point of saturation was reached, that is “no new concepts emerging from data.”(Aldiabat 2018, 248). Researchers had to “look for groups that stretch diversity, assure that category is saturated, based on widest possible range of data” (Saunders et al 2018).

2.8. Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations were included in the implementation of the study, such as the following:

Conflict of interest. Upon conducting the study, conflict with two or more competing interests might arise. The researchers adhered to the institutional requirements for identifying, disclosing, and managing conflicts. The researchers conducted the study without any conflict of interest; they led the research study for academic purposes and fulfilled the course requirements.

Privacy and confidentiality. The anonymity of the respondents and the confidentiality of the data and results gathered were correctly observed throughout the conduct of the study. The respondents’ identity remained anonymous by assigning codes. All documents were placed in a locked drawer.

Informed consent. In conducting the study, respondents were provided with informed consent and fully informed about the research's purpose and intended benefits. The respondents were asked to sign the informed consent after having understood the extent of their participation. Moreover, the respondents were informed about their freedom to withdraw anytime they decided not to participate in this study without being reprimanded.

Risk. Every study imposes risks on its respondents as well as the study itself. Invasion of privacy, boredom, mental fatigue, embarrassment at poor performance, or frustration is minor but common risks.

The anonymity of the respondents and confidentiality of the data and results gathered were observed adequately throughout the study. To lessen boredom and mental fatigue, the researchers gave enough time for the respondents to answer the questionnaire checklist. The researchers assisted the respondents while answering if needed, especially if they were unfamiliar with the questionnaire's content, to lessen embarrassment at poor performance and frustration.

Benefits. The study consisted of valuable and beneficial insights to the respondents that provided sufficient information. The result of this study provided important implications to the institution that can improve the areas that need improvement.

Compensation. The respondents did not receive any compensation since their participation in this study was voluntary, and the respondents had the option to participate in the study.

3. Results and Discussion

The participants described traumatic experiences that included both direct and indirect exposure to violence. It was evident that their experiences of pain and suffering were shared equally, regardless of whom the trauma was directed at. For these participants, life would never be the same. In this presentation of the findings, all names are pseudonyms.

Transcribed data from interviews were subjected to thematic analysis to reveal the experiences of residents on how they change the stigma of Marag Valley's ravaging war into a new paradise.

The occupation of the Communist Party of the Philippine-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) in Marag Valley happened in the 1980's to early 1990's. The peak of the CPP-NPA occupation was in the mid 80's, particularly in 1986. Several government efforts were done to liberate the area. Some statements from participants on how they changed the image of Marag Valley are given below.

As shared by WP-1 (woman participant-1):

No mabalbalin saan koman nga mapasamak dagidi naglabas, adu nga rigat ti nagpasaran mi ditoy Marag Valley. Adu ti nasayang nga oras ken oportunidad kangrunaan na dagiti ubbing ta lallakay dan idi agbasa iti elementary. Malagip ko pay idi no adda masakit saan nga maiyapan iti ospital wenko clinic man lang. Agpatingga kam la nga mangtaltalay no adda masakit. Adu met ketdi ti supply nga medisina kadagiti kakadua mi nga Rebelde. Umanay ti kararag iti Apo kadagiti amin nga rigat mi. Adda dagiti albularyo nga pagpindiran dagiti dadduma. Ti kaaduan na nga naglemlemengan mi ket dita bantay Kimmalugong ta makita mi no adda soldado nga umay rumaot. No ordinaryo ka nga tao, masapul nga liklikam dagiti agsinnumbangir nga puersa. Idi nastrek ti militar ditoy tawen ti 1991 agingga na ti 1992, awanen ti rumuar no alas singko ti malem. Kaasi ni Apo, gapu ti panagtittinnulong, mapaadda dagiti kasapulan kangrunaan na dagiti taraon. Kaaduan na ket mapasamak ti panangbomba da iti aldaw wenko sumipngat. Tiansa mi ti mapan aggapas ti rabii, no panagaani. Agmula kami ti saba, aba ken balangkoy pangsuposup ti bagas.

Ti dakkal nga suporta ken tulong ti gobyerno ken ti munisipyo ti Luna nga idadauluan ni Mayor Bienvenido G. Verzola nagbalin nga natalna ken pagwadan dagiti tallo nga barangay ti Marag Valley- Marag (popular ti awag nga Bucao, Calabigan ken Cagandungan. Nagtitimpuyog kami nga naapointaran nga barangay officials tapno

maisayangkat dagiti nadumaduma nga programa ti gobyerno nga mangpasayaat ti lugar mi.

Kadakami nga makunkuna nga Rebel Returnee, adda naited nga gatad nga pangruguan mi. Agyaman kami ken President Fidel V. Ramos kadaytoy nga programa. Nasayaat ti panangtratar da kadakami. Babaan dakami latta nga makigamulo ken makipartisipar kadagiti amin nga okasyon ti barangay. Idi damo, nadutukanak nga Punong Barangay ken nangabakak idi barangay eleksyon.

If possible, we do not want this to happen again. We had a lot of struggles here in Marag Valley during the war. We missed a lot of opportunities especially the education of our children. They were already old when they entered elementary. I remember when someone was sick, we could not go to the clinic or hospital. Some folks used herbal medicines and others relied on alternative medicines usually the ‘Albularyos.’ There were also supplies of medicines from the rebels. For ordinary persons, they had to be cautious with both the rebels and the military. When the military penetrated the area in the year 1991 to 1992, we needed to stay in our houses at 5:00 PM. By God’s grace, we were able to survive the hardships brought by the war. Through our unity and cooperation, we were able to produce our own food. Bombings were done during daytime until five or six in the afternoon. We took the opportunity to harvest our palay during nighttime. We planted root crops and banana as supplement to rice.

The strong support from the local government headed by Mayor Bienvenido Verzola made Marag Valley a peaceful and respected place. We worked as one when we were appointed as barangay officials so that we could implement various programs from the government.

For us rebel returnee, we were given starting capital. We thanked President Fidel V. Ramos for these programs. They treated us well. They encouraged us to engage and participate in all activities. In fact I was designated and later on elected as Punong Barangay.

Also shared by WP-2 (Woman):

Awan ti narigat no agtutunos dagiti umili, nangrugi kami nga nagpromote kadagiti produkto mi kas iti linaga nga labba, basket nga pataga, kallugong ken dadduma pay. Kadagiti bisbisita mi nga umay mangited ti programa da, ay ket pagsidaen mi ida dagitay best catch mi ti Marag River (referring to Zumigui-Ziwanan River) kas iti risek, bukto, kappi, udang, palileng, karpa, igat, ken tay shek mi nga ditoy la nga makita. No nateng ti pagsasaritaan, adu latta ti available nga pako, barangbang, parangipang ken dadduma pay nga adda dita bakir. Presko ti masida ditoy Marag, dayta ti maipagpanakel mi. Uray no saan kami nga na certify nga organic agriculture, mabalin ko nga I claim nga organic dagitoy products mi.

We work as one in producing our products such as baskets, hats and others. When people visit us, we offer them fresh products from Marag River and from the forest such as freshwater shrimps, shells and fishes of various kinds. We also serve vegetables from the forests such as ferns, rattan and others. We can say that our products are safe-free from pesticides and can be considered organic.

A man MP-1 (Man Participant) participant also shared:

Idi panawen ti gubat, mapan kam agkalap ti rabii bag la pangnayon ti sidaen. Pagbibingayan mi amin. Dagiti adda tyansa na nga mapan aganup, mapan da uray asideg lang ta adu ti atap nga ayup ti aglaw-law.” “Uray pay ita, agkakabsat ti turing mi amin ditoy, no pasken ti maysa pasken mi amin. Awan ti rigat no agtitimpuyog kami.”

During the war, we would go fishing during the night. Some would go hunting. The caught animals would be shared by all. “We are all brothers and sisters; we work as one when somebody has occasion. Work is easier when we were together.”

A woman leader (WP-3) added:

Dayta ti maysa nga sikreto mi, ta no kontes ti booth ken float no fiesta ti Luna dakami latta ti mangab abak. Manipud pay idi simmali kami ti Fiesta ti Luna, awan ti mangatiw kadakami no booth ken float ti pagsasaritaan. Siyempre adda pagbibingayan mi nga cluster barangays. Kanayon nakami pay nga imbitaran ni Mayor Betty nga mapan sumurot kadakuada no adda papanan na nga lugar tapno mapapintas mi pay ti management mi ditoy Marag.

That is our secret, we always win in float and booth competitions during Luna Town Fiesta. Our prizes are divided equally. Mayor Betty Verzola always brought us to places to benchmark so that we could improve our management here in Marag Valley. The promotion of Marag Valley as tourism destination is through the concerted efforts of the Provincial Tourism Office, the Municipal Tourism Office and Municipal Councilor Cecil Caluya.

WP- 4 said:

Ti ngayed ken buya ti kabambantayan ti Marag ket nakita dagiti leaders nga adu ti potentials na. Nakita ni SB Caluya nga adu ti mabalin nga maipromote nga tourist destinations. Inexplore mi ti Dupag Rock Formation ket nakita mi nga napintas. Base ti istorya dagiti RR, mayat ti Manacota underground river ken caves. Uray ti hanging bridge, napintas nga maisimpa nga pagpipiknikan, tapno umado ti dayo. Iti kastoy nga wagas, mas nga ti tumatak ti panunut ti tao ket ti pintas ken experience da ditoy Marag.

The grandeur and scenery of Marag was seen by our leaders. SB Cecil Caluya saw these potentials. We then explored Dupag Rock Formation. Based on the stories of the rebel returnees, Manacota Caves, Regional Botanical Garden and Underground River are also potential places to explore. We also promote Marag hanging bridge as picnic site. In this manner, people think only of the beauty of the place and their good experiences in it.

WP 5 added:

Gapu kadagitoy nga tourist destinations, pinadas mi met ti nagfiesta (Raket Festival) nga kasama ti Fluvial parade ken dadduma pay nga activities. Naaramid ti fiestaan ditoy Marag River tapno makita nga nasayaat ti pintas dagiti ramrambak. Daksang gasat ta naiyakar ti karayan gapu ti bagyo Ompong ken Lawin.

Due to these tourists destination, we tried having our barangay fiesta (Raket Festival) through Fluvial parade and other activities. We set up the fiesta at the riverbank. Due to typhoon Ompong and Lawin, the course of the river changed.

MP- 2 emphasized the importance of education:

Nagbasa kami nga nasayaat tapno adda met maipagpannakel mi nga taga Marag. Tapno makita ti ngayed ken pintas ti lugar mi, nagaramid kami ti Facebook page tapno makita dagiti dadduma. Pagyamanan mi ta adda ti Apayao State College nga mabalin mi nga pagbasaan. Maipagpannakel mi ken napasayaat metten ti panangbiag mi gapu ti kaadda ti Kolehyo.

We studied hard so that our parents would be proud of us. For others to see the beauty of our place, we created a Facebook page. We also thank Apayao State College for providing us higher education services.

MP 3 added:

Gapu ti Apayao State College, adda dua nga naproduce mi nga Cum Laude BSEd- Mathematics. Adun ti graduate ti college nga annak ti Marag. LtCol Jose Agpuldo is the pride of Marag. Maysa nga PMayer ken Cum Laude ti Apayao State College.

3.1. Narratives on Struggles During the War

Table 1. Theme and core ideas of the struggles of the participants during the war

Sub themes	Core ideas
Life struggles	They experienced hardship when someone was sick or would give birth; there was scarcity of food and other basic services such as health assistance, education and other government services
Coping mechanisms	They harvested during nighttime. They planted root crops, bananas and others as supplement to rice. They explored the use of alternative medicine such as herbals and Albularyos. Trained midwives usually called partera or mammaltot were consulted to by pregnant women.
Surfacing values of cooperation and unity	They would share their food and other necessities for their survival.
Belief in Supreme Being	God intervened in all their hardships; God provided them their needs and protected them from harm and sicknesses.

There are four identified sub-themes from their narratives on struggles. These are: life struggles, coping mechanisms, surfacing values of cooperation and unity, and their belief in the Supreme Being.

The hardships experienced by the participants during the war were things they would not want to happen to them ever again. Their experiences during the war caused them physical and mental torture, especially on days when there were bombings, and they had to look for refuge for protection.

When hardships were faced, men naturally looked for solutions to ease their misfortune. Alternative solutions such as consulting Albularyos, using herbal medicine and even seeking medical remedies from the rebels were done by the residents.

Filipinos are basically helpful. The *bayanihan* (cooperative undertaking) spirit surfaced during the war. The people were unified as they came together to survive the effect of the ravaging war.

Their religiosity was still in place even during the war. Their belief in the existence of the Divine Being as their protector and refuge is evident.

Table 2. Sub-themes and core ideas of the narratives on destigmatizing the catastrophic war

Sub -Themes	Core ideas
Effective government peace agreement	Start-up capital for rebel returnee. Rebel returnees were appointed as Punong Barangay.
Government interventions	Strong support from the local government headed by Mayor Bienvenido Verzola made Marag a peaceful and respected place. Government programs were started to put up livelihood and infrastructure projects such as the hanging bridge, roads, etc.
Inter-agency collaboration	Livelihood, education, infrastructure, and others were launched by various government programs.
Creation of a positive image	Working as one in almost all activities. Winning floats and booths during Luna Town Fiesta are results of concerted efforts among the residents.
Value for education	Children are sent to college. 2 Cum Laudes have been produced. The first PMayer in the person of Jose Agpuldo is from the place.
Capitalize on tourist destination	Explored and Promoted Potential Tourist destinations- Dupag Rock formation, hanging bridge, Manacota caves and Underground River, Regional Botanical Garden.
Ethical values	Hospitality. Love for nature. Cooperation (working as one).
Social media promotion	Creation of Facebook page.

3.2. Effective Government Peace Agreement

The government has provided support to the rebel returnees after they surrendered to the authority for some valid reasons. Start-up capital was given to them. They were given key positions in the *barangay* and were even engaged in various activities not only in the *barangay* but also in the municipality.

The Social Integration Program (SIP) effectively improved rebel returnees' standard of living in all aspects of the program's components, including income, food, material goods, housing condition, employment, education, health care, and security and safety.

3.3. Government Interventions

Government agencies have come together to bring various social and economic services to the people of Marag Valley. The opening of Marag Valley road in the 90's paved way to the development of economic activity. Government agencies such as the DA, DOST, DTI, DENR, PLGU, DPWH, DepEd, ASC, DAR, DSWD, DOH, and others have their own social and economic programs for the social and economic recovery of Marag Valley.

3.4. Inter-agency Collaboration

To maximize resources, government line agencies collaborated for the development of livelihood, infrastructure, and other socio-economic programs needed to propel the socio-economic status of the residents of Marag Valley. The basket weaving industry is a project of the DTI and DOST while various agricultural programs (agroforestry, corn, rice and vegetable production projects) were under the care of the DA, DAR, ASC and DENR. To ensure the health conditions and wellness of the residents, a nurse was assigned to the area. Medical missions were conducted. Literacy programs were done as part of the engagement of the DepEd and ASC. ASC piloted the "Story Telling Project" at Calabigan Elementary School.

3.5. Creating a Positive Image

Creating a positive image of the *Bayanihan* Spirit is still in place in Marag Valley. This is manifested in the awards they receive during Luna Town Fiesta. They work as one during special occasions such as weddings, graduation exercises, fiestas, and others. Their ingenuity and unity are manifested when they conduct the yearly Raket Festival.

Amidst natural disasters, Filipinos are strong-spirited people who continue to brave each storm hand in hand. Whatever situation they are in, they rise as one (Canvas 1). Among the festivities celebrated to establish the resiliency of the Filipinos are Panagbenga Festival after the 1991 earthquake and the Masskara Festival (Logdat 253; Yuson 12).

3.6. Value for Education

One of the key elements to liberate them from the stigma of the war is through education. The presence of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) such as ASC, FL Vargas and CSU-Sanchez Mira paved way to the production of degree holders and professionals in the Marag Valley. To date, they have produced 2 cum laudes and 1 PMayer. Jose Agpuldo of Marag Valley is part of the PMA MAndirigmang may DAngal Simbolo ng Galing at PagbangON (MADASIGON) Class 2023. He showed excellence in academics, graduating cum laude at the Apayao State College and passing the Licensure Examination for Teachers (Lo-oy: 1)



3.7. Capitalizing on Tourist Destination

Nowadays, when one talks of Marag Valley, they always say Dupag Rocks, Manacota Caves and Underground RIVER, Regional Botanical Garden and Hanging Bridge. The stigma of the war during the CPP-NPA occupation has changed to something remarkable and worth remembering when one climbs the Dupag Rock and experiences the cool breeze of Manacota underground river.



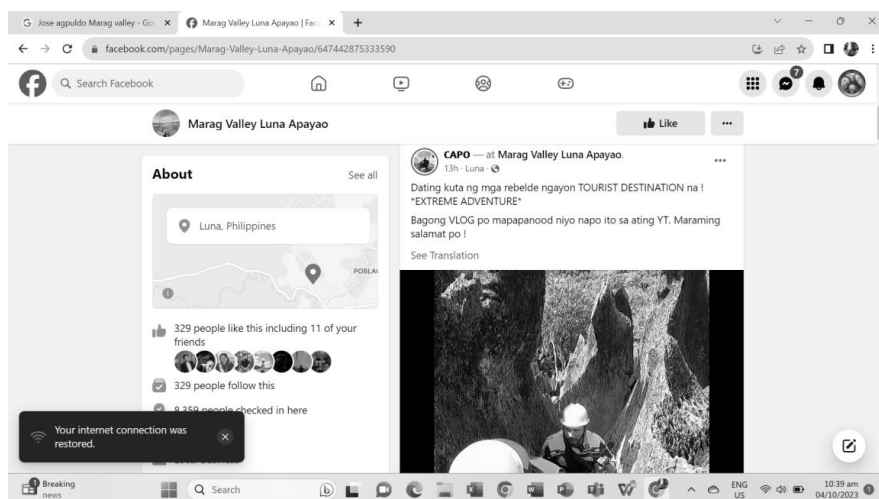
3.8. Ethical Values

The *bayanihan* system still runs in the blood of the residents in Marag Valley. They work together as one to achieve a common goal. This is manifested in the various awards they received during the celebration of Luna town fiestas. Other ethical values they possess include: love for nature, hospitality, and cooperation.

3.9. Social Media Promotion

Social media, particularly Facebook page, is a potent vessel to promote the beauty of Marag Valley. With the creation of Marag Valley Facebook page, tourists from various parts of the Philippines and the world visit Marag Valley just to experience its culture and beauty.

Vloggers from all over the world visit and feature the beauty of Marag Valley. These are: Capo, Kyle Jennerman, Liwliwa Unana, Becoming Filipino, and others.





The narratives on destigmatizing the catastrophic war in Marag Valley, as summarized in Table 2, reveal a cohesive and multifaceted strategy employed by the community. The effective government peace agreement emerges as a key catalyst, facilitating the return of rebels with start-up capital and leading to their appointment as Punong Barangay, symbolizing a tangible outcome of the peace initiative. Government interventions, strongly supported by Mayor Bienvenido Verzola, played a pivotal role in transforming Marag into a peaceful and respected place. These interventions encompassed livelihood and infrastructure projects, such as hanging bridges and roads, showcasing a commitment to both economic development and community well-being.

Inter-agency collaboration becomes evident in the comprehensive initiatives launched by various government programs, covering areas like livelihood, education, and infrastructure. The creation of a positive image is woven into the community fabric, with residents working collaboratively in almost all activities. Notable achievements, including winning floats and booths during Luna Town Fiesta, underscore the positive impact of united efforts. The residents' value for education is manifested in the commitment to sending children to college, producing Cum Laudes, and boasting the first graduate of the Philippine Military Academy from the community, highlighting a dedication to educational excellence.

Marag Valley strategically capitalizes on its tourist potential by exploring and promoting attractions such as Dupag Rock Formation, hanging bridges, Manacota caves, and the Regional Botanical Garden. Ethical values form the bedrock of the community, with hospitality, love for nature, and cooperation playing pivotal roles in fostering a positive environment. The integration of social media promotion, exemplified by the creation of a Facebook page, signifies a proactive approach in shaping the community’s narrative and enhancing visibility. In essence, these narratives paint a portrait of a community resiliently overcoming the shadows of its wartime past through collaborative efforts, governmental support, and a commitment to positive values and development.

3.10. Identifying the Major Themes

From the sub themes, two major themes were derived.

Table 3. Major themes on how Marag Valley’s residents destigmatize the catastrophic war.

Major Themes	Sub themes
External support systems	Effective government peace agreement, government interventions, and inter-agency collaboration
Internal support systems	Creating a positive image, value for education, capitalizing on tourist destinations, ethical values, and social media promotion

In the wake of a war or natural disaster, communities need to immediately access funds to rebuild damaged infrastructure and re-establish critical government services, but the immediate aftermath is often when financial liquidity constraints are at the highest (Jacobsen et al. 3). The time gap between the occurrence of a disaster and access to funding can be costly, exacerbating poverty through impacts on health, mobility, and access to education.

Emotional distress can happen before and after a disaster. Coping strategies include preparation, self-care, and identifying support systems (Schonfeld 1). People can experience a wide range of emotions before and after a disaster or traumatic event. There’s no

right or wrong way to feel. However, it's important to find healthy ways to cope when these events happen.

There are two identified support systems to retain the glory of Marag Valley after the occupation of the CPP-NPA. These are external and internal support systems. The external support systems include programs from government and non-government organizations for financing, emotional distressing, infrastructure development, social as well as economic services. On the other hand, internal support systems lead to creating a positive image through ethical values such as cooperation, unity, sense of belongingness, desire for education, sense of pride, and the like (Murray 1).

3.11. Description of the Promise Land

Dr. Mariano Marchan's advice, emphasizing the act of washing one's feet before ascending the Dupag Rock in Marag Valley, holds a symbolic resonance that draws parallels with the historic journey of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land. In both instances, the act of washing feet becomes a poignant metaphor for purification, renewal, and the transition from a state of adversity to one of liberation and promise.

The historical narrative of the Israelites leaving Egypt, as documented in the biblical account, portrays a people who endured the harshness of slavery, facing oppression and adversity. Similarly, the residents of Marag Valley experienced the profound hardships brought about by the catastrophic war. The act of leaving Egypt for the Israelites was not merely a physical journey but a profound transformation from bondage to freedom, mirroring the arduous path of Marag Valley residents emerging from the shadows of conflict to rebuild their community.

The symbolic act of washing feet before climbing the Dupag Rock can be seen as a ritual of cleansing, shedding the remnants of the past struggles and embodying a spiritual and physical purification. This ritual aligns with the Israelites' purification rituals and practices as they ventured into the Promised Land, marking a transition from slavery to freedom.

Marag Valley's experience, echoed in Dr. Marchan's guidance, resonates with the transformative journey of the Israelites. Both narratives depict a community undergoing trials and tribulations, facing the challenges of adversity, and ultimately emerging into a promised land of renewal and promise. The act of washing feet serves as a tangible reminder of the purification and renewal process, connecting the historical and contemporary experiences and symbolizing the resilience and hope embedded in the collective narratives of Marag Valley and the Israelites.

The comparison between Marag Valley and the biblical Canaan, the promised land, reveals intriguing parallels in terms of fertility, abundance, and richness of resources. While the biblical references to Canaan do not explicitly mention specific aquatic or mineral resources, the general depiction aligns with the description of Marag Valley.

In the Bible, Canaan is often referred to as a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3:8), emphasizing its agricultural prosperity. Marag Valley similarly boasts a fertile landscape with abundant water resources, including the Marag River teeming with freshwater mullet (*ludong*), gobies, eel, *tilapia*, carps, and various aquatic life. This resonates with the biblical notion of a land abundant in agricultural and natural resources.

Moreover, Marag Valley's diverse topography, featuring rivers, mountains (with Siamsiambiri as the highest), hills, forests, and agricultural lands, mirrors the varied landscapes described in Canaan. The promise of Canaan includes not only agricultural abundance but also mentions hills, valleys, and rivers. The mention of Marag Valley being the rice granary of Luna, producing significant quantities of rice and corn, aligns with the biblical portrayal of Canaan as a land of agricultural plenty.

While the Bible doesn't specifically highlight mineral resources in Canaan, Marag Valley's richness in mineral deposits, including manganese and others, adds another layer to the comparison. Canaan is often associated with a promised land where prosperity extends beyond agriculture, and Marag Valley's mineral wealth complements

this broader concept of abundance. Marag Valley's literal fertility, abundance of water resources, diverse landscapes, and mineral deposits draw intriguing parallels with the biblical Canaan. Both narratives depict promised lands characterized by prosperity, richness, and the potential for abundance in various forms, linking the tangible attributes of Marag Valley to the spiritual and historical connotations associated with Canaan in the Bible.

4. Summary and Conclusion

For more than a decade, Marag Valley was occupied by the CPP-NPA creating a negative stigma. The catastrophic war which happened in the 80's and early 90's caused deterioration in the socio-cultural and economic aspect of the residents.

This study was conducted to analyze the narratives of Marag Valley's residents during the catastrophic war in the 80's and early 90's and looked into how the residents destigmatize the ill effects of the war. The qualitative method of research was employed with key informant interview as the main data gathering tool. The researchers were properly guided with ethical considerations in conducting the research.

From the gathered narratives, eight (8) sub-themes were identified on how the people of Marag Valley overcame the stigma of the catastrophic war. These include effective government peace agreement, government interventions, inter-agency collaboration, creating a positive image, value for education, capitalizing on tourist destination, ethical values and social media promotion. From the eight sub-themes emerged two major themes, which are the external support systems and internal support systems.

5. Recommendations and Implications

Based on the insights gleaned from the research and the subsequent conclusions drawn, several recommendations are proposed for consideration:

Firstly, it is advised to disseminate the findings of this study through publication, ensuring that the knowledge acquired is shared with a broader audience. This dissemination can contribute to the academic discourse surrounding Marag Valley's catastrophic war, fostering a greater understanding of the community's experiences and resilience strategies.

Secondly, there is a call for further research to identify gaps in the literature pertaining to Marag Valley's catastrophic war. This recommendation aims to encourage future studies that delve deeper into specific aspects, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the historical context and the community's responses.

The implications drawn from the study are noteworthy. The recognition that individuals, as social beings, unite during times of adversity to develop resilience strategies underscores the communal nature of coping mechanisms. Additionally, the acknowledgment that, in hardship, there is a prevalent belief in the intervention of a Divine Being to achieve the seemingly impossible highlights the spiritual aspect of the community's resilience.

Lastly, it is suggested that the lessons derived from this study hold value beyond the context of Marag Valley. These lessons, pertaining to community resilience and response strategies, can be applied and replicated in similar conflict or disaster situations. By adopting these insights, other communities facing comparable challenges may benefit from the experiences and strategies identified in this study, promoting a broader applicability of the lessons learned.

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