

## Wartime Image and Healing Wounds in Peacetime from the Eyes of the Maritime Police Officers: The Studies of Zamboanga City Armed Conflict

### *Imej Perang dan Penyembuhan di Masa Aman dari Pandangan Pegawai Polis Maritim: Kajian Konflik Bersenjata di Zamboanga City*

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#### ABSTRACT

*This article presents the accounts of marine police personnel who were present during the armed conflict in 2013 in Zamboanga City, Zamboanga Peninsula, Region IX, Philippines. This study is qualitative-descriptive, utilizing an approved research protocol. A total of 4 maritime police officers from the regional maritime group participated in an in-depth interview and 6 in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The data was obtained using the approved interview guide by the ethics committee. The transcripts were analyzed and interpreted using thematic analysis. It draws on descriptions of wartime experiences of the maritime police and post-conflict situations. Two themes emerge during the analysis of the collected data: (1) wartime experiences of the maritime police and (2) the post-conflict situation. The data showed that both images of war characterized a gloomy and inspirational scene. Further, the findings have several identified repercussions caused by the armed conflict and advances for humanity in post-conflict scenarios. Future research implications are discussed, and topics that are pertinent to armed conflict are identified.*

*Keywords: Armed- conflict; city warfare; post-conflict scenario; war; wounds of war*

#### ABSTRAK

*Artikel ini membentangkan anggota polis marin yang hadir semasa konflik bersenjata pada tahun 2013 di Bandar Zamboanga, Semenanjung Zamboanga, Wilayah IX, Filipina. Kajian ini berbentuk kualitatif-deskriptif, menggunakan protokol penyelidikan yang diluluskan. Seramai 4 orang pegawai polis maritim kumpulan maritim wilayah telah mengambil bahagian dalam temu bual mendalam dan 6 dalam Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Data diperolehi menggunakan panduan temuduga yang diluluskan oleh jawatankuasa etika. Transkrip dianalisis dan ditafsir menggunakan analisis tematik. Ia menggunakan huraian tentang pengalaman masa perang polis maritim dan situasi pasca konflik. Dua tema muncul semasa analisis data yang dikumpul: (1) pengalaman perang polis maritim dan (2) situasi pasca konflik. Data menunjukkan bahawa kedua-dua imej perang mencirikan adegan yang suram dan memberi inspirasi. Selanjutnya, penemuan itu mempunyai beberapa kesan yang dikenal pasti yang disebabkan oleh konflik bersenjata dan kemajuan untuk kemanusiaan dalam senario pasca konflik. Implikasi penyelidikan masa depan dibincangkan, dan topik yang berkaitan dengan konflik bersenjata dikenal pasti.*

*Kata kunci: Konflik-bersenjata; peperangan bandar; senario selepas konflik; peperangan; luka perang*

#### INTRODUCTION

The military struggle bears striking similarities to terrorist acts in every conceivable respect. Because of this crisis, there has been significant damage done to people's life as well as their property and their means of subsistence. Due to the intrinsic devastation and lethality of the battle, warfare is extraordinarily damaging and risky due to the

nature of the conflict itself. According to Ifijeh et al. (2018), decades of battle-related violence have resulted in environmental degradation, the destruction of lives and resources, poverty, health difficulties, and insecurity, among other consequences (Hook & Marcantonio 2022; Rawtani et al. 2022; Sinani & Stojchevska 2022) economic, infrastructure, and health implications. The war has serious negative consequences on people and the

planet. The damage to industrial and commercial infrastructure can contaminate water sources, which can be hazardous for human and ecosystem health. Water shortages and deteriorating sanitary conditions are already evident since water supply and sanitary infrastructure have been hit. Air quality is adversely affected due to troop movement and constant bombarding. Chances of radiation leakage from nuclear sites also remain. The physical, chemical and biological characteristics of soil have been impacted due to shelling and explosions, as a result of which, agriculture has been severely affected. Military actions have caused large-scale deforestation and even wildfires. There is also fear of biodiversity loss and species extinction in the long term. The war of such nature may directly hamper efforts to deal with aspects such as climate change, sustainable development goals (SDGs). Most wars that occurred in historical accounts with political or social aims (Busbridge & Chou, 2022; Jilani, 2021) saw individuals or subnational groups use or threaten to use violence with the intent of intimidating a large audience well beyond the immediate victims (Enders & Sandler, 2012) and were strongly linked with policy-oriented goals, which associate terrorism with a broader political agenda acted purposively (Pain 2014; Huff & Kertzer 2018). The destructive and merciless result of the armed conflict is the worst of all human activities. The wartime experiences have been so profound that they affect victims, civilians, and those fighting in the combat zone. Armed conflict clearly has enormous repercussions for those who witness it firsthand. The outbreaks of armed conflict, have caused tremendous losses in human life, physical and emotional injuries to victims and offenders, and have devastated social systems and networks (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2001).

This warfare kills, maims, and terrifies, revealing heroism, brotherhood, and compassion (Haque et al. 2022; Mijić 2022). During an armed conflict, the implications of experience are far-reaching, which poses a significant threat to mental and physical health (Davies 2001; Bloorani et al. 2021; Cypel et al. 2023; Kokun 2023). The siege of Zamboanga in 2013 is an example of an experience that goes far beyond the surface of an armed conflict. Fighting broke out on September 9, 2013, between the government of the Philippines and a faction of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). There were sixteen (16) barangays in

Zamboanga City affected by the conflict, including the coastal barangays of Rio Hondo, Mariki, Sta. Catalina, and Sta. Barbara. Hundreds of individuals were taken hostage, and thousands more were forced to abandon their homes, in addition to the damage to several buildings and dwellings. The violence went further and resulted in the displacement of people in the island provinces of Basilan and Sulu, among other places. On September 25, 2013, Luiza Carvalho, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator (URHC), made a statement on behalf of the UN. In it, she talked about how bad the situation was and how the people's needs were getting worse. On September 25, 2013, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator (URHC) Luiza Carvalho issued a statement on behalf of the United Nations, highlighting the gravity of the situation as well as the escalating needs of the people.

Because to this war, there has been a major reduction in economic production, which has had a negative impact on the means by which individuals living in the area make their living. The regional administration has also reported that there has been an increase in the number of health issues, such as diarrhea, along with other issues pertaining to health and sanitation.

Studies on armed conflict and warfare were well developed in scholarly works, for example, in war strategy and tactics (Spence et al. 2007; Kilcullen 2011; Gaggioli 2013; Menon et al. 2016; Nakamura et al. 2017; Sullivan & Karreth 2019), violence against civilians (Wood 2008), traumatic memories and support systems (Burnell et al. 2010; Sixsmith et al. 2014), symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Ainamani et al. 2017; Attanayake et al. 2009; Slone & Mann 2016), and especially among children (Elbert et al. 2009; Dimitry 2012; Tol et al. 2013; Rousseau et al. 2015). Prevailing studies also discussed how war and armed conflict wreak havoc on society (Sidel et al. 2009), particularly in the context of economic devastation (Glick & Taylor 2010), societal culture (Becerra-Alonso et al. 2020), and the health and well-being of the community (Davies 2001; Shaar 2013; Devakumar et al. 2015; Marcial 2019). One of the most serious effects of war is the influence on the mental well-being of the civilian population, which is one of the most serious of these consequences. Studies of the general population have likewise revealed a significantly higher incidence and risk of mental diseases (Murthy and Lakshminarayana 2006).

In comparison to the trend of post-conflict studies in areas of armed conflict, the investigation into Zamboanga's experience is less well-developed. In the case of Zamboanga City warfare, the armed conflict has brought tremendous damage to the lives of the affected community, and yet post-conflict studies were seldom available in the existing literature. In this study, we investigated the actual armed conflict scenarios and post-conflict experiences of maritime police officers to add literature to the existing body of knowledge and research on armed conflict in the Philippines. As the years of rebuilding and recovery pass, the significance of this study grows because it aims to add to the expanding body of knowledge regarding the post-conflict environment and how to deal with it.

## METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH DESIGN, PARTICIPANTS, SAMPLING AND INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

This study utilized a qualitative-descriptive phenomenological study approach to explore the experiences of maritime police officers during the armed conflict in Zamboanga City in 2013. Many of those interviewed were able to provide further

details and examples relating to the conflict that erupted in the city. The participants were selected from a purposive sample of various Zamboanga City Maritime Police offices. It was specified that the participants should be police officers who were deployed and engaged in actual combat during the Zamboanga siege, who had a close encounter with the oppressive enemy forces, and who remained in post for 3 years after the war. A total of four maritime police officers participated in the in-depth interview and six in the focus group. For the interviews and discussions, a schedule was created that comprised three main areas, with open-ended questions being used to elicit replies, as shown in Table 1.

### ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The schedule of questions was validated and evaluated by the institution's research ethics committee from the University of Cebu in Cebu City, and given the approval fit for use. In accordance with generally known scientific protocols and internally accepted ethical principles, the university research ethics committee confirmed that this study complied with the requirements and, as a result, passed the review process. The data collection was done from June 10, 2018, to July 30, 2018.

TABLE 1. Summary of the interview schedule

| No. | Main areas covered  | Prompt questions  |
|-----|---|---|
| 1.  | The experiences of the informants during the 2013 Zamboanga siege | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the situations that you have encountered during the siege?</li> <li>• What is the most difficult to handle in the situation you have faced in the Zamboanga siege?</li> <li>• In handling the situation, what have you done to minimize the effect of the siege?</li> <li>• During the siege, what are the positive experiences you have witnessed?</li> </ul>  |
| 2.  | The strategies employed by the informants during the siege        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the procedures employed by your agency to prevent the damages caused by the siege?</li> <li>• How did the people respond to the strategies implemented?</li> <li>• What are the effects of these strategies on the people around?</li> <li>• In the strategies you implemented, what is the most effective one to minimize the damages caused by the siege?</li> <li>• In the implementation of the strategies, what are the challenges you encountered?</li> <li>• In what way has your professional experience contributed to the success of the implementation?</li> </ul> |
| 3.  | Impact of the siege to the maritime police officers               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the contribution of the strategies employed to the organizational function of your agency?</li> <li>• What development was brought out by the siege to your unit?</li> <li>• What is the impact of the siege on the community?</li> </ul>  |

During this investigation, a systematic procedure was observed similar to the procedures of published research (Patalinghug 2021; Alipoyo 2022). A series of meetings were organized to familiarize ourselves with the methods that would be necessary to carry out this research extensively. The information we gathered from the maritime police during the siege of Zamboanga was gathered in two different ways in this study. Both the in-depth interview and the focused group discussion were conducted.

Concerning the rigors of qualitative research, which are critical to the study's success, we followed rigorously the standards when doing this qualitative research. We did consider quality criteria for ensuring that the study is trustworthy. We followed the criteria of (a) credibility, (b) dependability, (c) generalizability, and (d) confirmability (Lincoln & Guba 2011).

#### DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis steps include, when qualitative data collection methods and early generic qualitative analysis techniques have been applied, the analysis of noteworthy statements, the development of lexical items, and the generation of essence descriptions. To avoid influencing the study's outcome, we observed the bracketing process. To that end, we used notes to fine-tune my data formulation and analysis. The confusing data in the transcript was referred to the informants for clarification throughout data collection and processing. Furthermore, the topic created throughout the data analysis was presented and reviewed, and emergent themes were discovered and accepted by the informants. In addition, for the transcription, data analysis, conclusions, and interpretation, we sought advice from the ethics committee.

#### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Most maritime police officers were quite clear about their experiences, and accounts of the war and post-conflict situation in Zamboanga City. They have shared in their accounts the images and actual situation of what happened to them during the armed conflict that took place in the city. A mix of positive and negative experiences was shared by the maritime police officer. Two main themes

out from the bracketed themes formulated: (1) the wartime experiences of the maritime police, and (2) the post-conflict situation. There were 4 descriptions of what had happened during the armed conflict and 2 descriptions of the post-conflict situation that had been observed by the participants. The themes include symbiotic partnership for peace, self-preservation struggle: A dilemma between self and family, inevitable destruction and displacement of people, and how difficult circumstances bring out the best in people. Moreso, on the post conflict experience of the maritime police, healing peacetime wounds, the themes of Remnants of Conflict, and War Symbolizes Development in a Post-Conflict Scenario.

#### WARTIME EXPERIENCES OF THE MARITIME POLICE

There were four key themes that emerged from the interview data, four of which come from the in-depth interview and six from the focus group of maritime police officers. Regarding the armed conflict in Zamboanga City, there were themes that emerged of what had happened based on their experiences during the conflict in Zamboanga City.

#### SYMBIOTIC PARTNERSHIP TOWARDS PEACE

It is critical that individuals who can provide a helping hand do so when a crisis occurs. As the maritime police performed this mandate in protecting the lives of the people in Zamboanga City during the siege, they have positively experienced things even in the most forsaken moments of the war. This involves cooperation and teamwork among them. As the war progressed, informants helped one another for mutual benefits. They protected one another from being injured. They protected the people against life threats. They exhausted their strength, but even if it was a very tiresome situation, the support of the forces and the government boosted their morale. Besides, their previous training was of vital importance in times of need. As experienced by the maritime police, it is good to know that even in the most desolate human life situations, positive experiences can still be witnessed and experienced. The theme represents how the aid, support, and participation of every active group have contributed much to

lightening the darkest hours of the men's lives in a war zone. Many of the officers emphasized time and time again that assisting others throughout the war strengthens the relationship and helps win the fight against the insurgents operating in the city. In the face of an adversary, it is critical to consider the power of collaboration and commitment from the group or team members themselves. A good example of this is when people help each other out, which is very important for the group's mission-critical project to go well. Further, cohesion among the group according to the participants have been very significant in their endeavor towards winning the battle and establishing symbiotic relationship.

"The positive experience was that there was camaraderie in the group. It is different if you were in the actual situation – you don't know what to do. The camaraderie was very strong, it's as if your hearts were one at that time. This was indeed the good thing that happened. We were all holding each other's arms at that time and found ourselves embracing one another after the siege." (IDI 2: SS9).

Similarly, it was found that the concepts of collaboration can surely be used to confront the realities of conflict (Borovyk, 2018). It has been a huge success because the maritime police officer has been able to see the images of war through his or her own eyes. This collaboration has led to a huge push to fight for the liberation of hostile enemy forces.

"The unity between the armed forces and the Philippine forces was our positive experience. We were really united in fighting the situation, and then our local government was very supportive of all our needs like food and gasoline. They provided us with our needs and that was our positive experience." (FGD5:SS13)

"Almost 5 barangays were under the MNLF and BIFF. They may have captured Zamboanga City but they had not totally taken over the entire did Zamboanga City due to a number of forces that arrived from different provinces to stop their objective, to conquer Zamboanga City." (IDI1:SS15)

The outcome of the in-depth interview is consistent with the outcome of the focus group discussion. The participants have the same confidence in the importance of working together to defeat the adversary. As troops in the conflict, their survival is dependent on one thing in common: efficient command dispatch within their unit and cooperation with other fighting units.

#### SELF-PRESERVATION STRUGGLE: A DILEMMA BETWEEN SELF AND FAMILY

In most cases, war is a devastation that destroys the peace of the location and the tranquility of the inhabitants. This condition contributes to the most painful and stressful experiences among people and those who protect them during wartime. This theme depicts the challenges that the Maritime Police in Zamboanga City faced during the wartime period. To achieve or obtain something, one must first overcome obstacles in order to do so. Food was in short supply throughout the conflict since most people fled for their lives, making it difficult to obtain it. Because businesses were closed, money had no value because it was difficult to purchase milk and food. Aside from the scarcity of vital commodities, the officers' main concerns are their families, who have been separated from them, and the hazards of the crossfires.

In times of armed conflict, the basic concern of man is the preservation of his or her life and finding safety. It is possible that this fight may force people's life to be in a constant state of struggle for survival, both in terms of the exterior danger caused by bullets flying beneath their heads and in terms of what to put in their mouths when the armed conflict begins. That is, the men in uniform experienced horrible things, and the people who surrounded them were striving to hide from the lethal bullets and find a means of subsistence for their own survival. It was horrifying. From the interview statements, it was clear just how terrifying it was when they were in direct encounter with the enemy forces they were fighting.

"There regarding our needs, our livelihood, and our food since stores were closed for almost a month. It was difficult to buy foods." (IDI3:SS28)

"During the war there were very little food available, and it is very difficult to buy if as stores were closed. We tried to get supplies for our family." (FGD6:SS15)

Aside from the worries about the personal safety of the maritime police officer, the safety of their family was also a concern. It bothered them while they were in the combat area. This shows that when a police officer is in a fight while doing his job in an armed conflict in place where they reside, they have

to choose between his own safety and the safety and situation of his family.

“The first impact of the war to me was that it compromised the safety of my family who were in Talon-talon. I can’t really imagine that I could do nothing for their safety because I was in the area where I was needed. I was on duty, but it seemed like I neglected my own family”. (IDI2:SS17)

“And then during night time, of course, we take turns in sleeping and in guarding the port itself. Gunfires would only stop by midnight and then resumes at 3:00 in the morning.” (IDI2:SS3)

“You want to go to specific area, but you are barred from doing so because of the presence of enemies. All the stores I think were closed after 25 days the children were pitiful since no milk was available. Money was also needed but banks were closed, you cannot withdraw. For almost a month, people had no money. What’s difficult was that most of the big stores were closed and there was panic buying among people.” (FGD1:SS7)

During the armed conflict in Zamboanga, troops, the army, and the maritime police provided lethal resistance on the battlefield while battling and exchanging bullets with the enemy forces. In such a setting, everyone was in a perilous situation, and any of the officers involved could die at anytime. Under the heavy fire exchange and firefight among the hostile foes who assaulted and conquered Zamboanga City during the 2013 siege, this is a terrifying circumstance in a soldier’s life. A person’s life could be taken by a single gunshot at any given time.

#### INEVITABLE DESTRUCTION AND DISPLACEMENT OF PEOPLE

This theme pertains to the experiences of maritime police officers who see how destructive an armed conflict is not only to the lives of the people but to the community in general. Conflict could bring disaster and destruction that cannot be prevented, even if mitigation efforts have been made. In a combat situation, for example, the lives of the people engaged in the battle and the constituents of the area are in peril of injury and demise at any moment. Secondary to that is the collateral damage of infrastructure on the site of the encounter.

“There it was. Our director called telling us not to seriously engage the enemies because our boat was merely plastic which was only good for patrolling and not for assault. But the warning was already late since it only came after the boat was hit. After

that, we did not anymore move close to the enemies as they are heavily firing at us when we come near the bay.” (IDI2:SS13)

“I have seen that my comrades from other government forces, not from our troops, have ben injured badly, some were killed in action to defend the city against the insurgent troops.” (IDI4:SS14)

Moreover, aside from this instance of disturbing images of war, since buildings and dwellings were put into rubble, families fled to safety in the evacuation centers. Many have been displaced while the conflict is ongoing. This devastation was shared by conveying:

“Houses and buildings in the conflict zone were destroy due to exchange of gunfire and even bombing where the enemies are hiding. Plumes of fire cover the city as building and houses continue to burn.” (IDI1:SS34)

“The houses were on fire, the residence flees away to escape from the attacking enemy forces. Some have been captured while others flee to safety. The houses have been destroyed by the bomb.” (IDI 1: SS17)

The participants viewed that war could bring inevitable change to lives of the affected. They have expressed and described the horrible situation of the site as the war progress and the peoples’ lives.

#### DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES BRING OUT THE BEST IN PEOPLE

This theme focuses on the attributes that the conflict brought out in those engaged in protecting civilians and others fighting government troops against hostile forces. This emphasized that in situations where people are experiencing hardship due to disasters, the compassion and kindness to help is always present. Amidst tank and gun fire, the nature of humanity doesn’t vanish. Glimmers of compassion and kindness show that helping one another to win the battle against the attackers of the city is a necessity. These images of war show kindness boldly to preserve, sustain the fight, and preserve the lives of the people.

“The unity between the armed forces and the Philippine forces was our positive experience. We were really united in fighting the situation, and then our local government was very supportive of all our needs like food and gasoline. They provided us with our needs and that was our positive experiences.” (FGD5:SS13)

“The positive experience was that there was camaraderie in the group. It is different if you were in the actual situation – you don’t know what to do. The camaraderie was very strong, it’s as if your hearts were one at that time. This was indeed the good thing that happened. We were all holding each other’s arms at that time and found ourselves embracing one another after the siege.” (IDI2:SS9)

“Of course, we contributed something important. Our craft was the backbone of our operation and the good thing was we had training, that’s why we did not encounter difficulties in handling and driving it. We did that. We also protected the port, including our comrades. We were not the front lines and we were prevented from going into the location where we had previously served as the blocking force. We had conditioned the boat that’s why it was not destroyed. That craft was our patrol boat.” (IDI4:SS23)

In this situation, altruism and heroism were seen. This further illustrates that the good side of human behavior will prevail. With warfare, this behavior will surface in group solidarity and individual level sacrifices.

“I have seen that people respond to help the people in the city. All agencies of the government and NGO’s provided support not only to the defense forces but also to the people fleeing from the war zone”. (FGD4:SS18)

It is evident from the responses of the participants that in war, life-threatening situations would increase the sensitivity of humans in terms of heroism and the altruistic tendency to help one another.

## POST-CONFLICT SITUATION

### REMNANTS OF CONFLICT

As a result of the war, many individuals were forced to leave their homes and places of employment, and as a result, they remained to live in temporary housing in the city of Zamboanga for many years after the war had stopped. Most haven’t been able to return to their houses or begin repairing the damage they sustained during the conflict between the state and the Moro insurgents. Those who had direct contact with the war’s devastation among the city’s homes are left scarred. The theme represents that war has collateral damage. The post-conflict scenario is worse than an ongoing conflict. As stated by the participants, war has been catastrophic as they see it. When a war or conflict comes to an end, the

rubble from the combat zone isn’t comparable to the devastation of the post-conflict scenario as it lingers long in the memories of those who experienced it personally. Years after the war, its remnants can still be felt, especially in the transitory settlements where displaced people stayed.

“The effect of the war is great especially to the residents in the main battle area, particularly to their children who have heard of the gunfires. Their houses were destroyed, but just in the main battle area (FGD6:SS22).

“First and foremost was the treat to the families. Children felt afraid and nervous when they saw soldiers carrying weapons. Fear was within the people, especially among children (FGD5:SS19).

Like the aforementioned, are the comments from the participants of the in-depth interviews:

“Evacuation centers are in squalid conditions. Most the people and constituents were traumatized by the war. Children in the evacuation center suffered different illnesses, you can see them become malnourish due to lack of food.”(IDI2:SS20)

Participants viewed the temporary settlement’s deteriorating conditions as a visual reminder of the war’s toll, and they said that the people who lived there were now in a worse position than they had been in before the battle. The participants went on to say that the consequences and remnants of conflict are far-reaching and long-lasting, and that it will take years of effort for the affected to heal. People had to move because of the destruction and what happened after it. Those who had to leave were often traumatized by what they saw, sick from the epidemic, and hungry because there wasn’t enough food.

### WAR SYMBOLIZES DEVELOPMENT IN POST CONFLICT SCENARIO

Until today, war was known to have had a devastating effect on the affected area. This theme presents how war transformed the city of Zamboanga after the armed conflict in 2013. Participants have quantified the contribution of war among them and the community in general. The conflict has been a wake-up call for the agency to innovate and foster improvement. Aside from this, there have been several improvements in the city in terms of accessibility, as sites that were previously inaccessible have now become freely accessible to everyone. The participants manifested during the interviews.

“Even if there are some lapses it had been seen what are to be improve because of the war.” (FGD5:SS27).

“Actually, in my own point view, the war has brought in advantages since the place has changed. Throughout my long stay here, there have been illegal activities. There are many people who are hiding, that’s why it is difficult even for the police to enter that place. Today, that place is already accessible, the lives of its people have improved, and it is rightful residents have been identified. Several projects were organized for the people to recover from their lost because of the conflict. It really leads to positive results and raises the consciousness not only of the local government, but also the soldiers and police not to underestimate the opposing forces.” The place has really improved.” (IDI4:SS25)

“Yes there is a development after the war. The higher headquarters had seen that we have deficiencies. Our deficiencies like defective patrol boat, lack of ammunition and firearms are the needs that the headquarters should improve to develop a unit). Moreover, many projects were implemented to develop the war zone and help the people to recover.” (IDI1:SS30).

“The war has a beneficial effect. We knew our weaknesses regarding our craft and armaments, including our fire arms which should be improved, as well as trainings, manpower and the lack of ammunition. We never anticipate that the conflict would last for several days, that is why we need to upgrade our firearms and vehicles.” (IDI4:SS11).

On the agency level, it was seen that war had been a turning point for the agency to realize the importance of readiness and the advancement of equipment for responding to a conflict.

“I believe the conflict has resulted in benefits because the place change much. During my long stay here, illegal operations have been ongoing; fugitives are sheltering in that area (war zone), and even cops have difficulty accessing. People’s life have been better, and their rights have been recognized. It truly works and raises awareness of the opposing forces among the local administration, army, and police. The environment has change significantly.” (FGD2:SS25)

“After the war big change happened, the place transformed, the government started to provide housing of displaced people through the NHA.” (FGD3:SS45).

Moreover, at the community level, though it is hard to accept the fact that war has changed the lives of the constituents. On the positive side of it, post-conflict scenarios may also change the lives of the people by the development brought by new infrastructure projects, housing, and livelihoods, and the government has paid more attention to them

for faster recuperation of the wounds that the war has brought to the community.

## DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis revealed that the experience of the maritime police officer during the armed conflict in Zamboanga can be classified into wartime experience and post-conflict scenarios. The participants of the study unveiled their experiences of what had happened during the war. It was seen by the participants that wartime partnership and collaborative effort are of great help, especially in combating the enemy forces in the city. A big part of this act was linked to the success in the conflict zone. Moreover, the acts of partnership and cooperation established strong bonds and camaraderie that augment the strength and capability of the troops and prevent the increased number of casualties among civilians and the fighting government forces. Likewise, it emphasizes the necessity of collaboration and commitment with the group, which is critical to the success of the collective endeavor. By cooperating, the troops have compensated each other in terms of their capabilities does increasing the defenses and offensive tactics to combat the enemy troops. One key factor which promote this behavior among troops may have been link to fear and loneliness in battlefield. In Wiener (2006) he pointed out that camaraderie and partnership was important part of soldiers’ life in the conflict area as each other may save comrades lives and serve as powerful weapon against fear. Aside from that, studies have backed up the assertion that social support is important in the success of an activity, particularly in war and armed conflict situations, because it can contribute to the development of resiliency (Nevarez et al. 2017). In similar instance, the value of camaraderie was also recognized as a motivating factor for Australian nurses who were prisoners of war to ensure their survival at a time when they were about to give up and to foster reliance among themselves (Fulford 2016).

Thought the war have tested the resilience of the maritime police, they have seen and encountered hardship and difficulty. This difficulty put them in dilemma between their safety and the safety of their family. The living conditions and scarcity of food in the war time was one of the struggles that they have seen among the people the inhabitants in the battle ground. This situation adds to their worries



as they leave their family while they were deployed for protecting the people. Soldiers in armed conflict who also live in the conflict zone, must confront the reality of serving others before one's own self-interest. Furthermore, in a combat situation, the state of feeling safe does not necessarily imply that there has been no devastation of life or infrastructure. When there is a battle, destruction and damage are unavoidable outcomes.

However, the instinct to protect us and help others will always surface. The study has revealed how good human values grow in times of armed conflict. In particular, the acts of heroism and altruism have been demonstrated by all who were engaged on the battle ground, as seen by the maritime police officers. It is further shown that when people's emotions are triggered by perilous situations, intrepidity and heroism go along to help fellow humans. There is compelling evidence that being exposed to wartime violence enhances prosocial behavior (Van Der Linden et al. 2017) and people's willingness to participate strengthens (Barceló 2021). It has also been demonstrated when people's emotions are triggered by a risky circumstance, they act with courage and heroism to assist their fellow humans. Considering the maritime police as a service-oriented profession, it can be linked to altruistic activities. Several studies have shown those who are engaged in the service profession tend to gain altruistic tendencies while in the performance of their duties (Chia-Nolasco & Pia 2018; Kam 2020; Patalinghug 2021; Kallström et al. 2022). In addition, this act was seen as essential for bringing about long-term good change in the community during times of crisis (Liekfett & Becker 2021).

On the other hand, post-conflict scenarios depicted visuals that were both gloomy and inspirational. On remnants of war, devastation was apparent the peoples' lives in general. Finding of the study have supported the claim on that war have tremendous impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the of the affected constituents in Zamboanga City (Marcial 2019) which was too noted in this study. Aside from this, devastation on the infrastructure was very prominent. While other have been displaced and have no other option but to find settlements even though rehabilitation was in progress. Similar claims have been postulated in the case of Colombia (McEniry et al. 2019). In addition to causing interference, displacement has

a negative impact on physical and psychological health at all ages, especially in children (Avogo & Agadjanian 2010; Virgincar et al. 2016). The remnants of armed conflict in Zamboanga may have been deep and beyond the surface, but the most visible was the suffering of the people, illnesses acquired in the transitory sites, the suffering of the internally displaced individuals, and post-traumatic stress disorder affecting the mental health of the people, not much visible on the maritime police officers. The same results corroborated in Bonanno et al. (2006), research indicate that survivors of trauma frequently suffer from a variety of medical and mental health problems, including decreased physical wellness and indicators of posttraumatic stress disorder, including anxiety and despair.

The post-conflict scenario may have been worse, with salient effects on health, mental state, and uncertainty among internally displaced individuals. However, its promising influence on progress and change in the community cannot be denied with multifaceted collaboration and regional security cooperation (Ramli & Idris 2022) between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governmental entities in targeted initiatives aimed at enhancing support systems for refugee populations (Nazri 2022). Furthermore, political advancement results in the establishment of institutions, mobilization, and economic expansion (Mat Ali & Yusof 2022), if utilized in post conflict scenarios.

The armed conflict in Zamboanga prompts institutional reforms in the maritime police organization and among those affected. Research suggests that conflict may result in institutional changes and a shift in social attitudes (Prohorovs 2022; Wantchekon 2004). Barceló (2021) likewise revealed that changes in community-wide interactions, institutions, and political structures that took place during the war are likely to last into the postwar eras as well. Another notable change in the post conflict setting in Zamboanga was the development of the place in terms of housing and infrastructure to promote reconstruction and recovery. In addition, the participants witnessed several projects and cooperative efforts in the post-conflict era. The Nations United (2017) has similarly seen the astonishing speed with which mankind recovered from the most dreadful conflict in history matched by an equally impressive strength and extent of international collaboration never seen before.

## CONCLUSION

In order to add to the increasing literature and research on the armed conflict in the Philippines, we looked into the wartime and post-conflict images from the perspective of maritime police officers. The study has established two images that might be depicted when war happens: wartime scenarios and post-conflict scenarios. Both images of war characterize a gloomy and inspirational scene. Furthermore, death and destruction in armed conflict and wartime have far-reaching implications years after the actual battle and carry with them threatening physical consequences. Likewise, while armed conflict has repercussions, it also advances humanity and helps to promote growth and progress in society.

Based on the results, limitations were also found, the study have not covered extensively the the post-traumatic effects of the the conflict on the maritime police, experiences families of maritime police officers who were left behind as they responded to their call of duty, and how service to others before service to self within the paradigm of human behavior works.

Given the complex and varied difficulties posed by armed conflict and its long-lasting consequences, we suggest implementing a comprehensive and proactive strategy. First and foremost, it is crucial to develop comprehensive support systems that are specifically tailored to meet the needs of maritime police officers and veterans. This involves the provision of comprehensive mental health services, customized family assistance programs, and the official acknowledgment of their exceptional acts of heroism and commitment to the nation.

Moreover, it is imperative to allocate a substantial number of resources towards the revitalization of regions affected by conflict. To expedite the recovery and foster stability and growth in these regions, it is crucial to prioritize infrastructure rehabilitation and comprehensive community development initiatives. Efforts should be made to actively encourage the development of resilience and altruism among individuals through educational initiatives and community-based programs. It is important to acknowledge that these attributes frequently serve as valuable resources during periods of adversity. Simultaneously, it is

imperative to give precedence to the improvement of social support networks within military and police organizations, with a specific focus on fostering camaraderie and collaboration among personnel, especially in high-pressure situations.

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