Benguet State University Research Journal (BRJ) April-August 2016, 76: 67-82 Copyright 2016, Benguet State University

TOKNANG, "HUMOR THAT BITES" UNDERSTANDING THE SUBCULTURE OF YOUNG FARMERS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines toknang a locally shared expression of humor among young farmers. Treated as a folk performance that happens during drinking sessions, it has become an alternative way of "expressing the self" and for everyday sensing. There are, however, complex interactions and conditions that happen during the verbal exchange that it becomes a "biting humor," creating a scenario where masculinity becomes the object of identity constructions. Using key informant interviews and focus group discussions, the study aimed to sketch the norms on alcohol drinking and understand the locally marked sense of humor called toknang among young farmers. Findings showed that alcohol drinking almost always comes with exchange of sense of humor which, generally speaking, forms part of the socialization of young farmers. However, gin drinking can actually lead to other strings of events including masculine show-offs animated in the play of toknang. While this forms part of socialization in a farming community like Pawil, there are differing views held by men and women on *toknang*. The view that negates toknang as subculture of the young is where the recommendation of regulating 'gin' drinking, as one precipitating cause of staging 'humor that bites' becomes compelling.

Keywords: *Toknang, apos, folklore, pa-suplay system, young farmers*

INTRODUCTION

In my study of the drinking norms of young farmers in one of the community of Mt. Trail, Benguet. I was bothered by the thought that certain conversations in drinking sessions could lead to self defeating actions. This challenged me to observe and gather data around *toknang*, a local expression of humor shared among young farmers during drinking sessions. *Toknang* takes place in situated acts of communication among local folks in the study site. What is more interesting is that it has evolved in such a way that it has become a subculture for young male farmers. My analysis is provisional and based mainly on my study of a particular group of young farmers in one community in the Mt. Trail area. I do not in any way; claim that the analysis and the tentative conclusion can be applied to other subcultures as my observations have been limited to a very specific group in a specific location and time.

The study site was in Pawil, a commercial farming community said to be built by cash economy (Malanes, 2000) as it has been producing semi-temperate crops for the market for more than half a century. By history, *"Pawil"* is known to be *paki-lagbuan*, a place of work for people wanting for cash. The community remains to be a favorite seasonal employment site for its neighboring villages. For ethical reasons, I used *"Pawil"* as the fictitious name for my study site. In the local language, *"Pawil"* means "here, the sun rises."

Market oriented vegetable gardening necessarily creates conditions that lead to changing socialization. Road construction for example, has now become an indicator of more accessibility and more promising vegetable gardening. In turn, it has also made gin/alcohol readily available. Along with it is the decreasing performance of rites and ritual. In the past, these events had the function of

providing the space for socialization.

Humor exchange happens during drinking sessions and in this part of the country, the content of "humor" usually refers/relates to the very technology used by farmers in their vegetable farms, such as pesticides. The shaping character of the pesticide is seen in its ability to structure human experiences such that certain practices become embodied dispositions. In an already toxic vegetable environment, this reality poses dangerous signals, not only to the community as a whole, but to the younger population who might be mimicking and reproducing a subculture that is less caring of the self. Subculture here refers to a group's meaning systems and modes of expression (Lanuza, 2000), vis-a-vis the mainstream culture.

A *toknang* play is a communicative act and when taken in the context of young people in a commercial farming community, this can become a warning signal for violence, which teachers, parents and community members may have to pay attention to. This ethnography can also serve as take off point for awareness-raising on the harmful effects of pesticides, [a knowledge that seems to have been set aside in the culture of market economics] with the roles and accountabilities of the Local Government Units and Fertilizer and Pesticide Association becoming more pronounced.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives were formulated:

1. determine the specific conditions and interactions that shape humor and humor exchange among young farmers; 2. ascertain the culture of masculinity in toknang performances and gin drinking in constructing the self; and 3. outline the reasons and forces at play behind the attraction of performing "humor that bites" and its implications to the lives of young farmers.

Vegetable farming. A defining character of conventional vegetable farming is the strong reliance on chemical inputs. Barlett (1987) outlines this chemical dependency as an important ingredient of an industrial agriculture scenario. In an industrial agriculture setting, synthetic chemical inputs become part of the technological treadmill (Barlett, 1987; Cochrane, 1979). The orientation is to adapt to every technological innovation that increases production or lowers the cost of inputs. In the treadmill, one finds himself/herself "forced to adopt the innovation" to be able to survive. Barlett (1987) characterizes industrial agriculture as a highly volatile and capital intensive food production system. This is also being experienced in Mt. Trail in the province of Benguet. Although full farm mechanization is not necessarily happening, I would argue later that this and pesticide dependency would contribute to conditioning the character of what I will call as differently situated farmers. Vegetable gardening in the highlands takes place under very harsh environmental conditions and hostile agro-climatic socio-economic situations.

In Bernstein's African peasant economy, there is the circumstance of uneven economic landscape. This results from the uneven capital penetration and as such, the struggle is among the peasants who are in desperate attempt to catch up with the "moodiness of the market." Similarly, in Mt. Trail, vegetable farmers intensify their labor in an attempt to catch up with the "jackpot price" and part of the menu is to intensify the use of pesticides. One can therefore see a 'snapshot' of capital penetration, but this is just limited to the 'production' side of the equation, breeding on exploitation since there is the intensification of commodity production. The farmer herself/himself shoulders other costs leading to a phenomenon termed by Bernstein (1979) as Simple Reproduction Squeeze (SRS). Reading from Bernstein, SRS refers to those effects of commodity relations on the economics of farming households in terms of increasing cost of production and decreasing returns to labor inputs. This leaves the vegetable farmer at the end of the ladder, as he/she is the price taker. Therefore, the intensified use of pesticide is a very much welcome

technology, as it extends the limits of labor power and ecology.

Labor shortage and the 'pa-suplay' scheme. Labor shortage is another problem faced by a Filipino farmer. The observation of Castillo (1994;2007) of labor shortage in farming communities with high population growth rate like the Philippines holds true in Pawil. This is the reason why farming remains a family endeavour (Boquiren, 1989; Batani *et al.,* 2004).

The capital-intensive nature of chemical based farming increasingly finds the farmer entering into risky credit arrangements (Boquiren, 1989). One mechanism confronting the farmer to mediate these forces is the "*pa-suplay"* system, a credit system that also defines production arrangements. *Basta adda ag-suplay, mula ladta* (For as long as there is someone who will supply, keep planting) is a common expression among vegetable farmers. This reveals the nature of chemical-based farming and production relations shaped by market economics.

Despite the many stories of exploitative relationship between a "supplier" (the one who "supplies" the cost of production) and a *suplay* (one being 'supplied' mostly in terms of chemical inputs, food and shelter needs for a cropping period), the *pa-suplay* system in Pawil is said to be more generous. As the sharing of profit will come after the produce is marketed, in Pawil, this arrangement is said to favor the one being "supplied", not only in terms of the sharing scheme but also in terms of the freedom to negotiate for other farm arrangements. It is common to hear success stories of a *'suplay'* cornering the jackpot price in the market. A jackpot price means a windfall profit when market price of vegetable produce favors the farmer or the *suplay*. Perhaps due to labor shortage and the peripheral positioning of many farmers vis-à-vis the market, the negotiations between supplier and suplay have become more open, at least in Pawil. The *pa-suplay* system has evolved into a homegrown credit and production system such that it has become attractive for seasonally employed farmers including teenagers who are supposed to be in school, to enter into this production. The *pa-suplay* system has become enduring as buffer against market forces.

Masculine constructions in farming scenarios.

Foster (1956) has an interesting proposition in analyzing masculinity in peasant societies which is to look at masculinity as a "limited good." This is coming from the view that looks at peasant societies as a close system. While the study site might not qualify as a "peasant society that is close" considering that it is producing for the market, what might hold true is Fosters' (1965) perspectives on competitiveness and the need to enhance philotimo "love of honor" at the expense of another; and to quote "where there is the ever present danger or attack, so man must be prepared to respond to a jeer or insult with swift retort, an angry challenge or a knife thrust…'. Fabinyi (2007) argued that 'illegal fishing' is only discussed during 'tagay sessions' or drinking sessions and as a social practice among younger fisherman, is performed and understood as a show of bravery, strength and risk-taking. His ethnographic account also included how fish is regarded and played out in terms of constructing identities and "showing off"-concluding that "illegal fishing is an intensified expression of masculinity, with its overtones of high risk and high returns" (Fabinyi, 2007).

Subculture of the young. Subculture is generally defined as a group's meaning systems and mode of expression, commonly understood as "oppositional" to the dominant culture (Lanuza, 2000). An elaboration of the concept of subculture is provided by Brake (1985) as cited by Lanuza (2007) who looks at subculture as having important functions for the young: subculture as offering alternative experience of social reality and subculture as an expressive element for the youth. In short, it is a culture shared among the youth to construct an identity outside school or in this case, farm work. It is against this backdrop that this study has been conducted, to understand the intricacies of this subculture and draw implications to well-being and to gender concerns.

Humor, as verbal art, is an expression of a subculture. Humor is considered in literature as an art of communication or play of words practiced usually by young men. Humor, like laughter, is an oppositional culture, a subtle, unorganized,

diffused and spontaneous form of resistance against the dominant structures that endorses particular social circumstances to endure (Willis *et al.*, 1990; Goldstein, 2003). The resistance to dominant structures can refer to the simple defiance to authority such as parents' rules or even parodying the power and "knock down effect" of a particular herbicide known to be indispensable toa farmer's life.

METHODOLOGY

The study hinges on an anthropological approach to *toknang* as a kind of folk performance, hence, it takes on an ethnographic account. Since *toknang* is a verbal art and is labeled performance, this draws attention to its character as "doing the folklore" (Bauman, 1972). As a specific mode of communication, it achieves important social and cultural effects (Shuman & Briggs, 1993). To capture these dynamics, I had to do participant observations in actual *toknang* performances, both deliberate and by chance.

As the study forms part of bigger research and extension activities of my University in this part of Benguet province since 2009, the stories, idioms and metaphors I captured during my entire fieldwork were interspersed in the presentation, whenever it is found relevant. It has to be noted that *toknang* as a topic of interest, came only in 2014, when finally, a "pesticide ingestion" issue subsided, the very reason that justified the University's sustained community engagement. These accumulated field experiences therefore become part of the ethnography.

As mentioned earlier, the ethnographic method primarily relied on observing drinking performances. I would say I was lucky for several times as I was able to capture productive moments where *toknang* play was happening. During the times when validation of data was necessary, I joined young farmers in local bars with a local assistant taking the lead and myself taking the backseat. Talking to them during the start of a drinking session or just as an observer most of the time proved productive. During the face-to-face interviews, I found the casual conversations more fruitful. Some sorts of *toknang* performances were replayed and twice, I became the "it" in some light teasing games. It is because of these observations that I usually prolonged the after-interview sessions which were usually casual conversations.

Sampling and Data Gathering

There were two (2) group discussions conducted andeight(8)face-to-faceinterviews.Threelocalbars were visited to serve as settings for the observation.

Table 1: Informants

Data Gathering Tool	Informants
In-depth Interview	2 parents, 1 teacher, 1 midwife 4 young farmers
Group Discussion	3 youth groups (1 high school and 2 out-of-school youth)
Key Informant Interview	3 elders, 2 mother leaders, 3 LGU

Data Analysis

Stories and observed interactions were corroborated with other data coming from older members of the community. Data sets were then categorized and interpreted. Interpretations were informed by particular theories and perspectives, carefully carved within the context of vegetable farming.

Conceptual Framework.

The conceptual framework of the study was lifted from by classic theories on folklore coupled with ethnographic framing on youth subcultures.

Ethnography of communication **.** In the ethnography of communication, there are several components that have to be considered: the setting, the participants, the place, time, particular norms of speaking and interpreting. This is a shortened version of Hymes SPEAKING mnemonic device that stands for setting, participants, ends, act sequences, keys, instrumentalities, norms and genres (Salzmann, 2004).

Hymes (1972) as cited by Salzman, (2004) stated that in addition, genre, key, rules of interaction and norms as components of communication, refer to speech acts or events associated with particular communicative situation and characterized by a particular style, form and content. "Key" as defined

by Hymes (1972) is the tone, manner or spirit in which a speech acts. This is seen by Salzman (2004) as very variable among cultures. "Key" may even override another component as when a speaker who is presumably praising someone becomes slowly but increasingly so sarcastic that the person spoken of feels hurt or ridiculed (Hymes, 1972).

Communicative activity is guided by rules of interaction. Under normal circumstances, members of a speech community know what is and what is not appropriate. It follows that this kind of interaction is interpreted based on the norms of interpretation in a given culture.

Folklore, on the other hand, takes interest in what is familiar and which is an everyday happening and where power is enmeshed (Ben-Amos, 1973 as cited by Bronner, 2000). The definition emphasizes on the goal of understanding folklore as a process, where interaction and performance would be moved beyond folklores' traditional subjects, *i.e.,* from product/items to performance (Ben-Amos, 1972 as cited by Bronner 2000). As a process, it can be considered as a sphere of interaction in its own right (Hymes, 1972 as cited by Briggs & Shuman, 1993). This means that the "performativity of folklore" can be understood by looking at situated acts of communication or a communicative event. Using classic works on folklore as performance such as that of Malinowski and Bateson, they concluded that "context" is important with face-to-face interaction as the primary context (Shuman & Briggs, 1993). The role of social, cultural and communicative contexts in shaping the form and meaning of verbal and non-verbal behaviour is constitutive of the folklore (Shuman & Briggs, 1993). In folk performances, the style as seen in the verbal exchange of humor, and the content which is usually the pesticides used on farms, become important. This could better be understood if particularly studied in situated acts of communication. In this case, it is *toknang* as a performance, engaged in by males.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What I intend to discuss in this section is in relation to a particular body of data in the context of *toknang* as a discursive reproduction of masculinity. Like the Subanun festive drinking in Frake's study (Frake, 1964), *toknang* is a form of verbal artistry, but unlike the Subanuns, *toknang* does not always end up with pleasant events as will be shown in the ethnography.

As a folkloric performance, *toknang* takes place during *inom* (drinking) sessions that is why it is usually associated with the *umiinom* (those who drink.) Others say it is a culture of 'the *bartekero* (drunkards). I first heard the word *toknang* in Pawil but those who grew up in the community say that *toknang* has always been used as a description like *na-toknang* gamin, 'he was pushed by *toknang*, or as a verb *may in tako toknangen sisiya tapnu manpa-inom* (alright let us go and play *toknang* with him, so he will buy us drinks). The former is used when providing reasons for why someone attempted suicide; the latter is used when a group of young men agree to go to another friend and use *toknang*, "to play wits" so that this friend will buy 'gin' for the group.

Toknang in this case can be part of the pre-drinking event among men, and when the *natoknang*, the "it" gets overwhelmed, then he can at least let his mates have a drink of the most sought after wine or 'gin' to rid of any undesirable image. *Inom* is the venue for *toknang*, but in other circumstances, *toknang* is played prior to drinking. In this case, *inom* can also diffuse the effect of *toknang*, such as the robbing of someone else's manly image.

Etymology of Toknang. In my desire to track the etymology of the word, I intentionally consulted different people of different ages and background. More or less, they gave me similar yet differently stated synonyms. The etymology of the word must have come from *tu-o* (wits) or smartness or *etek*; or *sa-it* (to talk ill against another); or *sinit* (to bully). From what can be concluded from the data gathered, *"tu-o"* is the closest. Still to some, the word is associated with *Kantiyaw nga bulboladas, awan kaes-eskanna* (hard teasing without clear

direction). Perhaps, it is for the latter that an elder from Pawil related the term with a local "nobody" who suddenly disappeared and was later heard to have worked in a place along the Mt. Trail area that is popular for a culture that is *binubulgang* (carefree) or gang culture, so when he returned, he popularized the term *toknang* (Listino, 2014). Getting other accounts from other informants, they said that the word is popular among "bachelors" in Buguias, where vegetable farming in its commercial scale is said to have started long before. Others say that the word is also heard from other neighboring towns which Pawil shares a boundary with, known also for its commercial scale vegetable production.

Among the professionals, a more positive perspective was heard. *Toknang* is a game of wits and toughness since the members can throw anything in the face of someone, including criticizing one's behavior through the play of words. Words exchanged can be interpreted based on the norms of the community. According to one young professional, because it is usually a game of boys during drinking session, jeering and taunting everyone involved should answer back with humor intact. These makes someone build his character. Taken in this way, the practice of commenting on one's behavior with the goal of "correcting it" through humored laughter is a more positive form of *toknang* by using positive criticisms. The notion that *Kankana-eys* are non-confrontational is given light here-that *toknang* after all, is a culturally defined venue for social commentaries and in self expression. Further, a contrasting opinion is taken from another young professional from the locality, emphasizing that not everyone, especially among the younger generation, can take *toknang* with wits intact. Hence, it leads to actions that no one would wish to experience. As one of the elders put it, *ti ubbing tatta ket nalaka da nga masasa-ir* (the children today easily gets peeved.) Perhaps this is also where the *apos* or *tampo* in Tagalog, is where these culture of the young can be traced which if remained ignored, can progress to self inflicted injuries. *Apos* or *tampo* is commonly associated with *toknang*, either as the indirect cause or as a precipitating event to life-threatening ideas.

Borrowing from folkloric discourse, it is said that folklore is considered as a "verbal art or literary art" (Bronner, 2000) and as an expressive form and aesthetics, which is consistent with locally defined culture (Bauman,1992). As a communicative event, *toknang* takes place during the *inom* (drinking) sessions. Part of the dynamics of the *toknang* play is its presentation as a verbal exchange, as humor-filled communication but in Pawil, the exchange becomes dense and serious as the play progresses which in the long run turn into biting humor.

From the above grounds, *man-tuo* is the closest root word of *toknang* and when taken in the context of folklore, it can be likened to what is termed as grounded aesthetics (pushing, taunting someone, to the point that he gets upset). To be manly, *toknang* demands good natured humor as a response. In its form and content, *toknang* works as a process where the stoic character and artistic dimension of this folklore becomes the thread that organizes the game. It may start first with *kantiyawan* (teasing) with themes that are reflective of the community's everyday pre-occupation. For example, *kantiyaw* can revolve around one's success in farming or even crop failure in the recent harvest or any topic packaged as an ice breaker such as the "girl-next-door." When *kantiyawan* is done within the context of young men grouped into an *inuman* session, a plain kantiyawan can escalate into *toknang* becoming a test of wit and of masculinity. Further, composition skills are tested as everyone can "speak in riddles" and even "below the belt". Smarter rebuttal during *toknang* is necessary to be able to lead during the play since it's in the exchange of good rebuttal where the attraction lies.

"Apos" or "tampo" and humor. The state of *apos* or *tampo*, is found to be transported into the context of humor, specifically during teasing games. A defining character of male sensibility among the young men of Pawil is humor which is also a staging ground for generating the vocabulary of emotions, told in parody and biting humor. Young men experiencing *apos* who are unable to find endearment at the household level, turn and seek comfort in his peers-with drinking and teasing as the ready outlet. Words such as *tapnu agpa-pansin* (to call attention) or *even mas masadotak sin biagko ay* (why I feel no longer have the knack for life) are strong emotions that when taken in the context of *toknang*, it can be capitalized to bully a player. Even

communication through "text messaging" such as *tan binasted iman text mate na* (because he got busted by his textmate) can escalate into driving a losing proponent in a *toknang* to take his own life. As shown later, with drinking and teasing, it is almost expected that a drinking-of-pesticide will follow. Lapuz (1973) who studied young patients back in the '70s in urban Manila, noted that protective behavior such as ingratiation, evoking pity, and, if I may add, drinking, thinly disguise the erosion of self esteem. In Pawil, these mechanisms are culturally sanctioned and many people employ them, thus, these reinforce what Lapuz (1972) stated that these "merely reinforces the denial of the hurt, anger and the damage to self-esteem".

"Apos" and Social Change. Things have changed. This has been clear to the locals I talked to. They claim that in the olden days, everyone gave attention to this emotional state. Today, no one pays attention anymore except when it calls for a serious consideration. It has become clearer that among the *Ipawil*, display of emotion still do not conform to being straightforward. Market economics has, however, generated new social standards that transgressed the traditional socio-cultural mechanism of conveying emotional conditions. *Kankana-ey* culture favors a non-confrontational stance by way of displaying *apos*, but with the changing times that is shaping the way they carry their everyday lives, *paspas di biag* (very fast pace of life), older household members can no longer fulfill the roles of wooing back and "soothing" these feelings of the younger members. Emotional states and interpersonal relationships have been devalued. In a situation of liminality, with the young navigating their place in this world, this makes them vulnerable in the process. Teenagers turn to their *barkada* (set of friends) for comfort. Drinking, teasing and masculine humor become the ready outlet. As Zayas & Abaya (2008) would argue, well being is what is desired and strived for and it is in many ways sustained by power derived from interpersonal social relations.

Ethnography of communication/socialization: Inom, Toknang. Drinking and teasing are common in farming communities in the uplands. Drinking hard liquor, locally called "gin" forms part of everyday socialization. With cold weather, almost fog-filled mornings and hard work that farming entails, young and old alike, resort to everyday drinking. In Pawil, the cold and windy climate is often taken as a good reason to drink. Part of the socialization of boys during their younger years is being exposed to drinking with kin and friends. One realizes that drinking, for the young and the old alike, is almost an unquestioned activity, considered legitimate in the given ecological context. It is taken as a form of relaxation, as a pastime in a boring landscape. Moreover, folks of *Pawil* usually drink just after applying pesticides. They drink so that *tapnu madismolar ti angot di spray* (to neutralize the pesticide odor).

Drinking, teasing: Animated in local bars. Inom (drinking)is animated in local bars that dot specific places in an otherwise vegetable garden-filled rolling landscape. Drinking, which always comes with the teasing game, *toknang* or "biting humor" reproduces masculinity. Here, self-making is crucial. *Toknang* as a masculine discourse ushers in the play of words, of bullying and taunting, of sexist jokes including pesticide scripts that implicates the body. This will go on, until it leads one to drinking the most powerful pesticide with the body as the ultimate test of power. Most often, the subject of *toknang* is the very same pesticide being used in the farm. One is bullied for not using the state-of-the-art pesticide. If one survived from drinking any toxic chemical, he receives either praise or jest, non-stop. A survivor is praised if he is known to have drank a lethal chemical and survived or if he drank a less lethal chemical, he is bullied and named after the chemical he drank. Biting humor coupled with drinking forms part of the "ways of doing things" and this is relegated as "normal." While the drinking of pesticide is a potential outcome of gin drinking and *toknang*, this is not the focus of the paper. Suffice it to say that part of the construction of male power rests on the power of the body and to the subject in a teasing game which is a resonance of specific local pre-occupations and resources.

The practice of *inom* (drinking) and *toknang* among young farmers, taken here as a "communicative event, is informed by the approach of ethnography of communication and folklore framing. Folklore can be borrowed from the folklorists to provide the broader context,

in which *toknang* and suicide are happening. Part of the dynamics of the *toknang* play is its presentation as a verbal exchange, as humor-filled but the exchange becomes a "biting humor" as the play progresses. An observed effect is the *na-toknang* or the "it" in the play; the one who gets defeated in the process at times, ends up ingesting the pesticide within the confines of his private home. *Toknang*, as a game and language of the *umiinom* (those who drink), does not necessarily lead to the suicide trail, however, it is significant to note that *awan sa met nag-suicide nga haan nga na-toknang* (no one has committed suicide without having gotten drunk and "bitten" by humor) as assessed by two elder informants and the barangay midwife.

A focus on a *toknang* event allows consideration of the relationship between the participants and the 'talked about'-with performance assuming a central role. Performance becomes animated with *toknang* play because of the exchange of wits and rebuttal interspersed with laughter and jeering. The aesthetics in the situated communication focuses on everyday life. In this case, if the topic is about the latest herbicide in town, to test its power against the body, is considered "performative." This is in the context of masculine wits and humor, as shown in a *toknang* play. As Bauman (1992) stated, the expressive form and aesthetics are consistent with locally defined culture. This is further discussed below.

Toknang game. A *toknang* episode is staged with the construction of male power by its players; the form or aesthetics is seen in the exchange of wits and words-the taunting and bullying words as part of the performance. These exchanges produce the "magical effect," in the words of Dumont (1993) "fresh, intense and sustained" interaction, and as a performance, it engages imagination (emotions and texts) and reflects intersubjectivity (Dan Ben-Amos, 1977 in Bronner, 2000).

When the theme in the *toknang* involves pesticides, it takes the form of everyday resistance (Scott, 1985) and somehow it unsettles the established power of pesticides, even if momentarily. In this case, re-appropriating the power that comes with the poison, it is further animated by "the act of taking and surviving." There are several operations working here; at one point, *inom*, like that of Fabinyi's (2007) *tagay* sessions among young fisher men is a social event that affirms togetherness of the *barkada*, but also affirms a sense of masculine powers. When male prowess is taken in the frame of Foster's "limited good" that it is considered as a scarce, finite resource, it becomes a play with one person amassing the honor of manliness, at the expense of another (Foster, 1965). In a *toknang* scenario, this is indicated by attacking and ridiculing the other-in the same manner that gin drinking, taunting and bullying the main *toknang* player earns the desired image of male valor.

The workings of power and resistance have to be taken in the context of the herbicide paraquat, in particular being valorized and commonly cited as *katulungan di farmer* (a ready help to any farmer.) Using this herbicide cuts on cost and time thus this herbicide is an indispensable item in the farmer's menu. With the "power" the herbicide can provide to young farmers, it is transported this time beyond the domain of farming-but through the young farmer's *toknangan*. Perhaps this also parallels what Dumont (1993) says of the changing character of the Visayan male *barkada*: that is the mischievousness, rebelliousness, redemptive capacity, togetherness among others, all packaged in one, "the *barkada* signifies and foretells all of this, at once". If seen in this way, in a culture where good life is strongly valued, drinking and *toknang* among young farmers, becomes comprehensible.

Felix's story is a case in point. He was described as a light-hearted, single, 21-year old, very focused on farming, but wishes to have a farm of his own someday. Before his death, Felix served as a farm helper to his sister's family. As described during his last drinking session, his biting humor started with a topic that was related to "making a score with female partners-in-bed." In a drinking session, usually one will take the lead and another will take the challenge, hence, they are referred to as *toknang* players. *Ka-toknang* therefore refers to the other party with reference to one of the players, and when the other talks back, he is also directing his rebuttal to his *ka-toknang*, and the cycle goes around. In this case, when Felix directed his *toknang* to a drink mate who was apparently irked being labeled as "not good-in-bed", he readily

of masculine powers, when things go right. Thirdly, in the case above, Felix was trapped into a situation of *nasalto* or *na-toknang* (gagged) thus he no longer throws back an equally powerful line. To win and not be defeated means so much for these young men. *Importante adi iman... ay tan kaman iman nagatinan di butbutlog mo...* (Winning is important... or else it is like you just allow your balls to be stepped upon…) as one young man jokingly said. Maintaining image in a network of relationships defines not only young peoples' local world but also their moral world. The shared, intersubjective meanings attached to male image of standing up stoically is very important. When seen in the frame of Foster's "a limited good" model (Foster, 1965) where masculinity is seen as always in short supply, the goal of *toknang* which is robbing one's dignity in public, makes sense. Foster has an interesting proposition in analyzing masculinity in peasant societies. This is to look at masculinity as a "limited good." Foster's perspectives on competitiveness and the need to enhance philotimo (love of honor) at the expense of another; and to quote "where there is the ever present danger or attack, so man must be prepared to respond to a jeer or insult with swift retort, an angry challenge or a knife thrust" (Foster, 1965). *Toknang* scenario when seen as a communicative event where "competition" is in the words being exchanged and wit is tested in terms of spontaneity in composition of a rebuttal, builds male character at the expense of a *ka-toknang*. *Toknang* with its biting humor becomes comprehensible as a game of young males running after masculinity as "a limited good."

In a seminal work about Filipino patients' psychodynamic world, Lapuz (1973) observes that what counts most is the interpersonal world as a primary source of gratification and that the successful negotiation of interpersonal matters with family and friends is reassuring and brings recognition. To be shamed and blamed for a certain result of an action matters a lot. Lapuz (1973) acknowledges the difficulty in distinguishing whether the state of feeling stems from being 'shamed' or being 'blamed' which contribute to the escalation of anger. *Na-ilasoy* for the *Kankana-eys* means both being shamed, blamed and even being under-estimated by another, hence the loss of face, which can mean loss of spirit. In the case of Felix, his act of teasing was a discourse of the self, and his drinking the herbicide was a display of "doing what others have done in the past." How the self emerges as a social self is important for these young men (Battaglia, 1995). Their local world of masculinity defines how to die correctly in a situation of shame and dishonor. To die in a certain way like drinking the familiar herbicide is more dignified than living dishonored. To Berger and Luckmann (1967) this "correct death" is part of subjective identity or shared meaning constructions. Repeating the actions of previous drink mates frees the individual from the burden of choice thus, it has become an embodied practice.

With agro-chemical-based gardening defining their habitus, with the market determining the manner in which 'competition' should be, commentaries such as *kapsot ka ay, taraki din ka-arrubam* (You are not smart, your neighbor is) is certainly a challenge. For my young informants, it matters so much to "be like-the-others" that is, to get hold of the latest technology in town, as a show of "smart farming" and to get better chances in cornering the jackpot price. It is a widely acknowledged fact that in extension work "farmers ask their fellow farmers" of the latest technique-which all the more makes the circle of information flow increasingly concentrated and homogenized. When set in a drinking session then, what has become an everyday preoccupation has also become one of the central themes in *inuman* sessions. In the same way that farmers in general, valorize the herbicide, young farmers in a *toknang* session glamorize anyone who takes the risk of proving its potency by pushing one to take it in. For example, the latest pesticide in town with its knock-out effect is one theme which has also become popular among farmers. The paraquat-based herbicide has been commonly used as a tool for suicide since 2008 in the Mt. Trail areas, dubbed by scientists who did experiments in highland settings as "Sagip-Lupa Soil Conservation and Weed Management Technology" (Sarian, 2011). It has become the subject of farmers' curiosity. Later, it became the almost single source of security, to the extent that this poison has been treated as natural and essential, much to its creator's benefits. Again, when these everyday conversations are taken into a drinking session, its potency becomes the subject

of testing masculinity with the ultimate challenge of taking the risk: to drink it and die of it or to drink it and survive it victoriously. This is very much like Widger's (2014) 'pesticide roulette' where the benefits and dangers of agro-chemicals in farmers' lives are managed through calculative risk taking.

In Sri Lanka, male farmers have a practice of drinking *kasippu*, a cheap, locally-made wine said to have been prepared with pesticide suspended during the fermentation process. According to Widgers' (2014) findings, to drink *kasippu* increases pleasure and intoxication. On the other hand, one can get poisoned of it. Of the 42 cases of suicide through paraquat, about five (5) were said to have survived it. This has been subject to speculations by the public. The medical perspective shows that surviving it cannot be true considering the fact that it (herbicide) is paraquat-based and has no antidote. Another medical doctor, however, said that perhaps the "alcohol somehow has become an inhibitor" and so the effect of the poison has somehow diffused (Poltic, 2014). However, women expressed contrasting views. Some of them did not really swallow the herbicide while some said that *adda lang nangibukbukan da nga parte iti bagi da* (some just poured the poison over parts of their body). According to the young informants, this has been the subject of curiosity, and as shown in the ethnography, the potency of the herbicide has become the 'object' of constructing masculinity. When sought of their opinion of "some survive it" they claim that some people can really survive it simply because they are *natataraki*, literally translated as robust and smart. From what can be drawn, drinking the powerful herbicide comes with masculinity which all the more become more attractive and boastful when one survives it.

Dwelling further on the young peoples' perspectives, suicide discourse among the young seems to have narrowed down to the issue of "what was taken in an ordinary pesticide or a more powerful herbicide" with actors becoming more boastful when they took in and survived the more deadly and more potent herbicide. Again, this has been illustrated in one of my encounters with humor-filled young men as presented in the following discussions.

From these experiences, it can be perceived that performing folklore means that there is action and interaction between participants and the 'process' can only be grasped if the communicative event is taken in its context. Performing the folklore, in this case, the interaction takes place in a place (in this case the local bar) with the interaction taking the form of exchanging humor, initially becomes an art of exchanging wit and humor. As a form of verbal art, this escalates into biting humor. Here lies the process, from quiet drinking and light humor until it escalates into loud teasing up to biting humor. This has to be understood as a gendered nature of performance, that is, if it is only played by men. The interaction that leads to complex results cannot be understood apart from the role of local bars as places where men can play masculine humor. It is therefore understandable that the masculine expressions and negotiations of this male power is negotiated in the local bars, the place for self-making which cannot be separated from its character as a place for drinking hard liquor by men whose identity partly lies on masculine valor.

Face to face with humor-filled survivors at a local bar. "To be teased is to be accepted" and to join in the teasing is to be "in-the-group" (Geertz, 1973). This has been clearly proven in *Pawil*. Laughter and jokes are shared and sentiments of "liking" one another is in the air. I can personally account for this when I also would resort to teasing and speaking their language which could just be light remarks on the results of their latest *liga ng kabataan* where their group won, including becoming the subject of teasing, thus, appearing funny and sometimes feeling embarrassed. My assuming an open positioning and not acting like a teacher-in-a University or so, proved to be very productive because I began to be accepted among male and female teenagers, aside from the fact that for the period I had to seek for my informants, with me was a young and pretty research assistant.

The two popular bars I went to are similar, yet different from each other. One bar was located in a site where many other bars have been clustered. During my fieldwork in 2012, the latest bar by comparison was fairly isolated but also offered varied recreations. The bar is located just above

the barangay road, which is the main road taken by the locals going to the national high school, elementary school and the barangay hall. I was told that this used to be an abandoned structure which was later made 'lively' by an enterprising non-local. It has a store inside, a billiard table which occupies one part of the structure. One big table is used for "drinking" with a side table in one corner. Outside sits a lot of benches overlooking the dirt road. During one of my early morning walks after trekking the steep dirt road, we stopped to rest in front of the cooperative which was closed since it was still early. At first, we did not realize that the boys (respondents of the study) were watching us from above the road. However my attention was finally caught when two young men sitting on the bench greeted us *ay tan suicide kasin sa?* "Is that the suicide thing again?" and laughter followed. To be "in" in this community is to be "teased is to be accepted" so I answered in a joking manner, *ay tan kaman manbung-bungar kayo ya* (It seems you are all washing-off the night's hang-over) that was met with laughter. I then asked if we can go up the bar where the others are and they answered in chorus that we should go up, and so we did. I suspect, however, that these young men had to call our attention because they wanted my young assistant's attention.'

After exchanging light humor, I asked if they knew the person we were looking for and luckily, the young farmer was with the group. I was directed to go inside the bar and left my assistant whom I quickly oriented on 'how to deal with the young boys.' As I entered the bar, I was chided by the boys outside saying that 'he is a good case' referring to my study, and laughter once again followed. I finally was face-to-face with him, sober and yet trying to present a good posturing, and as I see it, he was about 18 years old.

Kumusta kan ngay? (How are you?) was the usual greeting. He answered *mayat manang… pasensiya a medyo nakainomak* (I'm alright, and I must apologize, I'm quite drunk.

After introducing myself and my assistant, I again asked permission if we can "talk." He readily gave in half-laughing and joking. As the conversation continued, a more matured man peeped and said jokingly, *survivor imansa* (yes, the one you're talking to is a survivor) (laughter) to which I quipped back *aw ngarud isunga kangal-ngalat ko* (Indeed, that is why I am talking to him). After another 10 minutes or so, the same man came down and was chided by my informant to come in. He showed his face and disappeared and was chided back by my informant *nu aginum ta gamin, ad-aduen tapnu sigurado* (When you drink, make sure it is enough to be sure)-to which he shouted back *pada ta lang* (We are just the same you know) [laughter inside the room and outside]. The exchange can be translated as "when you drink, drink more, to ensure its lethality" referring to the drinking of pesticide, and to which he answered back "we're on the same boat." I learned later that his name was Warren and he also drank a particular brand before and finishing my informant's story, he came back again and said, saying in a loud voice *magas nagan ko sin listaan ta nalinis* (I don't have my name in the list, because I am clean…) and another spate of laughter followed. Half laughing and half serious and because I wanted to take advantage of the productiveness of the moment, I asked, *apay ngin ay nalinis* (Why do you say you are clean?) he answered back *tan na areglo ngarud…tan haanak napan ospital* (Because it was settled…I was not brought to the hospital, and that solved everything).

It was the right time to talk to him (he obviously was volunteering himself), and finally I met face-to-face with the other informant who already sat with the group of young men outside the bar. I learned later that he drank sumicidin, a kind of fungicide commonly used by vegetable growers, again after a drinking spree. He claimed he was "black-out" at that time and was heavily drunk. He did not realize he was already being brought to the hospital but he said he threw up and was already feeling better; hence they did not continue the trip to *Clinica Bantay.* Later, I would have another version of the story from one of his companions who was part of the supposed trip to the clinic. Just as everyone was rushing the attempter to the nearest clinic, the driver was surprised to experience difficulty in manipulating his jeep. It was only later that they realized that a cow was tied to the rear of the jeep. It was claimed that it was dark and no one had a flashlight and everyone was tipsy, supposedly because all who helped Warren were drunk. This became a favorite tale, accompanied by laughter.

For me, what was more interesting as well as intriguing was his statement of *na-areglo* (It was settled). This was quite interesting since these young men were talking about 'settlement' amidst the alarming social practice of 'suicide' among the youth. When probed what he meant, this attempter said it was because he incurred no hospital record and was able to survive. This metaphor became clearer when in another teasing exchange at a local store, light chiding brought out this tale. I would read this statement *na-solve* (it was solved) and/or *na-areglo* (it was fixed) as more meaningful when taken in the context of *toknang* where exchanges of biting humor would lead my informant to invoking this particular line "*tan na-areglo"* as words to meet head on the humor thrown at him. Another line that affirms this was when the other boys shouted *na-areglo iman adi tan in-testing na ket naabak na met din agas,* (it was settled because he tested the drug/ medicine and defeated its power). To try and test with one's body and surpassing the killing power of the substance is indeed feeding into discourses of masculinity especially if it is transported in the context of toknang. I have discovered that to prove one's masculinity, masculine powers have to be performed and be tested against chemical substances by literally 'swallowing it.' On the other hand, getting away with official record is a plus point to scores for masculinity.

Na-areglo (settled) was the term used by the young man who drank or tried to drink the chemical which can also be related to the discourse of what is official and what is not. When Warren said "I was not in the list" he was referring to the official listing of the barangay midwife who assumed the monitoring of health cases. For these young men, once a case is brought to the hospital, it gets officially listed. In fact, a theme that will come out later would be "health care facilities only become relevant because of the cases of pesticide ingestion."

One side note on the sometimes difficult data gathering among *Kankana-eys* is the lack of expressiveness in the culture of articulation which has been encountered in *Pawil*. Like any typical *Kankana-ey* community in this part of the country, this unexpressive culture has been enduring specifically among young men, so that my data-gathering technique was to take advantage of any moments such as this 'productiveness of engagements especially when the local is drunk.' In a society where the culture of articulation is not so much expressive, this moment is taken advantage of by any researcher. I was in the community for two weeks hoping to capture productive communicative exchanges and like in the above case, these productive moments are when my informants' are into a drinking bout. In these interviews, my voice was limited while my informants' stories were free-flowing, influenced only through my presence, my joining in the laughter and occasional probing.

On hindsight, what I can make out of this conversation is that cultural scripts among the young are revealing of their concept of pesticides and the same pesticide becomes part of the satirical humor *toknang*, a poison that can kill and is tested using the body and when one has been able to 'survive it', it becomes a source of power. Given the lethality when the pesticide successfully kills its agent, the success stories of surviving the ordeal or surpassing its power is truly a manly achievement. Nicknaming young farmer suicide attempters after the brand of pesticides they used, like being called "Torogi Blue"™ or gramoxone™ is humorous, a marker of "survivorship" and not defeat. As a researcher, this is another surprise. At first, I was careful not to use words which I thought might be a source of trauma to my informants but then, I realized that with young male farmers, the same words I struggled to avoid were openly said and had become a source of jokes, forming part of the habitus specifically during drinking sessions. At another level, how these young men make fun of the absurdity of their situation is perhaps a way to get by (Scheper-Hughes, 1993; Goldstein, 2003). How one has to deal with the contradictions of his existence as a young man who opted to join the bandwagon in a highly commercialized vegetable growing community where competition, engaging in cutting-edge technologies and dealing with time compression is the name of the game.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In a landscape where hard work, cold climate and a culture where self-expressions are constrained, socio-cultural habits such as hard-teasing and alcohol-intake become the site and mechanism of everyday sensing. Masculine humor, that is, biting humor locally called *toknang*, if done under the influence of alcohol, has the potential of becoming a predisposing mechanism to pesticide ingestion, the fact that the test of masculinity lies in testing the potency of the pesticide versus the self. In many ways then, the inom of the young men today has transformed a lot in the past. There was drinking and even everyday drinking, but there was no suicide. The aestheticization of the world of these young farmers for public performance (Shuman & Briggs, 1993) as seen in *toknang*, represents a particular dimension of masculine culture. It is also a resonance of an everyday habit that emanates from a toxic-filled landscape and to the fact that Pawil is very much into chemical farming. With the idea that this subculture is potentially an "oppositional culture," one cannot dismiss its life-threatening tendencies, while at the same time offering magical solutions to certain problems.

As the issue in the study involves sketching the norms of young farmers that has implications to the community's well-being in general, the fact that drinking and *toknang* can lead to other string-of-events that is already less concerned of caring for the self, entails mobilization of various sectors. The realization of these recommended actions needs comprehensive and concerted efforts. It also entails the utilization of existing mechanisms such as a pool of volunteers of Barangay Health Workers (BHWs) and the women's association at the sitio and barangay levels, the devolved scheme of planning and allocation of resources at the LGU level, as well as collective community efforts found in the remaining rites and rituals. As these young farmers are also in the secondary school, the education sector is challenged to play corresponding roles in terms of watching for "warning signals" as contained in the above presented 'communicative acts.' Series of IECs specifically on breaking the myth of alcohol drinking as 'social drinking' as there is growing evidence that it is becoming one of the most unrecognized health problems, is very much needed. All of these call for multi-sectoral action, both inside and outside these communities. The women's association has long started working along spiritual guidance and regulation of drinking gin. It would, however, matter a lot if regulatory policies at the provincial or regional levels can be worked out. Other support mechanisms in terms of education, capacity-building and networking are also imperative.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The paper could not have been finished without the openness and willingness of my young farmer informants to share the stories of their lives in between humor and serious engagements. I have also learned much from my conversations with Geof, Tex, Dra. Florence V. Poltic, Prof. Gregorio C. Taag, and of course Ms. Betty C. Listino, my research collaborator and to others whom I might failed to name here but whose insights have all contributed to the substance of the paper. For ISRD-BSU and HERRC-CHED for the opportunities to go on field work and as such, allowed me to validate and at times, do participant observation.