

# The Ethnopolitics of *Moro* Self-Determination in the Philippines: So little, too late?

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The paper re-examines the *Moro* secessionist movement in the Philippines from the perspective of ethno-politics. Using a hybrid framework, which combines Paul Brass' and Abner Cohen's instrumentalist approach to ethnicity on the one hand and Michael Hechter's and Michael Banton's rational choice theory on the other hand, the paper argues that the complexity of the current separatist war is not simply due to the weakness of the state but also due to the weakness of the *Bangsamoro* identity and notion of nationhood. This frailty allows the state to co-opt leaders of the movement and sabotage their legitimate quest to self-governance and political autonomy. The reinvention of the *Moro* struggle towards self-determination reflects another attempt to sustain the relevance of the Muslims' effort to create its own nation-state. However, the prospect of which is not promising. Addressing the conflict in Mindanao requires not only the strengthening of the state but also the strengthening of the *Moro* national identity. Mutually re-enforcing these strengths can accelerate the process of Philippine nation-state building and establish co-governance mechanisms that would guarantee the unification of the country in spite of its diversity.

**Keyword:** *Ethnopolitics, Bangsamoro, peace agreement, self-determination, and Mindanao*

The Muslim secessionist movement in the Philippines has been a continuing concern of the government. From the colonial to post-colonial period, regimes have tried to understand the deep underlying reasons behind the Muslim rebellion and attempted to confront secessionism in various modes, ranging from military to peaceful engagements.

This paper is another effort to examine the issue of Muslim separatism. However, unlike

other approaches, the study analyzes secessionism from the perspective of ethno politics. It appraises the significance of the politics of ethnicity in strengthening and weakening of Muslims' idea of *Bangsamoro* identity and how such identity has served and continues to serve a political purpose.

As the Philippine state tries to unify its nation, other "nations" assert their right to form their own state. The *Bangsa Moro (Moro Nation)*<sup>1</sup> is the most forceful compared to others like

Cordillera, for instance (Buendia, 1991). The conflict generated by the state's "nation-building" on the one hand, and *Moros*' "state-building" on the other hand continues to unfold.

Under this purview, the complex relationship between the politics of identities, unifying nationalism, and democratic governance is apparent. It is one of the vital areas that must be explored towards a better understanding of the dynamics and interaction involving state actors and independence movements.

The paper offers an alternative view in probing at the complexity of *Moro* secessionism. Apart from the weakness of the state in conclusively addressing the *Moro* national question as argued by several scholars, the weakness of the *Bangsamoro* identity contributes in their inability to negotiate with the state on the terms and conditions of Muslim political autonomy and self-governance in the Philippines. The paper argues that this drawback has allowed the state to exploit the ethnic cleavages between and among the *Moros* to frustrate their collective demands for a *Moro* nation-state.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In examining the *Moro* secessionist movement, the study utilizes the instrumentalist theory as its frame of analysis. In the interest of this paper, it adopts the ethnic and rational choice dimensions of instrumentalism. These are briefly discussed herein.

The instrumentalist approach to ethnicity has been propounded by Paul Brass (1979, 1991, 1994) and Abner Cohen (1969). Taking the case of India, Brass concluded that intra-elite competition for economic and political resources is the ultimate objective for the manipulation of different ethnic (linguistic and religious) symbols to arouse, organize, and mobilize their respective constituencies.

While Brass (1994) admitted that elites are constrained by mass cultures and ethnic or indigenous institutions, he viewed that leaders of ethnic movements invariably select from

traditional cultures those aspects that they think will be useful in their defined interest, disguise as the group's interest. In the process, elites affect the self-definition of the group, its boundaries, and social formation to the extent that ethnic community or nationality, for that matter, would be completely different from its progenitor and what it used to be before.

Using empirical evidences in his study of ethnicity in former British colonial states in Africa, Cohen (1969) on the other hand, concluded that: (1) contemporary ethnicity is the result of intense interaction between ethnic groups that operates not outside of state's framework but within the structure of the state; (2) mobilization of ethnic groups involves a dynamic realignment of relations and functions within the parameters of the new state that preserved and secured the power of the privileged class; (3) ethnicity is a political phenomenon which uses traditional customs as idioms and mechanisms for political rearrangement of state's power; and (4) ethnic grouping is essentially informal that does not become part of the official framework of economic and political power within the state. Thereby, their formation is allowed as long as this does not threaten the power of the elite.

The "rational choice theory" and "actor's model" version of the instrumentalist school has been explored by Michael Hechter (1986, 1996) and Michael Banton (1994, 1996). Both scholars refused to acknowledge normative and structuralist explanation of ethnicity and nationalism and instead built models of group solidarity based on individual pursuit of public good. Nonetheless, they differ in the focus and approach in explaining the phenomena. Hechter attended on the role of ethnic organizations in defining individual preferences while Banton chose to analyze ethnicity at the micro-level.

Hechter's (1986) rational choice approach is premised on the goals of an individual which are: wealth, prestige, and power. In the achievement of such goals, ethnic organization or group can project itself to its members as the mechanism in attaining one's goal. In the process, the

organization or ethnic group can perform two vital purposes. One, it can motivate or discourage participation in a collective undertaking through a scheme of rewards and punishments, using individual's interests—wealth, prestige, and power—as the gauge. Two, it can control the flow of information or concoct explanations that will convince the members to take or not to take a particular decision or action.

Hechter (1996) theorized that formation of preference in an ethnic group or community is highly contingent on the leaders' interests. Elites' systematic limitation and distortion of facts, information, and alternatives can politicize or de-politicize an ethnic or nationalist movement. He suggested that preferences tend to be formed in "solidary communities" whose transmission of information and knowledge is dependent on the elite. Finally, he said that the phenomena of ethnic boundaries, ethnic conflicts, racial assimilation and integration, and movements of nationalism and secessionism are consistent with the rational choice theory.

Banton's (1996) individuality-based group solidarity lies in his model of the social structure. He identified two models—an actor and an observer model. In the latter, the "observer" defines ethnicity based on one's information, knowledge, and concepts—what language, religion, color, physique, or belief is ethnic or not ethnic. An observer, in the process of testing one's assumptions, actually labels, categorizes, and frames people based on a pre-conceived idea. While an "actor," the person being observed, makes relationship, does interact, and acts based on one's decision outside of the observer's parameters. Banton's study on the cases of ethnics in Malaysia and Catalonia revealed that individuals are guided by their self-interest rather than ethnic affiliation and identification. He inferred that the processes and features of social relationships are defined more by personal preferences and not by ethnic norms and traditional cultures. Thus, Banton declared that ethnicity and nationalism are political constructs that are open and susceptible to manipulation.

The study adopts a hybrid framework that incorporates the ethnic and rational choice dimensions of instrumentalism. In the study, ethnicity is assessed as an alternative form of organization and structure of identification that easily adapts to changes in a particular political situation and social contexts in pursuit of advancing a particular political and economic interest. Ethnic identities may be shifted, ethnic ties may be severed, and collective objectives may be compromised, if not sacrificed, for the benefit of securing or preserving one's power. The mobilization of ethnic groups is seen as a reflection of the dynamic re-alignment of interests and relations as well as functions either to re-arrange state's power or to demand for more political, economic, and social benefits for the key leaders of the movement.

The study further suggests that primordial interest is something that is malleable and negotiable rather than fixed. Motives of leaders and organizations are changeable and unpredictable that often adapt to given or proffered opportunities and threats as well as political moods of the time. In other words, in spite of state's dominant role in society, it is not entirely responsible or liable for the internal political dynamics that transpire within the organization of a resistance movement, in this case, the *Moro* secessionist movement.

The paper contends that even if the state's policies may lead to the destruction, co-optation, or subjugation of social forces and eventually transform peoples' identities, the internal tussle among movement's leaders for power and control over the organization contributes to the weakening of its capacity to withstand state's pressure and makes it vulnerable to latter's political manipulation and maneuvers.

### **THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN THE SEARCH FOR A *MORO* NATION-STATE**

Beginning in early 1920s, Muslim leaders of Sulu and Mindanao began a peaceful movement

that asserted their right to establish their own nation-state and form a government of their choice. Leaders petitioned and offered two options for the US Congress to consider: join the Federal Government of the United States, or be declared a separate sovereign state from the would-be Republic of the Philippines. The last option rests on the hope that Muslims would gain their independence in the event that the US finally relinquishes its power over colonies and other non-governing territories in the future.

The denial of their petition and inevitability of Philippine independence after an American sponsored 10-year transition period under a Commonwealth Republic led Muslim leaders to reconfigure their *Moro* identity in line with forthcoming Philippine nation-state. Muslim leaders declared themselves as “Filipinos” and considered *Moro*—pejoratively associated with piracy, savagery, slavery, treachery, amok, and other negative connotations—as a name that is unacceptable.

The last-ditch effort of Muslims to live separately from Christian Filipinos was made in 1935 (the year when the Commonwealth Republic was inaugurated) when Lanao leaders appealed to the US government and the American people to exclude Mindanao and Sulu in the proposed independence to the Filipinos.

In the 1934 Constitutional Convention that framed the 1935 Philippine Constitution (used as the fundamental law of the Commonwealth and 1946 Government of the Republic of the Philippines [GRP]), several elected Muslim Constitutional delegates, led by Alauya Alonto, called upon their fellow delegates not only to cease from calling Muslims as *Moros* but also to accept Muslims as part of the Filipino nation.

The turn of events is a classic case of shifting self-definition, attaching new value and meaning to one’s identity in the prospect of advancing its political interests, and exigencies of power within the parameters of a newfound state. This is a clear case wherein ethnic identity is simply not fixed but malleable and shaped by one’s interest to preserve power and access to

resources as expounded by instrumentalists Brass and Cohen.

What deepened in almost two decades from the 1950s was the ethnic self-recognition of the masses as Filipino-Muslims (foremost as a Filipino and second, as a Muslim). The legitimacy of the Philippine state to govern the Muslim areas of the country was neither questioned nor challenged by any of the Muslim elite.

The emergence of new intellectuals and counter-elite among the Muslims and the political events that transpired in late 1960s until early 1970s triggered the re-invention of Muslim identity. The massacre of about 28 Muslim military trainees (called “Jabidah commandos”) in Corregidor Island in March 1968 rekindled the quest of Muslims for independence after almost 50 years when it was first clamored in the 1920s.

Although traditional Muslim politicians formed their own organization that appears to have secessionist intentions, like the Muslim (later renamed Mindanao) Independence Movement (MIM) set up by then Cotabato Province’s Governor, Datu Udtog Matalam,<sup>2</sup> and the *Bangsa Moro* Liberation Organization (BMLO)<sup>3</sup> founded by then member of the House of Representatives (HOR) Raschid Lucman in 1968 and 1971 respectively, they simply collapsed when then President Marcos offered their key leaders political and economic power and resources in and out of government.

The serious military challenge against the state came from the non-traditional politicians and intellectuals Nur Misuari and Salamat Hashim who bolted out of the BMLO and formed the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in mid-1971.<sup>4</sup> The MNLF Chair Misuari assessed that the failures of previous movements were not wholly rooted to the discriminatory policies of the state that favor the Christian majority but also due to the “collaboration” of Muslim leaders with the Manila “politico-economic elite” who safeguard their interests rather than defend the aspirations of Muslims. Misuari sets himself apart from the rest of the Muslim organizations. He conceived a rebellion that has two fundamental objectives:

to set up a single independent homeland covering the 13 ethno-linguistic Muslim groupings in the Philippines<sup>5</sup> inhabiting 13 out of 25 provinces of the Mindanao island and Sulu archipelago; and to wage war against Muslim traditional politicians and aristocratic leaders who cooperated with the state.

The MNLF's vision of a secessionist war was emphatically secular in orientation rather than Islamic. Its goal is to reclaim the *Bangsa Moro* (Moro Nation), the Muslims' homeland, that has been "unjustifiably annexed by the Philippine state". He called upon his brethren to renounce their identities as "Filipino-Muslims" and declare their identity and nationality as "*Moro*," a reincarnation of the pre-colonial identity as the descendants of the "unsubjugated" and "uncolonised" peoples. What looked to be the state's prejudices against the Muslims had found a national expression. As Ernest Gellner (1983) says, it is more advantageous to set up a "rival nation" when entry into the dominant nation is difficult if not impossible.

In retrospect, Misuari transformed the epithet "*Moro*" into a positive identity of the Muslims and symbol of unity and pride in the course of national resistance against the Philippine state. The ethnicizing of Muslim identity was a consequence of the awakening of Muslim self-consciousness.

The *Bangsamoro* struggle is an expression of what David Brown (2000) called "reactive nationalism," (pp. 64-66) articulated by the new and non-traditional counter-elite on a reactive basis, and resonated with Muslim society, which is undergoing some "crisis of self-confidence." It demonizes the threats of the state as the enemy and mobilizes the masses to take collective action against such threats. It has to appeal to an educated Muslim middle class and is invariably populist, intended to induct the masses into politics.

The *Bangsamoro* independence movement was nonetheless saddled with leadership crisis and power struggles. The MNLF's first major split occurred as early as 1977 when Salamat Hashim, a *Maguindanaoan*, broke away from *Tausug*-dominated MNLF. Hashim founded the

"New MNLF" which advocated for autonomy rather than independence. This was in line with Hashim's plan to negotiate with the then Marcos government for self-governance under the unitary state, on the one hand, and woo the support of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), which had been sustaining MNLF's struggle, at the time when Misuari became intransigent that threatened the collapse of the OIC-brokered Tripoli Agreement signed between the MNLF and GRP in 1976,<sup>6</sup> on the other hand. Unsuccessful in his attempts, Hashim renamed his organization in 1984 as the *Moro* Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and made Islam as its official ideology to gain the attention of the Muslim World League (MWL), and the Muslim World Congress (MWC).

It was quite apparent that the decision of the state to open a peaceful political engagement with the secessionist movement triggered a serious conflict between key leaders of the MNLF. The contestation for power, wealth, and prestige between the two contending leaders within the rebel movement emerged when the opportunity to share power and resources with the state became imminent. The experience suggests the tendency of leaders to re-create ethnic boundaries, ethnic affiliations, and identification in pursuit of protecting and advancing one's political and economic interests.

The power play is not only seen at the ground level but also manifests itself among the patrons of the conflict. The GRP-MNLF 1976 Tripoli Peace Agreement was politicized to serve the interest of Libya and other organizations, which stand to benefit from the prolonged conflict. In an interview provided by a senior Indonesian diplomat (requested to remain anonymous) who was part of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Talks, confirmed that one of the more important reasons why the peace negotiation dragged for several years was:

not entirely the cause of the Moro people or about Islam...it was the politics primarily of Libyan leader Col. Muammar Khaddafi and other OIC members. The political and personal interest of MNLF's benefactors

figured prominently in the negotiation for the settlement of dispute between protagonists rather than protecting the plight of the Muslims in the Philippines. *Ethnic and religious issues were simply used* (Italics provided). personal communication, March 12, 2000)<sup>7</sup>

Khaddafy wanted to highlight the *Moro* issue to buttress his propaganda offensives against the United States and its allies who are projecting his regime as “terrorist” before the international community at that time. In as much as the US maintains an amiable relation with the Philippines, he wished to show that US is an accessory to the carnage committed by Marcos against the Muslims. And in the spirit of *ummah* (the community of Islamic faith), Libya would be able to refurbish its image, personified by Khaddafy, as defender of beleaguered Muslims being unjustly treated by so-called US surrogates (Vitug & Gloria, 1999).

As the overseas sponsors of the MNLF harangued its leaders to surmount ethnic differences to effectively challenge the legitimacy state, sub-national *Moro* identities are simply not easy to give up even in the interest of a higher goal. In 41 years from the time the MNLF was established in 1971, the movement suffered four organizational fissures; clash over leadership and power occurred every eight years on the average. Currently, there are five *Moro* organizations (varying in size and prominence) advancing the issue of self-determination in different forms, adopting dissimilar strategies, and defining varied territorial limits of diverse *Bangsas*. The most recent splintered group emerged in February 2005 and engaged the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in a running battle in Sulu group of islands (Buendia, 2005). Definitely, this would not be the last.

It is also instructive to note that the three major rebel fronts that contested state’s power since the Jabidah massacre of 1968 correspond to the three main ethnic groups among more than a dozen of Muslim ethno-linguistic groupings. The BMILO was generally composed of the *Maranaos*, the MNLF by the *Tausugs*, and the MILF by the

*Maguindanaos*. It was also reported that *Moro* rebels prefer to fight with their fellow ethnic groups, for example, *Maranaos*, *Tausugs*, and *Maguindanaos* as the case may be, rather than to be with ethnic groups other than their own (Gutierrez, 2000).

Factionalism in the *Bangsamoro* struggle, either among and between traditional political elite or new intellectual and counter-elite, has not only hobbled the quest of the *Moros* towards achieving their goal but more importantly, highlighted the fundamental and continuing question of *Moro* identity and *Moro* national unity. From Matalam’s MIM to Hashim’s *Moro* Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Muslim minorities find it difficult to unite under one self-identifying and all-inclusive banner. The notion of a *Moro* Nation is constricted by their assorted political and organizational agenda. As a consequence of constant divisions and splitting up of leaders in the *Moro* movement, the process of ethnicizing *Moro* identity as a nationality has been stunted and is a reflection of a crisis in self-definition.

Moreover, ruptures in the *Bangsamoro* movement occur whenever the state accommodates some of the political demands or acquiesces partly to certain grievances advance by a particular *Moro* revolutionary organization. It appears that the shifting loyalties and interests of leaders as well as their respective organizational strategies and tactics is more of a response to the vagaries of political priorities and constraints, which the state presents.

Notably, the history of the secessionist movement is not only a history of conflict between the state and *Bangsamoro* people but also a history of sectarianism, betrayals, and treachery. Muslim identity is fragile and vulnerable to state’s political manipulation. Parochial interests and ethnic identities remain strong in spite of attempts to unify and train the Muslim struggle towards a single national liberation against the state.

The historical experience of the *Bangsamoro* struggle is not much different from Brass’ (1979) ethnic instrumentalist model as seen from his

Indian case wherein leaders of secessionist movements invariably used their defined, particular, and limited interest to represent peoples' interest. Likewise, it affirms Cohen's (1969) concept that ethnic groups are mobilized in accordance with the re-alignment of relations and functions in line with leaders' intention to defend and advance their power and control over resources.

### RE-INVENTION OF THE *MORO* SECESSIONISM AND SELF-DETERMINATION: QUO VADIS?

As the secular MNLF integrates itself politically and militarily to the government as provided by the GRP-MNLF 1996 Final Peace Agreement (FPA),<sup>8</sup> the sectarian MILF maintains its distance from the peace process and strengthens its own armed force, the *Bangsa Moro* Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), instead. Its military might in fact led then President Ramos to initiate exploratory talks with the MILF that eventually resulted in the signing of the GRP-MILF Agreement for the General Cessation of Hostilities (AGCH) on July 18, 1997.

Foreseeing the imminent demise of MNLF's vision to create a separate nation-state from the Philippines, the MILF re-invents itself from its reformist beginnings to an ardent advocate of an Islamic state through armed struggle. The late MILF Chairman Hashim believed that what was resolved was the government's problem and not the *Bangsamoro* problem, "the agreement never touched the core of the *Bangsamoro* problem which is the illegal and immoral usurpation of their (referring to the *Moros*) ancestral homeland and legitimate rights to freedom and self-determination" (Hashim, 2006 as cited in Buendia, 2008, p.5). The MILF, he argued, "would never agree to any solution other than the full independence of the *Bangsamoro* homeland... the establishment of an Islamic State" (Crescent International 1999, p. 16). Apart from this broad pronouncement, the character and type of Islamic

state envisioned to be set up in the *Bangsa Moro* has yet to be defined.

Indeed, the conclusion FPA did not terminate the Muslim secessionist movement. The FPA strategically co-opted Misuari to be part of government in addressing the complex problems of the *Moros* in a limited period. He became the third Governor<sup>9</sup> of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)<sup>10</sup> and assumed the Chair of the Southern Philippine Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD),<sup>11</sup> a transitory administrative arm under the Office of the President tasked to spur development in 14 provinces and 9 cities (as of 1996) in Mindanao and Sulu archipelago, known as the Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD). Misuari's three-year term (1996-1999), extended until February 2001, failed to yield the promised development and meaningful self-rule for Muslims and Christians alike in Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan.

The disappointing performance of Misuari led not only to his ignominious ouster as ARMM Governor and SPCPD Chairman but also as MNLF Chairman. Led by his own comrade-in-arms calling themselves as the "Council of 15," Misuari was declared as "incompetent" to remain as MNLF's Chairman. The Council proclaimed itself as the legitimate Central Committee of the MNLF, which was eventually acknowledged by the Philippine government and the OIC as the sole "representative of Muslim community in the Philippines" (Nawal & Javellana, 2003). Parouk Hussin, the MNLF's Foreign Affairs Committee Chair under Misuari and one of the leaders of the Council, became the new regional governor in November 2001 under the new ARMM's Organic Act (Republic Act 9054).<sup>12</sup> Misuari's expulsion from government was followed by his incarceration for sedition<sup>13</sup> and corruption<sup>14</sup> charges.

Whilst political autonomy is hinged on the power dynamics of the state, any change in the configuration of state power has direct consequence on disposition of the autonomous region, especially under a unitary governmental

structure. When MNLF was assigned to lead ARMM and SPCPD under the terms of the 1996 Peace Agreement, it was assured of national government's support. However, the assumption of Estrada as the new President of the country in 1998 has altered the priorities of the government. Estrada, who was never been involved in the peace process and has trivial comprehension of the Muslim issue, gave insubstantial support to ARMM and SPCPD not only because of the regional financial crisis that hit the country at that time but also his outlook over Muslims. Apart from providing MNLF-led ARMM and SPCPD with less support and assistance, his policy of "war as a means to peace" targeted the MILF (Estrada 2008). In 2000, he instructed the military to launch an all-out offensive (ground, sea, and air) against the MILF's headquarters, Camp Abubakar in Maguindanao, and other camps in Southern Mindanao; a culmination of his "all-out war" against the Moro separatists.

The MNLF preferred to stay on the margin and allowed the unhampered operation of the military against their fellow Muslims. Estrada's imperious and high-handed approach to peace frustrated MILF's design to fashion its own FPA with the regime unlike the FPA that MNLF had with Ramos. The armed resolution advanced by Estrada to uproot the MILF from their bases and camps led to the suspension of the peace talks between the two parties. Seven years after Estrada was deposed as President,<sup>15</sup> he remains fully convinced that his "war policy" against the Muslims is the right approach (Estrada, 2008).

The resumption of conflict between the MILF and GRP further sharpens the distinction between the goals of *Tausug*-dominated MNLF and predominantly *Maguindanaoan* MILF. After suffering from Estrada's hawkish political tactic, the latter has staunchly employed the internationally-recognized right to self-determination as unwavering framework to realize political autonomy rather than the former's concept of autonomous region under the current unitary state. "There can be no genuine peace and development unless the right of the *Bangsamoro*

people to self-determination is adequately addressed," says Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, Hashim's successor (MILF, 2003 as cited in Buendia, 2005, p. 122). In pursuit of the "self-determination" agenda, the MILF pushes the issue of ancestral domain. It hopes that government's recognition of the right of the *Bangsamoro* over their ancestral domain will eventually result to the acknowledgement of *Moros*' territory. "We just want a physical space where we can freely practice our religion and apply our ways-of-life. There is no need to seize power," says MILF Information Chief, Mohagher Iqbal (Elusfa, 2002 as cited in Buendia, 2005, p. 123).

Conversely, when President Arroyo, Estrada's successor, shifted the policy of the government to "all-out peace," the MILF went back to the negotiating table in March 2001 with the hope of crafting a more substantial FPA that incorporates its self-determination agenda within the state's political framework. Facilitated by Malaysia, the Agreement on the General Framework for the Resumption of Peace Talks between the GRP and the MILF was made possible. Signed in Kuala Lumpur, the document re-affirms the commitment of both parties to ceasefire agreements and re-commencement of negotiations until reaching a resolution of the *Bangsamoro* problem.

In June 2001, the Tripoli Agreement on Peace was forged and set out the three clusters to be negotiated: security; relief and rehabilitation, later referred to as humanitarian aid and development; and ancestral domain. While the two clusters successfully yielded the Implementing guidelines that established the Joint Coordinating Committees on the Cessation of Hostilities, the International Monitoring Team (composed of representatives from Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Libya), and the *Bangsamoro* Development Agency (BDA) in August 2001 and May 2002 respectively, the third cluster, which tries to operationalize the essential elements of *Bangsamoro* political power, self-rule, and self-determining governance in a geographic space, has been contentious.

The attempt to resolve the issue of ancestral domain through a Memorandum of Agreement



on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD), previously initialed by the GRP and MILF negotiating panels in July 2008 in Kuala Lumpur, proved to be critical and provocative. When information and news circulated regarding the conclusion and impending signing of the draft MOA-AD in August 2008, local politicians and entrenched political and economic interests in Mindanao and Arroyo's political opposition in Manila (including some members of the legislature and executive branches of government) petitioned and sought the immediate intervention of the Philippine Supreme Court (PSC) to issue a temporary restraining order (TRO) on the basis that the contents of the document were not fully discussed and disseminated to people who would be affected by the creation of a new political structure stipulated in the MOA-AD. The uproar generated by various interest groups against the draft agreement led the PSC to issue an injunction and aborted the scheduled signing ceremony in Kuala Lumpur.

As etched in the agreement, the MOA-AD would establish a "*Bangsamoro* Juridical Entity" (BJE), comprised of, or supplanting, the ARMM and as many as 737 Muslim majority villages (barangays) outside the ARMM as determined through plebiscites. It laid out the possible future inclusion of 1,459 other "conflict-affected areas." The expansive territorial coverage of the BJE lies in its definition of the *Bangsamoro* identity. It states:

It is the birthright of all Moros and all indigenous peoples of Mindanao to identify themselves and be accepted as "Bangsamoros." The Bangsamoro people refers to those who are natives or original inhabitants of Mindanao and its adjacent islands including Palawan and the Sulu archipelago at the time of conquest or colonization and their descendants whether mixed or of full native blood. Spouses and their descendants are classified as Bangsamoro. (Memorandum of Agreement on the Ancestral Domain Aspect of the GRP-MILF Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001, 2008, p. 2)

In addition, the BJE intends to provide greater

autonomy than the ARMM arrangement, which will have an "associative relationship" with the Philippine government. Except for national defense, foreign affairs, monetary and postal systems, the BJE is empowered to create its own government, election and judicial systems, police force, banking system, and system of education. Economic resources of the region will be allocated between the Philippine government and the BJE with 75% accruing to the coffers of the latter. The BJE is further allowed to enter into trade and economic relations with foreign countries and control the resources of waters extending 15 kilometers from its coast. Apparently, the BJE encapsulates the wide-ranging self-governing political entity that MILF envisions compared to MNLF's concept of political autonomy under the unitary set-up.

However, the PSC shattered MILF's dream of more than a decade after it ruled that MOA-AD is deemed unconstitutional. In October 2008, the court, in a split 8-7 decision, argued that the "associative relationship" is illegal as it implies the eventual independence for the BJE from the state.<sup>16</sup> It contended the BJE as "more of a state than an autonomous region" not allowed by the 1987 Constitution (par. 5) for the ARMM governing body. Likewise, the expanded definition of *Bangsamoro* identity and concept of ancestral domain have been arguable. The PSC also viewed MOA-AD as a violation of the 1997 Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA), which gave indigenous cultural communities and peoples the right to participate fully in matters which may affect their lives and destinies. By making "a sweeping declaration on ancestral domain, without complying with the IPRA ... respondents clearly transcended the boundaries of their authority" (The Province of North Cotabato vs. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines, G.R. No. 183591, 2008, p. 38). Among the many such groups opposing MOA-AD was the T'boli people of South Cotabato, whose chief said that the MILF should not intrude on the T'boli ancestral domain ("The IPs of South Cotabato reject MOAAD," 2008).

In its 81-page majority decision, the PSC reproached the government of “furtive” in its negotiations with the MILF and of being “whimsical” and “despotic” in committing to the deal:

The furtive process by which the MOA-AD was designed and crafted runs contrary to and in excess of the legal authority, and amounts to a whimsical, capricious, oppressive, arbitrary and despotic exercise thereof. It illustrates a gross evasion of positive duty and a virtual refusal to perform the duty enjoined. (The Province of North Cotabato vs. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines, G.R. No. 183591, 2008, p. 71)

Unsurprisingly, the MNLF joined the group opposition that challenged the establishment of BJE, aligning itself with its former enemies—local politicians, warlords, and traditional leaders in Mindanao—and Arroyo’s detractors at the national government. It was in the interest of MNLF to vehemently resist the MOA-AD as, in effect, it would nullify their own 1996 autonomy accord forged with the Ramos administration. The MNLF insists upon talks with the government to redress what the government has failed to implement since 1996. Rather than reinforcing MILF’s claim to re-establish a *Bangsamoro* homeland, it calls for tripartite talks, between themselves, the government, and the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) to revisit the 1996 Tripoli Accord. The MNLF even rejected the role of Malaysia, which supported the MNLF in the 1970s, in the peace talks with the GRP and MILF; perceived to be patronizing the latter against the former and has long standing territorial claim over Sabah.

The negotiating panels of both the GRP and MILF were exasperated by the turn of events. Agnes Devanadera, the solicitor general, tried to shield Arroyo from the scathing attacks coming from her political enemies by blaming Arroyo’s adviser on the peace process, General Esperon, for his failure to fully brief her regarding the MOA-AD. In hearings before the Supreme Court,

Devanadera strived to control the political damage by stating that the draft document will be set aside and would not be signed regardless of how the PSC ruled on the various petitions (“Govt junks MOA in all forms,” 2008).

Predictably the government, as it has done before, washed its hands from the mess it got into with the announcement of Arroyo’s Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita that the President “has directed a new paradigm in the peace process by mandating that peace negotiations be refocused from one centered on dialogue with rebels to one of authentic dialogue” with community groups (“Arroyo orders ‘thorough review’ of all peace initiatives: Gov’t peace panel in MILF talks dissolved,” 2008). The Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno, on the other hand, cited that disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes will serve as preconditions prior to the resumption of peace talks (“Puno to MILF: Disarm first before we can talk” 2008)<sup>17</sup>

On the part of the MILF, it considers the ditching of MOA-AD as a clear manifestation of government’s insincerity in pursuing the political settlement of conflict in the *Moroland* (Roughneen, 2008; Lum 2011). Chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal said in an interview that the Philippine constitution is a “tool to stifle the Moros’ legitimate aspirations” (“MILF to appeal ‘illegal’ MOA-AD before ICJ, OIC,” 2008). Ahboud Lingga, head of the *Bangsamoro* Islamic Studies and member of the negotiating panel, advocated for secession as the “only viable option left to the *Bangsamoro* people” (SC rules 8-7 vs MOA-AD: MILF panel says ‘SC ruling does not stop armed conflict,’ 2008) while senior peace negotiator and lawyer Michael Mastura (2009) believed that Muslims have been pushed by the government to their limits, “government runs the grave risk of navigating a timeframe for transition process beyond the benchmarks of legitimacy. I now coin D to mean Disarm, D to Disown, and R to Reject. It should go without saying that rejection encourages option to secede” (par. 21).

While the MILF negotiators are infuriated with the insistence of the government to use

the constitution as the framework and the DDR approach in resolving the *Bangsamoro* question, the leadership is not inclined to re-assume armed confrontation with the government. The moderate MILF central committee chair, Al Haj Murad, opted to engage the government in continuing the peace talks, giving the assurance that MILF leadership will “not order its forces into battle” (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2008, p. 1), although at the same time recognized that the MILF has no full control over the military actions of its other field commanders who might return to armed struggle. In fact, renewed fighting between the AFP and some MILF units, believed to be renegade forces, which the military refers to as “LMG” (Lawless MILG Group), broke out following the collapse of the accord.<sup>18</sup> The armed skirmishes were reportedly resulted in over 200 deaths and the displacement of close to 400,000 villagers in both North Cotabato and Lanao del Norte (ICG, 2008).

Although there is no guarantee that moderate Murad would not be challenged or replaced by a more radical leader in the future, the current leadership of MILF prefers to continually engage the state with its self-determination agenda within the Republic’s constitutional limitations but at the same time maintains its armed forces and bases as a bargaining tool in the event that the country’s leadership turns hawkish.

As Arroyo’s administration came to an end, a new truce was negotiated by a new set of GRP panel members with the MILF, and reached an agreement to resume negotiations by the end of 2009. In June 2010, the Philippine government and the MILF signed a Declaration of Commitment, in which both sides assented to continue negotiations under Benigno Aquino III’s administration. The MILF was upbeat in optimism for a comprehensive peace deal with the government, however after two years, the MILF registered its pessimism that a FPA will be possible under the present administration. MILF’s vice chairman for political affairs, Ghadzali Jaafar, was disappointed with chief government negotiator

Marvic Leonen’s insinuation the talks are reaching a stalemate. “We are very doubtful now whether we can sign a peace deal with government under this present administration” after the conclusion of the March 2012 exploratory talks in Malaysia (“[MILF ‘doubtful’ if peace pact can be signed under PNoy watch](#),” 2012).

In spite of the many legitimate grievances of the *Moros* and profound mistrust towards government’s intentions, the MILF with its moderate leadership and dwindling resources to re-launch a full-scale and long-haul war against the military, would unlikely achieve its goal to create a separate nation-state. Likewise, the deep-seated ethnic division and rivalry between the two major ethno-linguistic groups (despite their denials), that is *Maguindanaoan*-MILF and *Tausug*-MNLF, competing political and economic interests of Muslim traditional leaders and elites, and persistent inter-clan conflicts in Muslim-dominated areas of Mindanao (see Kreuzer, 2005; Torres, 2007; Lara & Champain, 2009 for details), constitute the underlying factors not only in shaping the *Bangsamoro* political entity within or outside of the Philippines but also form the fundamental requisites that enable the state to successfully “divide-and-rule” the *Moros* in their own homeland.

Given these circumstances, it is doubtful if MILF will re-invent and align itself with the MNLF at this time considering that ethnic differences and cultural enmity tend to be deeper compared with creating a better working relationship with the liberal-minded Aquino administration; taking advantage of government’s spoils and patronage. Mutual suspicion, differing goals, and egos persist between the *Maguindanaos* and *Tausugs* that undermined attempts at coordination and collaboration of political interests for several decades. But with a new administration, the window of opportunity, at least in the eyes of the international community, is broader in pursuit of advancing the right of self-determination in a calibrated manner.

### *The right to self-determination: Chance of success or failure*

Given the general theory and common practice of self-determination in the world, it appears that the *Moro* struggle for external self-determination would not be only arduous and intricate but also unimaginable. If there is anything that the MILF has to learn from the experience of self-determination struggles of peoples in the world under the context of the international state system, is the extreme difficulty towards its realization. The right of self-determination, established in the late 1950s and 1960s as a decolonization instrument, was enforceable only in relation to a small number of governments that continued to cling to colonial rule at that time. It was conceived to restore justice to nations, which have been subjected to colonialism. It was never intended to de-stabilize existing sovereign states or states that have been freed from colonial rule.

The doctrine of self-determination, more than ever, is to safeguard the territorial integrity (free from external invasion) and territorial unity (free from internal armed conflict coming from secessionist movements) of independent states. It offers a promise of independence and liberation to peoples from a state that marginalizes and discriminates them. Nevertheless, states know for a fact that such promise is plain illusion. The international state system established more than 60 years after the Second World War has historically rendered support to states challenged by secessionist movements and groups. Moreover the state is usually given a *carte blanche* in dealing with groups seeking to assert their separate identity. The state system thus, gives supreme importance to stability rather than justice, at least as seen by groups seeking independence from a state considered as purveyor of internal colonialism (Buendia, 2008, p. 17)

As discussed in the beginning of this paper, the notion of *Bangsa Moro* is quite new—less than 40 years. It emerged only in 1968 in the wake of the Jabidah massacre and has yet to be

crystallized. Historical facts attest that the shifting of Muslim identities from the time the Republic gained its independence from the Americans until late 1960s indicate the hollowness of *Moro* consciousness and concept of a *Bangsa Moro*. It took Misuari's MNLF to remind his Muslim brethren that they have to re-claim their homeland and redeem the *Moro* nation-state from the Philippine state. In a nationalist project such as the MNLF's movement, the attempt to wrest control of a proclaimed national territory from the illegitimate seizure of another state regarded as alien, is the overarching feature. The MILF as well as other splintered groups is not an exemption. They trace the historical roots of the *Moro* identity and *Bangsa Moro* centuries before the advent of colonialism.

Understandably, the *Bangsa Moro* requires a history, an imagined national past that is essential in the quest and process of nation-building. A nation is “an imagined political community – (one) imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” where people “not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (Anderson, 2006, p. 7). For Anderson, the imagined community of the nation is a mass fiction. It is not clear, however, who, if anyone, imagines a particular community and if there is any difference in the resulting fictional community, depends on who imagines it and how one does so. Invariably, the history of the Muslims during the Spanish era, as narrated by some nationalist movements, culling uncritically from accounts of historians, is to a certain extent mythical.

Nevertheless, what is important for them is that stories should be generally believed or that there should be substantial convergence in the versions of a story that are to be believed. Stories are not only needed at the time during which a national identity is being created, it is also required for one to understand what it means to be a *Bangsamoro* and one has to accept a version or some versions of the common story to grasp the significance of one's identity.

In other words, historical accuracy is not vital in constituting a nation since the story is told for

the purpose of self-definition. *Bangsa Moro*'s self-definition bears on the goals that its members will try to pursue in the future. Leaders of separatist movements have to defy the modern state in which they are found, challenge their authority, and confront their armed forces. They present themselves, as rulers as well as rebels, in order to supplant the jurisdiction of the alienized state with their own localized version. History making or myth making is in part and parcel an idea in the whole process of nation-creation.

External self-determination is an act that can be taken up only once and not a continuing action against the state. When a colonial territory has exercised the option of independence, ethnic groups living in the new state boundaries cannot invoke the right of self-determination against the newly declared independent state. There cannot be another secession in a state that had already seceded from its former colonizer. The UN General Assembly 2625 (XXV) on the Declaration of Principles of International Law proclaims that the principle of self-determination "cannot be interpreted to connote the recognition of the dismemberment and fragmentation on ethnic and religious grounds" (United Nations, 1970, p. 4). Affirming the doctrine of territorial integrity, ethnic, religious, and sub-national cultural entities and groups can only claim territorial and political autonomy within the new state boundaries.

An exception to this rule, as noted by Wellner (2005), would relate to a self-determination entity that does not opt to become independent but decides to associate, but not integrate, with another state. In such case, self-determination status of the entity is maintained or transformed into a situation wherein the right of self-determination can be asserted within the provisions of state's constitution. However, there is very little practice of this kind.

Against this backdrop, it appears that the question of decolonization would be a difficult process given that the entire Philippine archipelago, with its Muslim, Christian, and non-Christian/non-Muslim population, has been under

a single colonial ruler. The *Moroland*—Mindanao, Sulu archipelago, and Palawan—has been part of the Philippine nation-state when the former American colonizers granted the Philippines its independence in 1946.

An alternative to external self-determination is to seek for substantial and meaningful political and cultural autonomy within the Philippine state. However, pursuing internal self-determination in the long term necessitates the state to comprehend fully the root causes of *Moros* self-determination struggle. Unless the rationale behind secessionism is appreciated and resolved to its conclusion through sustained, comprehensive, coherent, and appropriate national policies coupled with effective and methodical policy implementation, secessionism would continue to inspire the *Moros* in search for valuable political power and social justice.

The Philippine unitary-presidential system as defined by the constitution may not necessarily be the best mode of operationalizing meaningful *Moro* self-governance. Its inherent structural centralism, despite existing laws on decentralization and autonomy, limits the attainment of Muslim minorities desire to rule themselves. Conferring a semi-sovereign status, resembling a federal structure of governance, to Muslim areas of Mindanao would be a promising option that the state can contemplate on to further the nation-state building not only of the Philippines but also of the *Bangsamoros*. The attempt to approximate this structure is what the proposed BJE intends to establish but unfortunately axed by the PSC. Apparently, the government and the *Bangsamoros* have viewed governance differently; for the former it is what the constitution provides and for the latter it is an issue of peoples' right to self-determination. The conflicting notions of self-governance and political autonomy remains unresolved.

The peace process currently being undertaken jointly by GRP and MILF with Malaysia as the facilitator and participated by the International Contact Group (ICG)<sup>19</sup> in spite of some violations on ceasefire agreements, provides already a

semblance of legitimacy on the part of the state to address the conflict within the confines of the Philippine state system. It is uncertain though that the new framework mutually agreed by both parties in 2012 where negotiations are to be structured will be any better than the previous BJE. The “new autonomous political entity” (NPE) as the most recent frame of reference which will serve as the foundation in carving the comprehensive and final peace agreement between the government and MILF is expected to resolve the decades-old conflict (OPAPP 2012, “Bangsamoro Juridical Entity’ no longer being considered in peace talks, says Deles”).

More than the government and MILF, the nation has no alternative but to remain hopeful and be optimistic on the just and long-term political settlement of armed conflict. Whether conflict could be managed and resolved within the bounds of the Philippine constitution or not is beyond the scope of this paper. What is ascertained however is that peoples’ right to self-determination and right to equitable development are fundamental not only in sustaining the stability and advancement of the nation-state but also in promoting basic human right to live in peace and just society regardless of ethnic identities, political interests, and organizational loyalties.

Under the present political milieu and given the opportunities and limitations the national and international conditions, it is evident that success or failure of realizing peoples’ right to self-determination is not dependent on the structural constraints and legal restrictions but on the strength of peoples’ determination to create their future under the aegis of responsible freedom, plural democracy, social justice, and fair power distribution.

### **SYNTHESIS, CONCLUSION, AND REMAINING ISSUES**

As shown in the paper, the state chose to exploit the rift within the movement’s leadership by co-opting one or several of its leaders or

factions through offers of power or material gain or both within the institutions of government. Co-optation did not only damage the organizational effectiveness of the secessionist movement but also proved that identities and interests of ethno-nationalists are pliable that can be shifted and altered in accordance with the opportunities and circumstances of the time. Obviously, the malleability of *Moro* identities has been influenced equally by the variability of state’s policies.

Militarization and co-optation failed to completely secure the stability of the state. Instead, it activated society. The people were forced to resist abuses not because the separatists have better political program or clear national agenda or even an ideology but for the reason of self-defense and survival. Identities gradually transformed and ossified defying state’s nation-building policies as people neither felt to be part of the nation nor considered the state as the protector and defender of their interests.

The *Moro* independence movement is inclined to use (wittingly or unwittingly) their idea of pre-colonial state status (claiming to be sovereign before the advent of colonialism) to strengthen their bargaining position vis-à-vis the state. Nevertheless, the passion and fervor of separatism and ethno-religious nationalism raised under the banner of a mythical nation can be easily extinguished after an acceptable compromise has been made between the leaders of the movement and the government. Yet, the bellicose slogan can be re-resonated and resurrected over time and space whenever they feel that the state had either ditched or sullied (rightly or wrongly) the terms and conditions of the peace contract. This has been demonstrated most notably by Matalam’s MIM in late 1960s and Misuari’s MNLF in mid-1990s and early 2000s.

The history of secessionism further depicted that primordial interest remained to be a powerful factor in organizing and mobilizing the people against state’s erroneous, skewed, and incoherent policies as well as its misuse and abuse of power. Ethnic and primordial concerns have been

intermittently used or served as ready instruments in re-constructing and re-constituting a political imbalance between communal forces and the state. The politicization of identities can be designed as a political strategy to draw the state into the negotiating table.

The *Bangsamoro* identities have been formed not through spontaneous processes of self-definition but primarily according to the exigencies of power—the demands for political autonomy and independence as a consequence of state's domineering role. Their identities and communal interests are malleable and pliant as they interact with state's power. It is in response to the political, economic, or social needs of group members at any moment depending on the contingencies of national politics. Indeed, ethnic issues among *Moro* leaders have partly hobbled the separatist movement to achieve its purpose but beyond ethno-linguistic divisions, *Moro* secessionism rests also on fundamental and legitimate socio-economic, cultural, and political grievances. Hence on the part of the state, it is essential that *Moros* be drawn within the domain of the state and make them feel that they are part and foremost stakeholder of the Philippine nation. Although ethnic identities and affinities can serve as one's refuge when the primordial culture of *Moros* is threatened by the state's domineering power, the sense of *Moros'* separateness as a people can be altered or modified. Perceptions are neither fixed nor permanent. They change as material conditions change.

The process of reversing outlooks and feelings of alienation and transcending ethnic boundaries demand a strategic approach of sustained and indefatigable efforts and commitment of state leaders toward greater democratization, meeting the new challenges of mosaic democracy and heterogeneous development. It requires the state to redefine itself and adopt an institutional framework of governance that would allow the expression of democracy in kaleidoscopic forms.

It is the contention of this paper that the threat of national disintegration will continue until an appropriate institutional framework for political

governance, which can accommodate Mindanao's social and ethnic diversity, is ensconced. Apart from re-engineering political institutions in Mindanao, there is a need to lay emphasis, at least at the local level, on good governance, the rule of law, improved civil-military relations, accountability of public officials for corruption, and human rights protection. These efforts would, to a large extent, facilitate the early conclusion of conflict, accelerate the process of peace, and find a respectable and honorable final peace agreement between contending forces. More importantly, steps toward this direction would not only strengthen the Philippine nation-state but also considerably extirpate the cause of secessionism.

Whether or not the state would be able to meet the challenges of nation-building and national unity is difficult to surmise at this point. Although there are new emerging forms of co-governance within states and novel types of nation-building, there is no assurance that these would work on the long term. Finally, the failure of the state to secure these peoples' basic rights and freedoms means that secession cannot, in the end, still be ruled out.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The term "bangsa" or "bansa" is a Malay word that usually refers to nations, castes, descent groups or lines, races or estates. Informants in this study prefer to use it as one word, "Bangsamoro." For the purpose of this paper, "Bangsa Moro" shall be used to mean the "Moro Nation" and "Bangsamoro" to refer to the Filipino-Muslims inhabiting the Philippines.

<sup>2</sup> The MIM was organized less than two months after the Jabidah Massacre. It was accounted that its creation was Datu Udtog Matalam's personal response to traditional filthy electoral system in Cotabato that had been disadvantageous to his political ambitions rather than a reaction to the massacre and intention to carve a separate state from the Philippines (see McKenna, 1998, pp. 144-149). Matalam later joined the government when then President Marcos appointed him as Presidential Adviser on Muslim Affairs.

<sup>3</sup> The word *Moro* was later dropped from BMLO as it remains unacceptable to many of the Muslims and adopted *Bangsa Muslimin Islamic Liberation Organization* (BMILO) as its new name in 1984 (Jubair, 1999, p. 152).

<sup>4</sup> There are conflicting versions on the founding of the MNLF. Jubair (1999) said that the MNLF was founded

in 1969 (p. 150) while Mercado (1984) noted that its founding was in mid-1971 (p. 159). Interviews conducted by the author among former MNLF leaders who were then government officials of the ARMM declare it on March 28, 1968, as MNLF's Foundation Day. Obviously, March 28 was symbolically used by the MNLF as its Founding Day since it was the day when the Jabidah massacred happened. Mercado's version is closer to reality as it was in mid-1971 when Misuari convened the "Top 90" guerrillas in Zamboanga City to repudiate the reformist tendencies of MIM and BMLO leaders. This eventually led to the birth of the MNLF. Hence, 1971 is used in this article as the year of MNLF's formation.

<sup>5</sup> The 13 Muslim ethnolinguistic groupings are the Maranao, Maguindanao, Tausug, Sama, Yakan, Sangil, Badjao, Kalibugan, Jama Mapun, Iranun, Palawani, Molbog, and Kalagan. Three of these are major groups occupying identifiable territories: Maranao in Marawi; Maguindanao in Cotabato; and Tausug-Sama in Tawi-Tawi and the Sulu group of islands.

<sup>6</sup> The GRP-MNLF Tripoli Agreement was signed on December 23, 1976. The three-articled Agreement named the specific areas in southern Philippines where Muslims shall enjoy political autonomy. It provides the establishment of Muslim courts implementing the Islamic Shari'a laws; a Muslim administrative system; a Muslim economic and financial system; a special regional security force composed of Muslim officers and men responsible in maintaining peace and order; and a legislative assembly as well as an executive council.

<sup>7</sup> Interview conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia March 12, 2000. Interviewee requested to remain anonymous.

<sup>8</sup> The FPA was signed on September 2, 1996 between the GRP and MNLF with the participation of the OIC. It laid down the process and framework in achieving peace and development in Southern Philippines. (see *GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement*, September 2, 1996 for details).

<sup>9</sup> Zacaria Candao, a Maguindanaoan who have strong links with the MILF, was elected as the first Regional Governor in 1990 followed by Lininding Pangandaman, a Maranao, who served from 1993 until 1996.

<sup>10</sup> ARMM was created on August 1, 1989 under Republic Act 6734 as a fulfillment of Article 10, Sections 15-21 of the 1987 Constitution. It was initially composed of four provinces (Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi) and increased to six when the province of Basilan and Marawi City joined ARMM after a plebiscite was conducted on August 14, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> SPCPD was established through Executive Order 371 issued on October 2, 1996. The dissolution of the SPCPD under Executive Order 80 of March 11, 2002 transferred all its on functions, duties, and responsibilities to the new ARMM under Republic Act 9054.

<sup>12</sup> RA 9054 created the new ARMM and replaced RA 6734 of 1989. As provided under the law and in compliance with the provisions of the 1996 GRP-MNLF FPA, a plebiscite was conducted on August 14, 2001. This resulted in the inclusion of Basilan province and Marawi City as new members of ARMM, in addition to the four existing ones.

<sup>13</sup> In November 2001, while still serving as ARMM Governor and Chair of SPCPD, Misuari resurrected his call for an independent Muslim Mindanao. He led some armed MNLF guerrillas to attack the Army headquarters in Jolo, Sulu on November 19, 2001. This prompted the government to charge Misuari of sedition which carries a penalty of 20 years imprisonment.

<sup>14</sup> It was also reported that Misuari pocketed funds allotted for the poverty alleviation program and allegedly spent some P42 million (US\$840,000) to buy high-powered weapons.

<sup>15</sup> President Estrada was ousted through extra-constitutional means, known as "People Power" 2 in 2001, after the prosecution walked out of the impeachment court when the Senator-Judges voted "no" in the opening of the second envelope, allegedly containing evidence of his ill-gotten deposits from a bank. The people joined the prosecutors in massive protest in the streets that forced Estrada and his family to leave the Presidential Palace.

<sup>16</sup> The concept of "associative relationship" implies the recognition of the associated entity as a state. The Court argues that the concept of association in international law is generally understood as a "transition devise of former colonies on their way to full independence" (See *The Province of North Cotabato vs. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines*, 2008, pp. 41-42).

<sup>17</sup> Interior Secretary Puno defined the "r" in DDR as rehabilitation, not reintegration.

<sup>18</sup> The MILF renegade commanders were reportedly led by Ameril Umbra Kato, Abdullah Macapaar alias Bravo, and Aleem Sulaiman Pangalian. Their actions may be driven more by local political dynamics than by the MILF's broader strategic goals.

<sup>19</sup> The creation of the International Contact Group (ICG) was mutually agreed on September 15, 2009 by the GRP and MILF as one of the conditions for the resumption of the peace talks to overcome the trauma of the botched MOA-AD as well as to ensure that future negotiated agreements have international endorsement. The ICG includes countries from the OIC and the European Union (EU), representatives of the United Kingdom, Turkey, Japan and Saudi Arabia, and representatives of international non-governmental organizations (Asia Foundation, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Conciliation Resources, and Muhammadiyah).



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