THE PHILIPPINES’ MORO CONFLICT: THE PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS IN
THE QUEST FOR A SUSTAINABLE PEACE

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By

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The Moro conflict is a multifaceted, highly complex matter, emanating from centuries of profound societal fragmentation and divisions. In the decades since the conflict began, the Philippine government—with aid from international mediators, civil society, and non-governmental organizations—has drafted and reached various accords with Moro non-state armed groups, namely the Moro National Liberation Front and Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Negotiations, while broadly unsuccessful in achieving long-term peace, have at least been able to shift the insurgent groups’ demands from secession to increased autonomy within the Philippine state. Nevertheless, the violent, extremely protracted conflict remains at an impasse. Many feel that the prospects for peace are dwindling by the minute as the conflict continues to devastate the Mindanao region. For the Moro people, the conflict is representative of their ongoing effort to recover their sovereignty, an objective that the liberation fronts are trying to achieve on their collective behalf. For the Philippine government, the current goal is to keep secession at bay and preserve the country’s “territorial integrity.”

This thesis analyzes the various dimensions of the Philippines’ Moro conflict and the relevant peace processes by (1) providing a historical context to further understanding of the problems at hand; (2) identifying the criteria essential to success of peace efforts; (3) evaluating the respective peace accords against these criteria; and
(4) proposing solutions designed to maximize the prospects for the long sought-after just and sustainable peace.
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To my guardian angels on Earth and in heaven:
My beloved mother and guiding light, Josephine Zepeda Hernandez;
and my dearly departed father, my Papillon, Jose Rogelio Pascua Hernandez.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................... ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ...................................................................................................... iv

DEDICATION ...................................................................................................................... v

ABBREVIATIONS ............................................................................................................ viii

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER I  AN ABRIDGED HISTORY OF THE PHILIPPINES AND
THE ROOTS OF THE MORO CONFLICT ................................................................. 6

*Ang Perlas ng Silangan:* The Pearl of the Orient before 1521 ...... 6

*Las Islas Filipinas:* The Spanish in the Philippines, 1521-1898 .. 12

The Philippine Islands: The Archipelago under American
Rule, 1898-1946...................................................................................................... 18

The Repercussions of Colonial Rule......................................................... 30

CHAPTER II THE CONDITIONS FOR THE MORO IN THE NEW
REPUBLIC AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE
MORO RESISTANCE .............................................................................................. 33

The Early Years of the Republic of the Philippines,
1946-1965 ........................................................................................................... 33

The Marcos Era, 1965-1986 ............................................................................... 40

The Moro Resistance: The Moro National Liberation Front ........ 45

The Moro Resistance: The Moro Islamic Liberation Front ....... 52

CHAPTER III A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE ATTEMPTS AT
FINDING A JUST, SUSTAINABLE PEACE .......................................................... 57

The Tripoli Agreement, 1976 ................................................................................. 58
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER IV</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE QUEST FOR A JUST, SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND FINAL THOUGHTS</th>
<th>90</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiating and Policymaking toward Peacebuilding</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community-Based Peacebuilding</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Peacebuilding: Nurturing Peace and Non-Violent Action</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final Thoughts</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td></td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>AFP</td>
<td>Armed Forces of the Philippines</td>
<td></td>
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<td>ARMM</td>
<td>Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao</td>
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<td>BBL</td>
<td>Bangsamoro Basic Law</td>
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<td>BDA</td>
<td>Bangsamoro Development Authority</td>
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<td>BIFF</td>
<td>Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters</td>
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<td>Bangsamoro Juridical Entity</td>
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<td>BLBAR</td>
<td>Basic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region</td>
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<td>BTC</td>
<td>Bangsamoro Transition Commission</td>
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<td>BUC</td>
<td>Bishops-Ulamas Conference</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
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<td>FAB</td>
<td>Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro</td>
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<td>FPA</td>
<td>Final Peace Agreement (Jakarta Accord)</td>
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<td>HUK</td>
<td>Hukbahalap, “People’s Army Against the Japanese”</td>
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<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>MILF</td>
<td>Moro Islamic Liberation Front</td>
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<td>MNLF</td>
<td>Moro National Liberation Front</td>
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<td>MOA-AD</td>
<td>Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain</td>
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<td>NSAG</td>
<td>Non-state armed group</td>
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<td>NUC</td>
<td>National Unification Council</td>
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<td>OIC</td>
<td>Organization of the Islamic Conference</td>
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<td>OPAPP</td>
<td>Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process</td>
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<td>PCIA</td>
<td>Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment</td>
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<td>PNP</td>
<td>Philippine National Police</td>
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<td>PNP-SAF</td>
<td>Philippine National Police – Special Action Forces</td>
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<td>SPCPD</td>
<td>Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development</td>
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<td>SZOPAD</td>
<td>Special Zone of Peace and Development</td>
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INTRODUCTION

An archipelago of 7,107 islands, the Philippines comprises a complex mélange of ethnic groups that have been merged together under a shared Filipino ethos owing to the phenomenon of nation-building. Geographically, the islands are divided into three chief groups: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. The southernmost island group, Mindanao, is arguably the most resource-rich regions, and is home to numerous ethnic and religious groups. Mindanao, referred to as “the Land of Promise” throughout Philippine history, is also the setting of the multifaceted, complicated ethnic conflict that has plagued the region for over four decades.

The Mindanao or Moro conflict can be seen as a “clash between two imagined nations,”¹ the Filipino and the Moro.² The emergence of these two factions is a consequence of the Philippines’ colonial history. The Spanish and American colonial powers separated the native population by a religious line, utilizing the “divide-and-conquer” strategy to maintain their power, pitting Christian and Muslim Filipinos against one another. The Christian, Western ideologies that accompanied centuries of colonial rule greatly influenced the formation of the Filipino ethos, which qualifies anything else as “other.” The Moros are seen as part of this Filipino “other,” never

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² The appellation “moro” for Filipino Muslims came from the Spanish conquistadores who arrived on Philippine shores nearly five centuries ago. They referred to the Muslim inhabitants of the Mindanao region as Moros, the same term they used to refer to the Muslim Moorish conquerors that controlled most of the Iberian Peninsula for nearly eight centuries. The term was widely viewed as derogatory up until the 1970s, when a Moro insurgent group transformed the name into a badge of honor and used it to represent the collective identity of Muslims in Mindanao.
having been wholly assimilated or integrated into the structure of the broader, "homogenous" Filipino society, largely on account of their Muslim faith.

The divide between the Christian Filipino and Muslim Filipino persists in the post-colonial era. The policies of various Philippine administrations have only exacerbated this separation, resulting, unfortunately, in the continued alienation, systemic marginalization, and ethnic minoritization of the Moro in their ancestral homeland, contributing to their many grievances. These are some of the myriad factors in the emergence of the Moro insurgent groups that would become the main players in a conflict that, 45 years later, has yet to come to a definitive end.

The Moro conflict is a multifaceted, highly complex matter, emanating from centuries of profound societal fragmentation and divisions. The contemporary Moro conflict began in 1972, a watershed year that marked President Ferdinand Marcos’ declaration of martial law and the start of the most violent period of sectarian violence. The conflict originally involved the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Moro National Liberation Front, the first Moro insurgent group to fight for independence for the historically Muslim Mindanao. The eruption of this conflict stems from complicated, deep-seated problems such as the relations between the Christian and Moro Filipinos, the territorial disputes, as well as the phenomenon of nation-building, all of which, among others, have contributed to the conflict’s complexities. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which splintered off from the Moro National Liberation Front, would later join the struggle for Moro independence. These two rebel groups are discussed at length in this thesis.
In the decades since the conflict began, the Philippine government—with aid from international mediators, civil society, and non-governmental organizations—has drafted and reached various accords with the Moro insurgent forces. Negotiations, while broadly unsuccessful in achieving long-term peace, have at least been able to shift the insurgent groups’ demands from independence to increased autonomy within the Philippine state. Nevertheless, the violent, extremely protracted conflict remains at an impasse. Many feel that the prospects for peace are dwindling by the minute as the conflict continues to devastate the Mindanao region. For the Moro people, the conflict is representative of their ongoing effort to recover their sovereignty, an objective that the liberation fronts are trying to achieve on their collective behalf. For the Philippine government, the current goal is to keep secession at bay and preserve the country’s “territorial integrity.”

This thesis analyzes the various dimensions of the Philippines’ Moro conflict and the relevant peace processes by (1) providing a historical context to further understanding of the problems at hand; (2) identifying the criteria essential to success of peace efforts; (3) evaluating the respective peace accords against these criteria; and (4) proposing solutions designed to maximize the prospects for the long sought-after just and sustainable peace.

To better understand the context of the contemporary Moro conflict, Chapter I provides a backgrounder on Philippine history. This chapter traces the roots of the ethnic conflict and separatist movements through a historical lens, dating back to the pre-Columbian era through the periods of Spanish and American colonial rule, which

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3 Santos Jr., Primed and Purposeful, 58.
have had a profound effect on the evolution of Philippine society. The adverse consequences of colonialism play a role in the birth of the Moro separatist movement, and this chapter also examines the repercussions of colonial rule on the Moro.

Chapter II looks at the Republic of the Philippines after it gained independence in 1946 and explores the consequences of sovereignty on the Moro people. This chapter also discusses the emergence, formation, and key goals of the two chief non-state armed groups (NSAGs) in the Moro conflict: the Moro National Liberation Front, which spearheaded the separatist movement, and the subsequent founding of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

Chapter III details the various peace negotiations between the aforementioned Moro NSAGs and the Philippine government. Assessing and evaluating peace agreements are imperative to develop criteria that can aid the formulation and implementation of future peace-building and peacekeeping efforts. The continued “ignorance in the field of agreement design”⁴ has led to the inevitable repetition of errors in successive agreements between the key stakeholders. To this end, Chapter III also evaluates the significant peace negotiations throughout the course of the Moro conflict, detailing the efforts in finding common ground and bringing a definitive end to the decades-long conflict, as well as the outcomes of these endeavors. Each attempt at peace is analyzed against the following criteria essential to successful

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1. **Precision** – the extent to which it addresses the key drivers in the conflict, and whether its provisions detail the permitted, prohibited, and mandatory actions in order to reduce the possibility of self-serving interpretation and deviation

2. **Effectiveness** – whether it achieved its explicit aims; the negotiation outcome: agreement, no agreement, or collapsed agreement;\footnote{Negotiation outcomes per Ariel Hernandez, *Nation-building and Identity Conflicts* (Leipzig, Germany: Springer VS, 2014), 191.} key factors that contribute to achievement or non-achievement of aims

3. **Impact** – the broader outcomes of the negotiations (positive or negative, intended and unintended), and if/how it effected broader socio-political change

4. **Sustainability** – whether it resulted in the effective establishment and handover of peace initiatives; if measures were set in place to ensure effective implementation in the longer term.

Building upon the assessments in Chapter III, Chapter IV focuses on peace-building and peacekeeping solutions that may be applicable to the Philippine case. Using a multi-dimensional approach, this chapter proposes peace initiatives that would optimize the prospects for avoiding the reescalation of hostilities, facilitate a durable and just peace process, and support the attainment of justice writ large. In line with the principles of liberal study, this thesis also explores the role of values issues in the Moro conflict, demonstrating the relevance of ethical norms to the Moro struggle and examining those that apply to certain aspects of the Moro conflict, such as faith, integrity, and justice, among others.
CHAPTER I
AN ABRIDGED HISTORY OF THE PHILIPPINES AND THE ROOTS OF THE MORO CONFLICT

The present-day Mindanao conflict first began in 1972, but its true origins date back centuries. Although many believe the Moro conflict to be a twentieth-century problem (including a majority of the Philippine population themselves), its roots stem from centuries of Spanish colonial rule, the subsequent American occupation, and the societal divisions that arose as a consequence. This chapter traces the Moro conflict’s historical roots in order to better understand its context, shedding light on the issues that have affected the Philippines’ Muslim population for hundreds of years. Chapter I is divided into four sections. The first part begins with an overview of Philippine history before the arrival of the Spanish conquerors in 1521. The second part explores the conditions during Spain’s 333-year reign. The third part examines the Philippines under American rule. The fourth part briefly goes over the repercussions of colonial rule in the Philippines that set the scene for conflict.

Ang Perlas ng Silangan: The Pearl of the Orient before 1521

The Philippines is an archipelago of more than 7,000 islands. Located in Southeast Asia, Taiwan is to its north, Indonesia to its south, and Vietnam to its east. To the west of the Philippines lies the vast Pacific Ocean, giving the archipelago a strategic location that has appealed to western powers’ maritime ambitions for centuries. Myriad tribal groups have always inhabited the islands, descended from a complex mix of ethnicities. The Negrito group was the first to arrive in present-day
Philippines, walking the land bridges over 30,000 years ago.\textsuperscript{1} Over the next two or three millennia, the Negrito would be displaced by the wave of proto-Malays who traveled to the Philippine islands by \textit{balangay}, long-distance seafaring vessels, from what is now Indonesia.\textsuperscript{2} The final migration wave prior to the colonial periods involved the Malays, who arrived on Philippine shores between 500 BCE and 1500 CE.\textsuperscript{3}

Familial schema before the arrival of colonial influences involved the practice of cognatic kinship, which allowed for descendance to stem from both maternal and paternal sides.\textsuperscript{4} This meant that sons and daughters were able to inherit property and also continue to function as a part of their natal family following marriage.\textsuperscript{5} Those who were not biologically related formed fictive kinships, creating linkages in the form of ritual brothers, godmothers, and godfathers.\textsuperscript{6} Marriages typically formed political alliances, uniting families and creating webs of dynasties. This common familial framework would influence the evolution of the broader political and social structure in the Philippines.


\textsuperscript{3} Samuel K. Tan, \textit{A History of the Philippines} (Quezon City, Philippines: The University of the Philippines Press, 1987), 30.


\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
Small-clan island communities formed and were later known as barangays, after the outrigger boats used by the ancestors who migrated to the islands. A datu, or chief, headed this basic unit of governance. The broad social echelons comprised the nobles, such as the datu and his counterparts; freemen; dependents, which included landless laborers and those who had lost their status as freemen owing to debts or crimes; as well as slaves. These autonomous communities lived off the land and made use of the region’s abundant natural resources. Just as their ancestors who arrived by balangay, travel by sea was an essential component to the survival and development of communities, as it allowed for cultural interaction and trade with other neighboring barangays.

Over time, these communities organically diversified into three major language groups, subsequently forming the country’s three major geographic regions: the northern island of Luzon, the islands of Visayas in the center, and the island of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago in the south. These geographic divisions, in conjunction with their inhabitants’ diverse cultures and languages, eventually played a part in the evolution of the Philippines as a nation.

The arrival of Islam on Philippine shores marked the beginning of an influential cultural shift throughout the islands. Arab merchants are believed to have first

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introduced Islam to Southeast Asia in Aceh, in present-day Indonesia, around the 12th century. In contrast to Catholicism, Islam lacked a priestly structure and thus did not have missionaries tasked with converting natives during their trade excursions. Instead, Islam’s spread throughout the archipelago is attributed to the merchant class. Trade was a significant aspect of pre-colonial Philippine society, and its importance presented an opportunity for Islam to be easily adopted by the local populations.

Muslim merchants were subject to the laws regarding commercial transactions that fell within the scope of Islamic doctrine. For native Mindanaons, the prospect of improved business relations with these Arab merchants on account of adopting Islam is believed to have had an impact on the religion’s expansion throughout the region, in spite of the absence of missionary presence. Adopting Islam as religion was considered a pragmatic business decision, rather than a spiritual one. The significance of commercial relationships facilitated the spread of Islam throughout the archipelago, not only in the southern region, but also reaching as far north as Luzon, where the capital city Manila is located.

Islam brought with it a new system of governance: the sultanate. The first was the Sulu sultanate, established around 1450 following the marriage of a Sulu princess with the Sumatran sultan Sayyid Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr was credited with bringing Islam to the Philippines, emphasizing “its attendant political and social institutions.”

11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
adopting and adapting them to local life. The traditional practice of cognatic kinship ended given Islamic doctrine’s views on paternal descendence, but fictive kinships continued, and were reinforced by the alliances formed within the sultanate structure.

Abu Bakr would expand his reach – and that of Islam – to neighboring islands in the Sulu region and throughout Mindanao, claiming power over lands and people.16 Given the practicality of Islam, most datus adopted the religion on their own accord. Tribal rulers throughout the archipelago realized the advantage of participating in Muslim commercial networks and the opportunities for forming alliances. Abu Bakr did not forcibly convert, so long as they acknowledged his authority, but he did distinguish the believers from those who did not,17 thus establishing a dichotomy between believers and non-believers.

The sultanate structure allowed for Muslim Filipino communities to accumulate wealth by means of increased trade and commercial activity.18 Although there were already self-contained, independent tribal groups and datuships throughout the Mindanao region before the arrival of Islam, they were consolidated under the sultanate structure,19 shifting to a feudal system that relied heavily on slavery for economic advancement.20

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Cesar Adib Majul, Muslims in the Philippines (Quezon City, Philippines: University of the Philippines Press, 1973), 50.


20 Ibid., 246.
The Sulu sultanate is considered the “first centralized political bureaucracy in the Philippine islands.”\textsuperscript{21} However, as Islam made its way through the archipelago, new sultanates emerged and Moro subgroups formed, each identifiable by their distinct languages.\textsuperscript{22} In the early 16\textsuperscript{th} century, Sharif Kabungsuan came to the Philippines and founded the Maguindanao sultanate. Out of the ten Moro subgroups, two of the three largest groups originate from the Maguindanao: the eponymous Maguindanaos and the Maranaos. The third group is the Tausugs of the Sulu sultanate. Belonging to different sultanates, and having diverse cultural heritages, the various Moro groups are not inherently closely linked. Fiercely proud of their distinct identities, endemic conflict took place among the different Moro groups for centuries. However, the Islamic faith is undeniably integral to the Moros, despite their varying levels of adherence to its religious tenets. Islam cultivated a sense of ideological, religious, and political cohesiveness, and the religion continues to serve as a unifying element for the collective Moro people.

Islam made its mark on the Philippines. The religion transformed the once indigenous societies by introducing its system of governance, more developed political organization, moral codes, and novel ethical viewpoint.\textsuperscript{23} Islam and the sultanate system fostered the prosperity of the Moro, but these well-functioning communities were thrown into chaos upon the arrival of the Spanish, who ended the expansion of Islam and spent the next 300 hundred years attempting to subjugate the Muslim


\textsuperscript{22} Hunt, \textit{Philippines: A Country Study}, 82.

\textsuperscript{23} Majul, \textit{Muslims in the Philippines}, 84.
Filipino. Islam enabled these once separate ethnic groups to cultivate a sense of religious and social community, allowing them to forge alliances and develop a collective identity that would stand at the core of the Moro people’s determined resistance to invading colonial forces.

*Las Islas Filipinas: The Spanish in the Philippines, 1521-1898*

The arrival of the Spanish on Philippine shores in 1521 marked the beginning of the end for most indigenous cultures throughout the archipelago. Motivated by “God, Gold, and Glory,” the Spanish stayed in the Philippines for over three centuries, leaving an indelible mark on its people and shaping the evolution of the Filipino.

Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese explorer, set out on an expedition on behalf of the Spanish crown, seeking to chart a better route to the Maluku islands in Indonesia to dominate the European spice trade. Upon arriving in Cebu, in the Visayas region, he claimed the land in the name of King Carlos I. Magellan fostered a trade relationship with the indigenous Visayans, bartering items such as knives, combs, bells, and ivory, for gold, poultry, fish, palm wine, among others.24 Magellan also aimed to convert the locals to Christianity, and the ruler of Cebu, Rajah Humabon, was the first to be christened.25 The Spanish considered baptism to be a symbol of allegiance. Humabon helped the Spanish in their efforts to convert other natives. He informed Magellan of the resistance of one particular ruler who refused to neither accept Catholicism nor bow to the Spanish Crown: Lapu-Lapu of neighboring Mactan. Overcome with


evangelical zeal and a misplaced sense of superiority, Magellan wanted to punish the insubordinate Lapu-Lapu. He and sixty of his men headed from Cebu to Mactan in Spanish vessels, with the aim to subjugate the local leader and convert him and his subjects. This excursion would be Magellan’s last, as he would die in the Battle of Mactan.26 His men returned to Spain, catalyzing the effort to conquer the Philippine archipelago.

On a later voyage, Ruy López de Villalobos named the group of islands Las Islas Filipinas, in honor of young Prince Philip, son of King Carlos I. López de Villalobos’ attempt at founding a Spanish colony in the Philippines was futile.27 It was not until 1565, during the expedition led by Miguel López de Legazpi, that Spain was able to begin its colonization of the Philippine islands. The establishment of the first colony in Cebu, in the central Visayas region, marked the beginning of the Spanish crown’s subsequent conquest of the remainder of the Philippine archipelago.

As they had done in the Americas, the conquistadores’ endeavors involved the forced conversion of the indigenous populations to Christianity. The Spaniards, filled with religious fervor, felt it their duty to convert the natives, the savage indios. As Cebu’s first governor, Legazpi and his men sought to convert the natives to Christianity.28 Although they largely succeeded in their endeavor of converting the majority of the indigenous populations in the Luzon, Visayas, and northeastern Mindanao regions to Catholicism, the Spanish were unable to replicate their success

26 Francia, A History of the Philippines, 54.
27 Ibid., 56.
when it came to the broad Mindanao region. The Spaniards discovered that converting the Muslims of the Philippine south would be a more complicated task, as Islamic beliefs were well ingrained in the southern population, in contrast to the other native groups who were likely animists or polytheists. Not only did the Moros present a challenge in religious conversion, they were also unwilling to give up their wealth and be subjugated by this foreign force. Muslim Filipinos, with their trade networks and tribal alliances, presented a far more organized front against the Spanish compared to other indigenous groups. They were able to coordinate their resistance, and the Spaniards resented this fierce, unrelenting, fighting spirit. Over the course of their three-century-long stay in the Philippines, the Spanish were unable to subjugate the Moros and fit them into their colonial mold.

The Muslim Filipinos of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago were determined in their struggle against Spanish conquest. The Spanish referred to the 300 years of Moro resistance as guerras piráticas, or “pirate wars;” a misnomer when reflecting on the true, defensive nature of the conflict: the natives were fighting to hold on to their territory, and ultimately, their way of life. However, the converted Filipinos fought alongside the Spaniards, thus aiding the formation of the distinct division between the Christianized Filipino and Muslim Filipino that exists to this day. The Spanish exploited this divide, sowing the seeds of a “communal antagonism” through an early form of propaganda, the moro-moro plays. These theatric performances involved storylines depicting Catholic missionaries’ efforts to civilize


and save the souls of the villainous moro. The Spanish “divide-and-rule” approach resulted in the characterization of the Moro as the “other,” creating and perpetuating the sentiments of mistrust and animosity between the Muslim Filipinos and Christianized Filipinos. The Spaniards employed other approaches in this strategy, such as the large-scale relocation of Christian Filipino populations from their central and northern territories to the sparsely populated areas in the majority Muslim south; promoting “colonization by proxy.” The seizure of traditionally Moro and indigenous lands sparked tensions between the non-Christian and Christian Filipino populations. In essence, the appropriation of these lands by the colonial authorities seemed to legitimize, in a broader legal sense, the marginalization of the Moros and indigenous peoples who lived in those territories.

In addition to introducing Christianity to the Philippines, the successful Spanish conquest of the Visayas and Luzon regions also resulted in an irreversible change to the existing social and governance structures: datuhsips and their system of mutual indebtedness were abolished. These traditional political institutions were replaced by allegiance to Spain, and the requisite adaptation to its system of patronage and colonial bureaucratic configurations. Although the colonial system of governance still utilized certain aspects of the datuhsips, they largely entailed political appointments of Spaniards or Christianized Filipinos, and facilitating endemic corruption.

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31 Santos, Jr., Primed and Purposeful, 60.


Colonial rule had a detrimental effect on the development of the Mindanao region. Spain’s efforts to push the Moros into submission included using its power to blockade trade routes, crucial to the seafaring commerce from which the sultanates derived their wealth. Natives were robbed of their land and territory, with no recourse for recovery. The Moros’ continued resistance to Spanish rule and the intermittent periods of fighting over the centuries were also detrimental to the sultanates’ human resources, slowly depleting them. Losses in human resources also resulted in agricultural losses; without enough manpower to work the land, they were unable to continue to benefit from the abundant natural resources. In addition, the institutionalized discrimination against and marginalization of non-Christianized Filipinos meant that Mindanao was left behind in comparison to the Christianized areas, with neglected education systems and severely underdeveloped regional economy. However, in spite of Spain’s various endeavors to coerce them into submission, the Muslim Filipinos were able to maintain, to a large degree, their cultural, economic, and political autonomy throughout the Spanish colonial period.34

Spain’s conquest of the Philippine islands transformed the archipelago. First, the conflict and intermittent fighting between the Moros and the Spanish colonial forces substantially weakened the sultanates, politically and economically. Centuries of conflict destabilized the region and adversely affected the regional economy, contributing to the deterioration of living standards for the Muslim Filipino and indigenous peoples of the south, pushing them into poverty and fostering internal

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discord. This crippled the Moros, and facilitated the subsequent occupation and conquest of the Muslim Filipino territories by the next colonial power.

Second, the Spanish employed a “divide-and-rule” strategy that fomented discord among the Filipinos and maintained power in Spanish hands. By pitting the converted natives against the Moros and indigenous lumads, the Spanish colonial system initiated and fostered the systemic marginalization of the once self-determining Moro people. The “divide-and-rule” strategy resulted in the feelings of resentment, animosity, and hatred between the Moros and Christian Filipinos, producing deep-seated divisions that are still visible today.

Lastly, the massive Christianization of the Philippines resulted in the eradication of most indigenous spiritual traditions and the firm establishment of Catholicism. It still is the largest Christian nation in Southeast Asia, and today 83 percent of the population identify as Catholic. Christianity contributed to the formation of a socio-religious shared identity; Christianity became integral to what it is considered to be a true Filipino. The division of the population along a Christian/non-Christian line created two imagined identities: the Christianized and Westernized Filipino, and the indigenous or Moro “other.” Catholicism intertwined with aspects of native life, becoming a significant aspect of what would eventually become the collective Filipino ethos.

The Spaniards referred to the Muslim Filipinos of the south as “moros” because of their religion, associating them with the Muslim Moors that conquered and ruled the

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Iberian Peninsula for nearly eight centuries. Much in the spirit of the *Reconquista*, the Catholic military campaigns to regain control of the Iberian Peninsula from the hands of the Muslim “infidels,” the Spanish also aimed to relegate Moro Filipino. The Moros’ refusal to accept Christianity became the symbol of the Moro resistance to Spanish colonial rule. The Spanish projected their disdain for the Moor onto the Muslim Filipino. Designating the term “moro” to the Muslim Filipino inevitably cast him as the “other” in relation to the Christian Filipino, and the derogatory nature of this term lasted for more than 300 years. The Spanish prejudice towards the Muslim population would have a lasting effect on the perception of the Muslim Filipino as the unassimilable “other,” separating him from the ideal of a true Filipino.

The arrival of the succeeding colonial force did nothing to abolish this imposed sense of “otherness”; instead, it reinforced and exacerbated the problem for the Moro people.

**The Philippine Islands: The Archipelago under American Rule, 1898-1946**

Take up the White Man’s Burden
Send forth the best ye breed
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives’ needs
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild
Your new-caught sullen peoples
Half-devil and half child…

– Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands,” 1899

The United States’ occupation of the Philippines marked the first time in three centuries of foreign rule that Moroland and the broader Mindanao region were

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incorporated and brought under the same political structure as the rest of the archipelago. The United States gained control in 1898, following its crushing victory over Spain in the Spanish-American War. Although the Spanish were never able to successfully conquer most of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago throughout the course of its 300-year reign, these lands were included when Spain relinquished its territories to the Americans under the Treaty of Paris of 1898. The origins of the contemporary Mindanao conflict and separatist movements can be traced to the era of American colonial administration.38

It is important to note that when the Treaty of Paris was signed, the territories covered in its scope were de facto states: (i) General Emilio Aguinaldo declared Philippine independence from Spain on June 12, 1898, six months prior to the signing; (ii) the Maguindanao and Sulu sultanates (and most of Mindanao) were never under Spanish rule; and (iii) the indigenous lumad tribes were also free from Spanish control. Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago were not part of the Spanish colonies and should not have been included in the Treaty from the outset.

Filipinos were baffled by the American decision to annex, in particular, due to the expressions of American support for the Philippine independence movement. American consular authorities contacted Aguinaldo, who led the revolutionary efforts while exiled in Hong Kong, to voice support for the Filipino cause. However, these discussions were not put on paper and the US government later denied that these exchanges ever took place.

Aguinaldo, still under the impression that US would come to the aid of the Filipino resistance, returned to the Philippines accompanied by American troops and declared Philippine independence on June 12, 1898. By this time, the Filipino revolutionaries had defeated the Spanish throughout most of the archipelago, save for the walled city of Intramuros, the colonial capital. However, Aguinaldo was unaware that the Americans and Spanish had engaged in backroom negotiations to put on a scripted battle (to preserve Spain’s honor) and effect the handover of the Philippines from Spain to the US.39 The sham skirmish resulted in casualties on both American and Spanish sides. The US, not recognizing the Philippines’ newly declared sovereignty, laid claim to Manila and prevented Filipino soldiers from entering Intramuros on the grounds that the Spanish feared that the indignant Filipino troops would kill them en masse. It became clear to Aguinaldo and the Filipino revolutionaries that they had been manipulated, and that the United States had already set its sights on taking control of the Philippines.40

In an attempt to legitimize the acquisition of territory following their victory in the Spanish-American War, the United States purchased Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines for US$20 million. However, this did not legitimize the situation in the eyes of the Moro, who were attached to the rest of the Philippines without their consent. The US government debated several options in the Philippine question: keeping it as a permanent colony; returning the land to Spain; selling the territory; or

40 Ibid.
respecting the country’s declared independence. President William McKinley struggled with the issue, and shared his thoughts with Protestant clergymen:

...And one night late it came to me this way...that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died....I sent for the chief engineer of the War Department...and I told him to put the Philippines on the map of the United states, and there they are, and there they will stay while I am president!42

President McKinley may have arrived at the conclusion with divine intervention, but ultimately, the decision to maintain control over the Philippines was not without benefit. The Philippine occupation was part of the American idea of “manifest destiny,” effectively stretching the country’s frontier as far as Southeast Asia. The United States was able to expand its global reach and assert itself as a powerful nation. This decision also opened new markets such as China to American-made products and provided access to the bountiful natural resources available.

The United States maintained its control of the Philippines, but on the premise of helping with a well-paced, smooth transition to independence. President McKinley’s plan was for the “benevolent assimilation” of the Philippine people, which entailed the gradual incorporation of Filipinos into the Pax Americana, but aligned with Filipino norms and social traditions.43 The idea was for a “peaceful indoctrination in principles of self-government and cultural frame of mind distinctly westernized and attuned to the

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42 Francia, A History of the Philippines, 149.
43 Ibid., 164.
same cultural models as the United States.”44 Ultimately, the United States did not grant full independence to the Philippines at this juncture, but instead established American hegemony in the Pacific island nation.

Aguinaldo responded to McKinley’s Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation, condemning the “violent and aggressive seizure”45 of the Philippines. Reeling from the American betrayal, the Filipinos again fought for their freedom in 1899. This second war of independence is known as the Philippine Insurrection. Unlike their Spanish predecessors, the Americans had a larger number of troops that they were able to disperse and concentrate throughout the country. Putting their military prowess to use, the Americans conducted brutal, large-scale campaigns throughout the archipelago. Lasting only two years, the violent conflict resulted in severe casualties. On the Filipino side, an estimated 20,000 Filipino soldiers and 500,000 non-combatants were killed in the Luzon and Visayas regions, and another 100,000 died in Mindanao.46 More than 4,000 American soldiers died, and 3,000 were wounded.47 The two years of the Philippine Insurrection, which saw the Filipinos fighting as a fledgling nation, was bloodier than three centuries of Spanish rule.

Following the Insurrection, the Americans installed new governance structures throughout the country. The 1902 Philippine Organic Act stipulated that, provided the attainment of peace, a bicameral legislative body would be established. The lower

44 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 161.
house, the Philippine Assembly, would comprise elected officials; and the upper house, the Philippine Commission, would consist of delegates appointed by the US president. The Commission had the sole power to pass laws pertaining to the Moros and indigenous peoples. This meant that the previously self-determining Moros were reduced to being subjects under American and Christian Filipino rule, not even considered stakeholders in the governance of their own people.

In an effort to facilitate their integration, the US created transitional political structures for the non-Christian regions. The Americans established a Moro province in the Mindanao region and consequently changed their traditional political structures, eliminating elements of Islamic governance common to Moro communities. The new political organization “challenged the authority of traditional community leaders” and resulted in the abolition of certain indigenous social institutions, including slavery in the sultanates. The Moros were strongly opposed to the abolition of slavery in view of its economic benefits for the sultanates. New schools had also begun to teach non-Muslim curriculum, clearly affecting the indoctrination of the Moro youth. American rule posed a threat to the Islamic way of life in Mindanao, and thus catalyzed uprisings in what would later be referred to as the Moro Rebellion phase of the Philippine-American War. The Moros were resisting yet another colonizing force, and as a result,

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49 Ibid., 27.
Mindanao and its Moro and lumad inhabitants were placed under American military rule for almost a decade.\(^5^1\)

Employing scorched-earth tactics and ravaging Moro and lumad communities into submission,\(^5^2\) the Americans were able to gain full control of Mindanao in 1913 and forcefully integrate the region into the Philippines.\(^5^3\) The Americans succeeded where the Spaniards failed: in a relatively short amount of time, they were able to subjugate majority Muslim Mindanao. The United States’ decision to move into the southern regions was more productive and consequential. In spite of the defiant Moro opposition, the successful conquest of Mindanao essentially realized the symbolic “unification” of the peoples of the Philippines,\(^5^4\) and the patent marginalization of the non-Christian population.

The American occupation of the Philippines was a turning point for the Moros, as they lost the relative autonomy they had even while the rest of the archipelago was still under Spanish rule. Several aspects of American colonial rule carried significant consequences for the Muslim Filipino, contributing to the Moro struggle and the grievances still relevant today. First was the classification of the Philippine population. Although the Spanish era saw the categorization of Filipinos based on religion, under

\(^5^1\) Ibid.


the Americans, the classification became more explicit. In the 1903 census of the Philippines, the Americans categorized the population into two broad groups: non-Christian and Christian. In official government documents, these terms were used interchangeably with “uncivilized” and “civilized,” respectively. Adopting the “divide-and-rule” strategy also empowered and gave a sense of entitlement to the Christian Filipino population; still the “preferred” native of the western conqueror. This division and the preferential treatment fueled the existing animosity between non-Christian and Christian Filipinos.

The changes to the traditional political structures under American colonial rule impacted the Moros. The Jones Law of 1916 replaced the 1902 Organic Act. Part of the process in the eventual independence of the Philippines, the Act involved the departure of American bureaucrats from their government positions, succeeded by Filipinos. This had a particular impact on Mindanao and its non-Christian population, as they already lacked representation under the previous colonial structure, and the Jones Act brought the Legislative branch under firm Christian Filipino control. Despite the American jurisdiction over the Executive and Judiciary branches, it became clear that the “Filipinization” of the governance structure meant that the Moro would continue to be sidelined under the future independent nation.

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56 Ibid.

Colonial governance affected the Moro population. The Americans, showcasing the administration’s tutelary spirit, decided to establish a compulsory public education system as in the US, which contributed to the plight of the Moro. Education was the ideal tool for the cause of mainstreaming and “civilizing” the non-Christian cohort into the greater Filipino population. The Americans designed the curriculum and instruction was in English, a stark contrast to the Spaniards who did not openly teach the natives their language during their three-century stay. American military and civilian teachers known as Thomasites trained Christian Filipino educators from the northern region in order to ensure the program’s continuity following the American departure.\(^\text{58}\) The government dispatched hundreds of Christian Filipino teachers to the south to carry out the public education program in barangay schools, but Moros viewed this as an attempt at “Filipinization” and “Christianization.” The mandatory education program effectively marginalized indigenous cultures, contributing to the gradual disappearance of local culture. In addition, it exacerbated the existing divide: there were the English-speaking, westernized, Christian Filipinos, and then the indigenous lumads and Moros.

American governance also jolted the Moro way of life through the passage and enforcement of land laws that contained discriminatory provisions for non-Christians. The division of Filipinos by a religious line was a factor in this regard, as the “civilized” Christian population was not subjected to the same mandates as non-Christians. The new political structure did not recognize the legitimacy of the existing system of communal use and ownership of land in the Mindanao region, instead

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institutionalizing private land ownership. One of the earliest land laws imposed by the American colonial administration nullified and voided any land grants by traditional, non-Christian leaders, unless with explicit government consent. US-imposed laws mandated that lands could only be registered and titled to private entities (persons and corporations),\textsuperscript{59} a concept foreign to the Moros and indigenous peoples. This facilitated the seizure of native peoples’ lands. The Americans also understood the abundant natural resources at their disposal, and shaped laws to allow for the exploitation of these lands for economic gain. These laws also discriminated against Moros and lumads in the distribution of land, with the legislation detailing the limitations to property: corporations were allowed to own up to 1,024 hectares, Christian Filipinos up to 24 hectares, and non-Christian Filipinos were limited to a mere 10 hectares. By 1936, this was reduced even further to four hectares.\textsuperscript{60}

Yet another aspect of American governance that contributed greatly to the Moro struggle was the resettlement efforts spearheaded by the colonial government. The Americans thought that the “Moros and primitive pagans who [inhabit Mindanao] are neither capable nor desirous of developing [these lands],”\textsuperscript{61} and encouraged Christian Filipinos to migrate south and settle. Beginning as early as 1912, the Americans opened up vast territories in Mindanao to resettlement by Christian Filipinos from the central Visayas and northern Luzon regions. Encouraged by the promise of land for their own agricultural cultivation, thousands of poor Christians

\textsuperscript{59} Rodil, “Re-establishing Order in the Community and its Connection with Biodiversity Conservation.”

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{61} Ralston Hayden, “What next for the Moro?” \textit{Foreign Affairs}, July 1928.
from other regions took advantage of the resettlement initiative. This policy was particularly devastating to the Moro and indigenous peoples, as their communal properties were usurped and redistributed. The homesteaders were unaware that they were appropriating indigenous and Moro lands, as they were made to believe they would be living on public domain. Additionally, migrants from northern regions filled the positions opened by the new corporations; the Moros were excluded and unable to benefit from the economic development in their own region.

The seizure of land and displacement of the Moros only inflamed the already antagonistic sentiment towards the Christian Filipino. Owing to the resettlement program, the Moros and indigenous tribes were displaced and marginalized on their own ancestral territories, and given the legality of the policy, had no recourse to recover their land. By the 1920s, the once-majority Muslim and indigenous populations were outnumbered by Christians. The appropriation of Moro lands in Mindanao dates back to the Spanish era, but the American resettlement initiative was on a much larger scale. This injustice is one of the long-lasting repercussions of the American occupation, and remains one of the Moro peoples’ grievances to this day.

As time went on, American public sentiment turned against the country’s Philippine occupation. Fearing competition from Filipino immigrant workers, American agricultural companies and workers advocated Philippine independence.62 To this end, a bill proposing the establishment of a Philippine commonwealth and moving toward the country’s complete sovereignty was passed in US Congress in 1934. The Tydings-McDuffie Act stipulated a ten-year commonwealth period, with

Philippine independence marked for 1944. The Commonwealth was already in place when the Japanese invaded in 1941, and the war postponed the trajectory of Philippine independence. The tragic events of World War II ravaged the Philippines. Following years of fighting, with an outstanding effort from the Filipino guerilla resistance groups such as the *Hukbalahap*, the Japanese surrendered on September 2, 1945.\(^{63}\) The following year, on July 4, 1946, the archipelago, including Mindanao and Sulu, declared its independence and officially became the Republic of the Philippines.

The Moros had made explicit that they did not want to be part of the Philippines as a sovereign nation. The independent Philippines would be dominated by Christian Filipinos; the Moros’ traditional enemies.\(^{64}\) In 1935, a datu petitioned President Franklin D. Roosevelt: “The American people should not release us until we are educated and become powerful because we are like a calf who, once abandoned by its mother, would be devoured by a merciless lion.”\(^{65}\) Unfortunately for the Moros, who were incorporated into this endeavor of nation-building without their plebiscitary consent, Christian Filipino leaders were vehemently opposed to continued US rule of Mindanao. The Moros were not granted any special status, and upon the proclamation of independence on July 4, 1946, Mindanao officially became part of the Republic of the Philippines.


\(^{65}\) Ibid.
The Repercussions of Colonial Rule

The Spanish executed Jose Rizal in 1896 for the crime of rebellion, citing his purported role in inspiring the anti-colonial revolution. Fifty years later, not far from the place where Rizal fell in Luneta Park, the Philippines would declare that it was finally free. The American Stars and Stripes were lowered on July 4, 1946, and the Philippine flag was raised in its place. This symbolic act cemented the sovereignty of the newly established Republic of the Philippines. For the first time since 1521, the 7,107 island archipelago had become unified under the same political structure and was a fully independent, sovereign nation, free from the shackles of colonial domination. However, the profound societal fragmentation that emerged from centuries of colonial rule still persists to this day.

Spain and the United States’ respective colonial efforts were accomplished largely through the homogenization of the country’s unique and diverse population. A consequence of this standardization is the loss of indigenous cultures. The inhabitants of the archipelago were traditionally scattered, diverse groups that were largely independent of one another. As a result of colonial rule, these ethnolinguistic groups with distinct cultures were mainstreamed, molded into the ideal western colonial subject. The conversion to Christianity also contributed to the disappearance of many indigenous cultures, as they abandoned their traditions to eventually adapt to Spanish colonial norms. Owing to the colonial occupation, many of these groups were fused together under the broad title of “Filipino,” with the exception of those in the Mindanao region, who managed to stay largely out of the Spanish reach.
The amalgamation of the indigenous groups under the large banner of “Filipino” subsequently resulted in the emergence of the Filipino ethos. The Filipino spirit that formed largely aligns itself with hispanized, Christian (Catholic), Western sociology. The concept of the ideal Filipino has, as a result, created a social division among the Filipinos, meaning that those whose ideals are not broadly aligned with the traditional Filipino is considered “other.” The Moro and lumad were pushed into this “otherness,” Filipino by citizenship but not at the core. An important repercussion of colonial rule is the creation of this dichotomy within Philippine society: the mainstream Filipino vs. the other.

The societal division between the Filipino (Christian) v. the other (non-Christian) also tied into the demographic shifts in the non-hispanized Mindanao and Sulu regions. Substantial demographic changes took place as Christian Filipinos began migrating to the southern regions under Spanish rule, but the resettlement took place on a much larger scale during the American occupation and commonwealth period. The Moro and lumad territories were appropriated by the government, redistributed to Christian Filipinos who promised to work the land, or to corporations that could exploit the resources for economic gain. The resettlement efforts resulted in the displacement of the Moros from their own territory, and the overwhelming increase in Christian Filipino presence in traditional Moroland. The Filipino v. Moro split, stemming from the colonial powers’ “divide-and-rule” strategy, plays a role in the deep social fragmentation visible until today. The unjust displacement and marginalization of the Moro during this period is a factor behind the eventual formations of Moro insurgent groups.
By the time the Philippine flag was raised in Luneta Park, the Moros were already harboring profound resentments toward their Christian “compatriots.” Their ancestral lands had been taken from them, and their social, economic, and political rights usurped. Yet the plight of the Moro was insignificant to the new Filipino government. Although the Moro was now a “Filipino,” a citizen of the independent Republic of the Philippines, his marginalization would persist – and worsen – at the hands of his Filipino brethren: The Christian Filipino oligarchy.
CHAPTER II
THE CONDITIONS FOR THE MORO IN THE NEW REPUBLIC AND
THE EMERGENCE OF THE MORO RESISTANCE

Chapter II explores life for the Moro people following the declaration of Philippine independence in 1946, providing background for the contemporary conflict. It takes a look at the consequences of Filipino self-determination for the non-Christian population such as worsening economic, political, and social conditions, and how these factors contributed to the formation of insurgency groups. This chapter is divided into four parts. The first discusses the early years of the independent Republic of the Philippines. The second part explores the country under Ferdinand Marcos’ rule. The third and fourth sections, respectively, detail the formation, ideology, and goals of the two non-state armed groups (NSAGs) that are discussed in this thesis, the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The Early Years of the Republic of the Philippines, 1946-1965

On July 4, 1946, after almost five decades of flying high above Philippine lands, the American Stars and Stripes came down during the ceremony for Philippine independence in Luneta Park, Manila. The Philippine flag was raised in its place, having waited as many years as the American occupation to finally fly. General Emilio Aguinaldo designed the flag during the first war of Philippine independence against the Spanish in 1898, during his exile in Hong Kong. The flag features a horizontal bicolor of blue and red, with a white equilateral triangle at the hoist. Inside the triangle is a sun with eight rays, each representing the provinces that fought against the Spanish during the war, and three stars symbolizing the major regions of Luzon, Visayas, and

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Mindanao.¹ When flown with the blue facing upward, the country is experiencing a
time of peace, and when the red is atop, it is at war. The raising of the Philippine flag
was an act symbolizing the country’s newfound sovereignty, but the degree of the
fledgling Republika ng Pilipinas’ true independence was debatable. Despite the official
handover, the United States did not fully relinquish its control of the Philippines.
Rather, its hold only became less explicit. Although the Philippine flag may have
flown with its blue side atop on July 4, 1946, for the newly minted Moro Filipino, who
was unwillingly incorporated into the Republic, life would move farther away from a
time of peace.

The post-war Philippines, finally graduated from the Commonwealth period
under American tutelage, was ripe for reform. It would have been the perfect juncture
at which to address the myriad issues that plagued the archipelago before and during
the Commonwealth period. However, the Americans had not fully renounced their
control. General Douglas MacArthur was still heavily involved in Philippine politics
and close to the oligarchy, and among the elite ruling class, it became evident that
significant positive change would not take place for the Filipino people as a whole. As
a result, the country returned to the pre-war status quo: American control of Philippine
governance, and continued Filipino tutelage. In the same vein, the conditions for the
Moro and other non-Christian Filipinos also returned to the status quo. The
Philippines’ declaration of its independence was a mere transition from colony to neo-
colony.²

¹ Stewart Lone, Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Asia: From the Taiping Rebellion to the
Vietnam War (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 50.

² Francia, A History of the Philippines, 192.
Post-colonial Philippine administrations essentially aligned their policy on the Moro question with that of the Americans. American army official Dr. Najeeb N. Saleeby, Assistant Chief of the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes in Charge of Moro Affairs, described US policy on the Moro problem:

...the method or form of administration by which the Moros and other non-Christians who are living among them can be governed to their best interest and welfare in the most peaceful way possible, and can at the same time be provided with appropriate measures for their gradual advancement in culture and civilization, so that in the course of a reasonable time they can be admitted into the general government of the Philippine islands as qualified members of a republican national organization.3

Centuries of rule under colonial powers shaped the Filipino ethos, largely associating with the Christianity and western norms, inevitably classifying anything else as “other,” including the Moro. Post-colonial Filipino society ended up normalizing the artificial divide between “Filipino” and Moro. The American perspective on the malleability of the Moro people set the stage for the broader Filipino viewpoint as well. The Philippine answer to the Moro question was largely in line with US policy, and subsequent administrations, with Christian Filipinos at the helm, shaped their policy with the idea of the eventual integration of the Moro into the Filipino mainstream.

At the outset, the newly installed Filipino government instituted policies that did not particularly address the Moro question. Rather, they were focused on the threat posed by the hukbalahap, the group of tenant farmers who were instrumental in

defeating the Japanese in their effective use of guerrilla tactics.\footnote{Hunt, \textit{Philippines: A Country Study}, 79.} The Huks, led by communist party member Luis Taruc, formed their armed resistance in an effort to regain their land back from the Japanese during World War II.\footnote{Ronald E. Dolan, “Glossary,” in \textit{Philippines: A Country Study}, 4\textsuperscript{th} ed., ed. Ronald E. Dolan (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1993), 361.} After the war, the Philippine government (GRP) began to view the Huks as a communist threat. The Huks’ most significant grievance pertained to the seizure of their land, and were therefore asking the new Philippine government to enact land reform measures. In an effort to appease the Huks and quell the burgeoning communist movement, the GRP geared its land policy toward the Huks. Under President Elpidio Quirino’s administration, the government encouraged resettlement away from Luzon, the province where the capital city Manila is located, and gave the Huks land in the southern Philippines—in Mindanao. Thus, in their effort to assuage the Huk problem by pushing them toward the “open frontier” of the Philippine south, the government only contributed to the difficulties faced by the Moro, rejecting their earlier, longstanding pleas for land reform.

The government’s incentivized resettlement scheme for the Huks was not entirely effective in its aim of tamping down communism, and by 1950, the Philippine government received assistance from the US to address the communist problem. In the context of the Cold War era, US Air Force Colonel Edward Lansdale provided counsel to Philippine Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay, advising the reorganization of the
With assistance from the US Central Intelligence Agency (of which Lansdale was a covert operations specialist), Magsaysay reorganized the AFP. Lansdale introduced psychological warfare, employing elements of Filipino traditional beliefs and superstitions into the AFP’s counterinsurgency repertoire. In addition, Lansdale encouraged Magsaysay to embark on a “hearts-and-minds” propaganda campaign, having the media cover government efforts to address the rural populations’ needs, depicting army units digging wells and providing medical assistance, as well as Magsaysay and Lansdale accompanying troops on counterinsurgency missions so that they would be present for the “surrendering Huk” photo opportunity. In October 1950, the US-Philippine effort was able to capture one of the key Huk leaders, which essentially led to the defeat of the movement. The Philippines and US signed the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1951, building upon the success of their anti-communist effort, and effectively bolstering US presence in the archipelago.

Riding on his popularity from the Huk defeat and his time as the charismatic head of the Philippine Armed Forces, Magsaysay became president in 1953. He established the Economic Development Corps, which aimed to resettle surrendered Huks, Chinese-Filipinos, and Christians outside of the Luzon province, again to once-majority Muslim Mindanao. The program utilized military power to clear large tracts of land to prepare for this incentivized resettlement. From 1954 to 1963, the Program

7 Ibid., 207.
8 Ibid.
resettled 20,500 Huk families, seizing the land of and displacing the indigenous and Moro inhabitants of Mindanao. During this time, in a period of postwar optimism, a large influx of Christian Filipinos from the northern regions migrated to Mindanao. Hundreds of thousands resettled in the Mindanao provinces, mainly in majority Muslim Cotabato and Lanao, resulting in more disagreements over land and inflaming Moro hostility.10

For instance, Christian migrants would complain that they purchased land from one Muslim Filipino, only to have the relatives dismiss and refuse to acknowledge the validity of the sale, instead renegotiating and asking for more money.11 In addition, Muslim Filipinos, unfamiliar with the concepts of land administration, would claim that newly arrived Christians had titled Moro land through government agencies.12 The land laws of the post-colonial administrations defined all unregistered territory in Mindanao to be military reservations or public land.13 Unfamiliarity with the bureaucratic procedures and deterred by the costly processing fees and steep taxes (even prior to title issuance), many Moros neither applied for the new lands “opened up” by the government nor filed for the land they were living on. “Land grabbing” and property rights are chief points of contention that contributed to the eventual formation of the Moro insurgencies.


11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 84.

President Magsaysay died in a plane crash and Vice President Carlos Garcia assumed the presidency in his place. Garcia, along with Filipino nationalists, envisioned a unified Philippines in which all Filipinos could benefit from the country’s economic growth. However, Garcia’s vision also involved increased efforts in the assimilation of Moros and other non-Christians into mainstream Filipino society. In this vein, he replaced the Commission for National Integration with the Office of Muslim Affairs and Cultural Communities, charged with integrating the non-Christian Filipino population into the mainstream culture.14 The goal was that Moros would essentially “become Filipinos,” practicing their own religion and not consuming pork.15 Christian Filipinos were not enthused by the idea of mainstreaming Moros, and the Moros themselves viewed the Office’s outreach efforts as the “euphemistic equivalent of assimilation.”16 As a remedial measure, the Philippine government made concessions to recognize Muslim Filipino customs and traditions, such as the exemption from Philippine laws pertaining to polygamy and divorce, which are illegal outside of the Moro context.17

The government may have yielded to the Moro on certain cultural matters, but it did not compromise on the issue of land. During Garcia’s presidency, over one million people resettled to Mindanao to farm,18 this time without government incentives. This continued flow of Christian migrants into traditionally Moro lands

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15 McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 117.


17 Ibid.

became a rallying cry for the displaced and marginalized Filipino Muslim. Land disputes in Mindanao saw increasing tensions throughout the period of US occupation, but Philippine independence and the Filipino government’s policies in this regard only added strain. The policies of subsequent presidential administrations did not improve conditions for the Moro people. Conditions worsened under Ferdinand Marcos, and his time in power resulted in the uprising of the Moro insurgency.

**The Marcos Era, 1965-1986**

Ferdinand Marcos assumed the presidency in December 1965, marking the beginning of the most tumultuous and violent period in the relationship between the Moros and the Philippine government.

Marcos was elected during the Cold War era, a time when the spread of communism was prevalent in numerous Southeast Asian countries. In contrast to regional peers, the Philippines’ previous life under American colonial rule and its transition to a representative form of government upon independence made it the poster child for the success of American democracy. Fundamentally modeled after the United States, the country employed a democratic system of governance. Yet, the Philippine government comprised elites, largely amounting to a legally elected oligarchy. At the time of Marcos’ inauguration, the Philippines was suffering from an endemically corrupt government and chronic bureaucratic inefficiency,\(^\text{19}\) taking away from the idea of a government by and for the Filipino people. Along with rapid population growth and an ailing economy, these posed formidable challenges to Marcos at the outset of his presidency: “We have ceased to value order. Government is

\(^{19}\) Francia, *A History of the Philippines*, 221.
gripping the iron hand of venality, its treasure barren, its resources are wasted, its civil service is slothful and indifferent, its armed forces demoralized, and its councils sterile.”

In his endeavor to reverse the country’s fortunes, Marcos increased the role of the Philippine Armed Forces in governance. His militaristic restructuring program was largely aligned with American foreign policy, in particular, the strengthening of the military to fight the growing communist threat in Asia. Marcos was a “master manipulator” of US-Philippine relations and played up his anti-communist card to gain favor with the Americans and to boost his military power. He also utilized the Vietnam War and the spread of communism in Asia as a bargaining chip with the United States. The Vietnam War added value to the United States’ strategically located bases in the Philippines, which were agreed upon in 1947, with 99-year leases. Despite the Military Bases Agreement between the US and the Philippines, Marcos essentially charged the Americans “rent” for their control of 23 bases in the archipelago, most notably Clark Air Force Base and Subic Bay Naval Base. The Americans noted this as “aid,” and out of self-interest, largely ignored the growing levels of corruption within Marcos’ administration, so long as his policies continued to be aligned with US interests.

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21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 197.
Marcos was reelected in 1969. He was the first Philippine president elected to a second term, defeating Sergio Osmeña Jr., son of the former Commonwealth president. Marcos won by a glaringly suspicious 2,000,000-vote margin and although he would have won even without cheating, it was evident that Marcos exploited his position to use every resource at his disposal to ensure victory. These elections were the most expensive and most corrupt and, in essence, dried out the country’s reserves and resulted in inflation,\(^{23}\) provoking outrage among workers and students. The rise in Filipino student activism, first witnessed in 1968 as part of a global wave of political consciousness, resulted in organized protests against the Marcos administration.

Marcos, having embarked on the route to authoritarianism by way of self-mythologizing, continued to rouse the ire of student activists and catalyzed a slew of protests. Marcos’ electoral misstep and the consequent rallies threatened the Philippines’ neo-colonial relationship with the US and the oligarchical “democracy” of which he was the leader. Demonstrations against the administration’s corruption and its collaboration with the US in the Vietnam War peaked during the First Quarter Storm (FQS), the most violent manifestation of political turmoil in Philippine democratic history up until that point.\(^{24}\) The FQS entailed a series of protests, rallies, and marches led by a coalition of student groups, farmers’ organizations, and labor unions, continued their outcries against the Marcos administration from January through March of 1970. The FQS began after Marcos’ State of the Nation Address to the Philippine Congress. An estimated 20,000 protesters comprising workers, students,

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 223.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 224.
and farmers shamed the President and First Lady, hurling rocks and bottles. The protesters’ frustrations went unaddressed and four days later they marched to and attempted to storm the presidential residence, Malacañang Palace. The incident resulted in the death of a 23-year-old university student who was shot in the head. As the political tensions grew, the number of anti-Marcos demonstrations continued to rise.

The early 1970s also saw a rise in communal violence in Cotabato and other parts of the Mindanao region. Many of these incidents were largely sectarian in nature, consisting of attacks by armed Christian or Muslim gangs on members of the opposite religion who were largely unarmed.25 Although these conflicts were not widespread throughout all of Mindanao, the scale of destruction was catastrophic. Over a two-month period, a report in the Mindanao Cross cited that 137 people had been killed. The November 20, 1971 issue of the Mindanao Cross reported that from January to October of the same year, 269 Christians and 305 Muslims were killed, and approximately 500 homes set ablaze. It is likely that the actual figures were higher, as many incidents went unreported.26

The Philippines was already steeping in an increasingly tense social and political environment, and by 1972 the country had plunged into political unrest. Although sectarian violence in parts of Mindanao had begun to wane, the communist movement was picking up strength. The Marcos administration issued repeated warnings about the communist threat in the Philippines, citing the communists as the

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25 McKenna, Muslim Rulers and Rebels, 149.

26 Ibid., 250.
reason for the increased violence throughout the country. In the same vein as the 
Spaniards’ moro-moro plays, which portrayed the Moro as the villain, the communists 
were actively smeared by the Marcos administration, in particular, by Defense 
Secretary Juan Ponce Enrile. Incidents such as two small explosions at electricity sub-
stations were blamed on the communists. However, the most significant incident 
attributed to the communists was the fabricated assassination attempt on Enrile. On 
September 21, 1972, rather than ride in his own car in his motorcade, Enrile opted to 
ride in his security vehicle. This supposedly fateful choice coincidentally allowed him 
to escape the barrage of bullets directed at his car by ambushers.

In the context of the violence in parts of Mindanao, the communist and 
separatist menaces, and the purported attempt on Enrile’s life, Marcos provided enough 
reason to justify the declaration of martial law. On September 22, Proclamation 1081 
placed the Philippines under martial law,\(^27\) an effective way of indefinitely lengthening 
Marcos’ hold on the presidency. The Philippines would be under the Marcos regime 
until his ouster in the People Power Revolution of 1986.

One of Marcos’ main reasons behind the supposedly urgent nature of imposing 
martial law was the surge in violent armed conflicts between Muslims and Christians 
in the Mindanao region. However, at the time of his proclamation, the south had been 
seeing a steady decrease in incidences of sectarian violence, and groups advocating 
separatism such as the Muslim Independence Movement had been fairly silent over the 
previous year.\(^28\) However, key to his endeavor of establishing autocratic rule was the

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 226.

\(^{28}\) McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 155.
suppression of democratic principles, including the freedoms of speech and assembly. Marcos had to exaggerate the violence in the south and pin the blame on factions that had formed in opposition to his administration. Martial law banned the existence of political groups, attempting to repress expressions of dissent and rebellion, but this did not stop the emergence of underground resistance movements. Marcos and his cronies were unaware that martial law would become the “proximate cause”—and not the consequence—of the armed Muslim insurgency against the Philippine government, and that this declaration would lead to unprecedented violence in Muslim Mindanao.

**The Moro Resistance: The Moro National Liberation Front**

Marcos’ declaration of martial law saw strong resistance from the Moros in Mindanao. The Moros were opposed to Marcos, whose administration, like those before his, continued the government policy of disregard for the plight of the Muslim Filipino. The Marcos administration did not address the Moros’ various concerns about the persisting land disputes, the lack of economic resources and lag in economic development in Mindanao, the issues of political power, and the violence within the region. Moreover, the deaths of Moro armed forces recruits in the supposedly Marcos-ordered Jabidah Massacre of 1968 outraged the Muslim Filipino population and catalyzed the founding of Muslim liberation fronts throughout the country’s southern region.

In 1968, Marcos sought to recover territory in Eastern Sabah, part of Malaysia. He believed that it was Philippine territory; a gift from the Sultan of Borneo to the

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29 Ibid., 156.
Sultan of Sulu, a Philippine territory, for the latter’s help in quelling a revolt.30 Malaysia refuted this claim, having annexed Sabah in the 1960s as part of an accord with the Sultanate of Sulu.31 Sabah is a resource-rich region, and as such, Marcos wanted to seize and incorporate it within the Philippine’s sovereign territory. To this end, he organized a military effort to destabilize Sabah and facilitate its appropriation, assembling the AFP under the guise of an anti-communist exercise called Operation Merdeka. However, the Marcos administration wanted to ensure that the attempted seizure of Sabah could not be traced back directly to the AFP. Thus, the destabilization plan involved the recruitment of almost 200 Muslim soldiers as scapegoats.32 The recruits, from the Tausug and Sama Moro tribes, trained in Tawi-Tawi, a historically Muslim-populated province. The young recruits, aged between 18 and 30, were ecstatic at the prospect of becoming part of an elite AFP unit. As the training continued, the soldiers were discontented with their treatment by the AFP, working and preparing for their upcoming mission but without receiving the promised monthly stipend of 50 pesos. However, it is said that some of the young Moro soldiers mutinied after discovering the true nature of their mission; wrought by the idea that they may have to fight and kill some of their fellow Muslims, as well as Tausug and Sama people who were living in Sabah, all for Christian Filipinos’ political ends. Christian soldiers were accused of murdering “at least 28”33 of the Moro recruits in an effort to


31 Ibid.

32 McKenna, Muslim Rulers and Rebels, 140.

quell the mutiny. This unfortunate event, known as the Jabidah Massacre, gave impetus to rise to the Moro independence movement and amplified the perception of injustice against Moros, spearheaded by grassroots student groups.

The course of peaceful Moro student activism shifted following the events of the Jabidah Massacre. The incident catalyzed Moro resistance groups against the Marcos administration. Inspired by the student activist movements in Prague, Paris, and throughout the globe, Moro students also began to form their own underground resistance movements. Having studied abroad or in the Philippine capital and learning about the possibilities of social change and liberation theology, Moro student activists began forming organizations to fight for their right to self-determination.34 A group of student activists called upon University of the Philippines professor Nur Misuari to lead their effort geared towards the liberation of the Filipino Muslims.35 With a view to put an end to the marginalization of the Moro and fight against the continued injustices imposed upon them, Misuari reformed his student organization and founded the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

Misuari had been exposed to left-leaning ideologies and Filipino nationalist teachings during his time at the University of the Philippines. This, in conjunction with his involvement with Jose Maria Sison, leader of the communist National Democratic

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Front of the Philippines, reinforced the MNLF’s secular-nationalist orientation at its outset.36

The name “Moro National Liberation Front” took inspiration from other liberation movements throughout the 1960s, in particular, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. The MNLF’s name is of great significance to the Muslim Filipino cause. The term “moro” was a derogatory term brought over by the Catholic Spanish conquerors to refer to the islands’ Muslim inhabitants, just as they had the moors of North Africa, whom they detested. MNLF Vice Chairman Abul Khayr Alonto is credited with shifting the meaning of the word “moro” to a respectable term for the Muslim Filipino.37 He emphasized its rebranding and reclaimed the pejorative, transforming it into a source of pride that laid the foundation for a common consciousness and identity for the 13 Muslim ethnic groups in the Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan regions; the historic homeland of the Moros.

The MNLF became the standard-bearer for the Moro people and their cause. The three roots of the group’s philosophy are, in the Tausug tongue, Bangsa (nation), Hulah (homeland), and Agama (religion). The MNLF has struggled with the three aspects of its ideology; however, over the years, it has become apparent that the organization’s aims are chiefly territorial and nationalist in nature, although Islam has served as a rallying cry and remained central to its resistance to the Philippine

36 Santos Jr. and Santos, Primed and Purposeful, 328.
37 Ibid.
government. The group’s leaders tend to invoke the original aim of independence from the Philippine state and “decolonization,” which still resonates strongly among its Moro constituents. However, since the 1996 peace agreement, the MNLF has voiced its goal to pursue the “liberation through peace and development in the form of autonomy for the Muslims in the southern Philippines.”

The MNLF’s political base comprises the Bangsamoro, the Moro nation from the various 13 tribes. The most active among the tribes are the Tausug (to which Misuari belongs), the Sama, the Yakan, as well as the Maguindanao and Maranao Moros. Although the MNLF continues to have the broadest reach in Mindanao, compared to other Muslim NSAGs, the MNLF has never been an overwhelmingly large association. In 1994, its estimated membership was at 14,000, and in 1996, around 17,700. Stipulations in the 1996 Peace Agreement required the gradual incorporation of former MNLF forces into the AFP and the Philippine National Police, and by 2006, 6,905 MNLF soldiers (out of the agreed 7,500) had been integrated.

Misuari believed that the Moros have a unique identity and a distinct history, setting them apart from the Christian Filipino mainstream. From the beginning, the MNLF sought to liberate the Moro people “from the terror, oppression and tyranny of Filipino colonialism” and “to secure a free and independent state for the Bangsa

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38 Ibid., 329.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 333.
Moro people.”  For Misuari, the MNLF aimed to defend the “Bangsa (nation), the homeland, and Islam” by means of Islamic diplomacy through peace talks and also a paramilitary struggle. In this vein, the group was organized into two parallel structures, military and political.

The military arm, known as the Bangsa Moro Army (BMA), has a formal, conventional—not guerilla—organizational structure composed of overall and provincial field marshals, as well as zone commanders in municipalities. Although martial law obligated all civilians to surrender their arms, the Moro, who had always been traditionally armed, were suspicious of the government’s intentions in its demands for disarmament and refused to surrender theirs. Three weeks into martial law, Marcos declared that he was ready to commission troops to “annihilate” the violence in Mindanao, and incidents of violence between the BMA and Christian paramilitary groups began to rise. Contributing to the Moro perception of injustice was the decision of the Philippine Constabulary, the country’s gendarmerie-type police force, to side with the Christian forces during certain incidents, organizing offensives to combat the MNLF’s armed forces. The MNLF conducted counteroffensives and demanded an independent state for the Bangsamoro. The Philippine government had shifted its modus operandi from disregard and neglect of the Moro to clear state aggression. While the Philippine national government rejected the MNLF’s objective of seceding from the state, the Moro rebels rejected the eradication of their culture and identity through their assimilation into the Filipino mainstream through armed struggle.

42 Ibid.
43 McKenna, Muslim Rulers and Rebels, 157.
The political wing comprises the Central Committee, different bureaus, and a system of village and provincial committees. The Central Committee is composed of both secular and religious members. Seven members, including Misuari, are secular, while the remaining six hold more religious leanings. The existence of the MNLF’s political arm has allowed the group to engage in diplomatic talks with the Philippine government throughout periods of conflict, with Misuari typically leading such negotiations. The MNLF has proven itself capable of engaging in negotiations with the government. Owing to its highly organized political arm, throughout the 1992-1996 peace negotiations with the Philippine government, the MNLF was able to match the number of government officials in the support committees for discussions on significant policy items.\textsuperscript{44} The MNLF was also the only rebel group recognized by international groups such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the union of Muslim nations that helped broker peace negotiations with the Philippine government.

Over the years, despite being at the forefront of the Moro liberation movement, the MNLF has unraveled as an organization. Misuari had traditionally been at the helm of the Moro struggle, considered the \textit{maas} or “wise old man” of the movement.\textsuperscript{45} However, many have taken issue with Misuari’s controversial leadership style, believing it to be exclusive and biased toward the Tausug Moros. Tensions arose following the 1976 negotiations in Tripoli, Libya, as some members were frustrated with Misuari’s tilt toward secular ideology and lack of focus on the group’s Islamic

\textsuperscript{44} Santos Jr. and Santos, \textit{Primed and Purposeful}, 341.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 329.
ideals. Rival factions formed within the MNLF, and Head of Foreign Affairs Salamat Hashim ultimately left the organization in 1977 to found his own organization, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Since its formal inception in 1972, the MNLF has struggled with Misuari’s leadership and its inability to maintain a cohesive front, leading to disarray and a fall from its place as the principal Moro rebel group.

The MNLF deserves recognition for shining national and international attention on the Moro plight, and also for the gains it achieved in the 1996 Peace Agreement. However, at this juncture, the MNLF is no longer the standard-bearer for the Moro movement and is no longer the representative body for working toward a just, lasting, and comprehensive solution to the Moro problem.

**The Moro Resistance: The Moro Islamic Liberation Front**

Unsatisfied with the lack of tangible progress in the Philippine government and MNLF negotiations, and frustrated by the dissonance within the MNLF itself, Head of Foreign Affairs Salamat Hashim splintered off to form the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). In contrast to the MNLF’s secular-nationalist leanings, the MILF’s ideology is rooted in Islam. Although Hashim and most of the Maguindanao Moros broke away from the MNLF in 1977, it was not until 1984 that the organization declared itself completely separate as the MILF, emphasizing the rebel group’s Islamic orientation.46

The MILF had more of a religious orientation and agenda from its inception, demanding the establishment of an independent, sovereign Islamic state. Unlike the MNLF, which tried to achieve autonomy through political discourse, at the outset, the

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46 Ibid., 345.
MILF was not primarily interested in engaging with the government, but instead preferred warfare to sitting at a negotiating table.

The MILF’s mission is to “regain the illegally and immorally usurped freedom of the Bangsamoro people.”47 In splintering from the MNLF, whose aim was increased autonomy within the Philippine state, the MILF expressed its aim to achieve complete independence. The MILF’s long-term goal is the achievement of a sovereign Islamic state within the homeland of the Bangsamoro nation. In view of its aim to secede from the Philippines, the MILF would pose a formidable constitutional challenge to the Philippine government, as the decision to accept would have to play out in the legislative arena.

The MILF’s official ethos is Islam, in particular, radical Islamic revivalism. The MILF’s ideology also entails the Islamization of political institution and society.48 Despite its emphasis on Islamic ideology, the MILF does not officially believe in jihadi Islamism and has tried to distance itself from terrorist groups. Like the MNLF from which it originated, the MILF also believes in the cause of Moro nationalism, asserting the right of the Moro people to self-determination.

MILF leadership long revolved around Hashim, its founder and religious political leader. However, the MILF leadership has always been largely collective, emphasizing the Islamic principle of shura, or consultation, in governance. To this end, the MILF established a Central Committee, comprised of both ulama (learned religious leaders), and secular leaders. In a shift from its semi-conventional warfare tactics,

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following the 1997 ceasefire, the MILF has put its diplomatic arm to greater use in peace negotiations, but still with armed support, if necessary.⁴⁹ For 11 years, the MILF’s diplomatic leadership engaged in talks with the Philippine government on a Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD), part of a roadmap to a comprehensive, final peace treaty. This effort would fall through in 2008, but was a reflection of the MILF’s capability to engage with the government.

The MILF also has a military arm, the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF). During the time of the MNLF’s discussions with the Philippine government, the MILF built its base of supporters and armed forces. The MILF posed a credible military problem to the AFP, given the rapid buildup of paramilitary forces. The BIAF has a military chain of command much like the AFP, with responsibilities divided into regions throughout Mindanao. The MILF’s traditional army structure also involved fixed training camps, which served as bases for its operations and training. However, most of their camps were destroyed in President Joseph Estrada’s “All Out War” against the rebel groups. In 2007, the MILF had an estimated 12,000 fighters, but the MILF maintains that it has 45,000 armed combatants in addition to thousands of guerilla fighters.⁵⁰ Most of the BIAF soldiers are part-time fighters, training from time to time but still returning to their families and farm work. The BIAF has had broad periods of inactivity, in particular following its reiteration of the 1997 ceasefire in 2003. However, following the breakdown of the MOA-AD in 2008, renewed fighting took place. The MILF has been linked to Islamic terrorist groups such as Jemaah

⁴⁹ Ibid., 351.
⁵⁰ Ibid., 349.
Islamiyah in view of Hashim’s relationship with the latter’s leadership. The MILF maintains that it does not endorse terrorism, and has publicly renounced terrorist activity in the name of Islam.

The MILF’s political base largely comprises Moros from the Maguindanao, Maranao, and Iranun tribes, but its influence extends to Moros in non-Muslim parts of Mindanao such as Zamboanga City. Its membership consists of young men from internally displaced communities in conflict-ridden areas. The MILF has claimed a significant portion of Moro support: out of the four million Muslim Filipinos in Mindanao, the MILF claims that three million attended the 2005 MILF General Consultation.\(^{51}\) It was able to garner considerable support from Moro peoples in view of the learned Muslim religious leaders within its leadership. The MILF has also stated that differences in Moro ethnicity are no longer a point of contention. Claiming that it has the support of three-quarters of the Moro population in Mindanao, the MILF claims that it has a mandate from the Moro people as its representative.

The Philippine government did not recognize the MILF as a legitimate organization with which it could engage in discussions, and the OIC only recognized the more secular-leaning MNLF as the official representative body for Muslim Filipinos. For years, the MILF largely went ignored by the Philippine government throughout the course of peace talks in the Moro conflict. This has changed in recent years, with the MILF showing a willingness to prioritize peace negotiations as a means to achieve its primary goal, which has since shifted from a completely independent state, to a state with increased autonomy within the Philippines. The group has since

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\(^{51}\) Ibid., 347.
taken the reins from the MNLF, and presently offers the best chance among the Moro NSAGs in negotiating a political settlement with the Philippine government.
CHAPTER III

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE ATTEMPTS AT FINDING A JUST, SUSTAINABLE PEACE

Chapter III examines the various efforts at achieving a just, sustainable peace throughout the duration of the contemporary Moro conflict, analyzing the significant formal peace negotiations between the Moro insurgent groups and the Philippine government. The first part covers the Tripoli Agreement of 1976, the first milestone accord between the Philippine government (under President Ferdinand Marcos) and the MNLF. The second part details the negotiations under President Corazon Aquino, the Jeddah Accord and the establishment of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The third part explores the “full implementation” of the Tripoli Agreement in 1996, also known as the Final Peace Agreement, under President Fidel Ramos. The fourth part evaluates the talks on the draft Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in 2008. The fifth part looks at the most recent attempt at reconciliation under President Benigno Aquino III, the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro and the Bangsamoro Basic Law.

Each of the aforementioned attempts at peace will be evaluated based on the following criteria: ¹

1. Precision – the extent to which its addresses the key drivers in the conflict, and whether its provisions detail the permitted, prohibited, and mandatory actions in order to reduce the possibility of self-serving interpretation and deviation

2. Effectiveness – whether it achieved its explicit aims; the negotiation outcome: agreement, no agreement, or collapsed agreement;\(^2\) key factors that contribute to achievement or non-achievement of aims

3. Impact – the broader outcomes of the negotiations (positive or negative, intended and unintended), and if/how it effected broader socio-political change

4. Sustainability – whether it resulted in the effective establishment and handover of peace initiatives; if measures were set in place to ensure effective implementation in the longer term.

**The Tripoli Agreement, 1976**

**Overview**

The 1970s saw the most violent period in the MNLF’s fight for the Bangsamoro Republik and the bloodiest conflicts on Philippine territory since World War II. In the first four years since President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972, there were 120,000 civilian and military casualties. During this same period, 100,000 Muslims fled the conflict-ridden Mindanao region to seek refuge in neighboring Malaysia and one million people were internally displaced.\(^3\) In 1975, the conflict between the Philippine government and the MNLF had reached a stalemate.

It was also in 1975 that the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), an international entity formed around the idea of Muslim solidarity,\(^4\) recognized the MNLF as the sole representative for Muslim Filipinos and gave it observer status. With the help of the OIC and the Malaysian government (a founding member of the OIC) as mediators, the Philippine government then began its efforts for peace with the MNLF.

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They were able to facilitate a ceasefire agreement in 1975 and proceeded to the negotiating table soon afterward. Peace negotiations between the MNLF and the Marcos administration were also held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. In December 1976, members of both parties headed to Tripoli, Libya, to sign a peace accord detailing the conditions for Muslim autonomy, later known as the Tripoli Agreement.

Precision

The Tripoli Agreement was the Philippine government’s first attempt at formally addressing the Moro question. The MNLF’s chief demand from the conflict’s outset was complete independence from the Philippines in order to establish the Bangsamoro Republik. The Agreement did not address this demand, as the Philippine government was open only to a political solution that would not disrupt its territorial integrity and sovereignty. In view of this condition, the MNLF acquiesced and changed its original goal of ultimately seceding from the Republic of the Philippines, settling for increased autonomy but still as part of the Philippines. Thus, the Tripoli Agreement aimed toward “the establishment of Autonomy in the Southern Philippines within the realm of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines.”

The new area of autonomy would comprise 13 provinces in Mindanao, and the cities and villages therein.


In its first two provisions, the Tripoli Agreement stated that foreign policy and national defense would be under the purview of the central government in Manila. The government also laid claim to the mines and mineral resources in the region, but noted that some of the revenue would be reserved to promote the region’s development. The MNLF did not have the upper hand in these negotiations, in particular, having acceded to the Philippine government’s condition of only pursuing autonomy instead of secession. Nevertheless, as a whole, the Tripoli Agreement appeared promising for the Moro, guaranteeing autonomy for the Moros and granting them the freedom to form institutions necessary for the success of the new autonomous region.

Under the Agreement, the Moro would establish their own court system within the bounds of Shari’ah law, and would also be granted representation at the level of the Philippine Supreme Court. The Agreement also allowed for the creation of the region’s own educational system, but discussions on the curriculum’s relationship to the central education system would be the “subject of discussion later on.” This postponement of discussing technicalities became a common theme throughout the Agreement’s various provisions. The Agreement lacked severely in specificity and failed to provide details on the logistics of its implementation. It allowed for the Moro to be represented in the national government, but provided that “the number of representatives and ways of participation shall be fixed later.” Although it included a provision on the establishment of independent economic and financial systems, the Agreement did not expand upon their relationship with the central government, stating that it “shall be

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9 Ibid.
discussed later.”\textsuperscript{10} Other stipulations without a clear timeline were the integration of MNLF forces into the AFP, the establishment of special security forces, the structure of the independent administrative system, as well as the organizational structure of the region’s own legislative and executive branches. These provisions were essentially left in limbo, as there was no detailed timeline for the resolution of pending matters.

The Agreement also stated that President Marcos would appoint a provisional government in the interim and that the Philippine government would “take all necessary constitutional processes for the implementation of the entire Agreement.”\textsuperscript{11} The Agreement’s broad and vague provisions did not ensure equitable interpretation, putting the Moro at a potential disadvantage. In essence, the MNLF relied on the same government that had continuously marginalized and failed its constituents to effect the positive change agreed for the Moro people. The Tripoli Agreement’s severe lack of specificity left the door open for the Marcos administration to implement the Agreement as it saw fit, regardless of it potentially being inimical to the Moro interest.

Effectiveness

Whether or not the Tripoli Agreement successfully achieved its aim of establishing an autonomous region for the Moro is debatable. The Marcos administration believed it was a successful agreement, but the Moros concluded differently. The Marcos administration interpreted the Agreement’s provisions in a manner that left the Moros at a clear disadvantage, as it decided to require—without consulting the MNLF—a plebiscite to determine which provinces would be

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
incorporated into the autonomous region. Despite the MNLF’s opposition to a plebiscite, particularly since it was not included in the original terms of the Agreement, Marcos’ unilateral decision to require plebiscitary consent was based on the 16th provision he had added, which gave the government the right to take “all necessary constitutional processes” in implementing the Agreement. Marcos justifying the plebiscite via the Philippine Constitution was ironic in that he had suspended its legality in his declaration of martial law. Nevertheless, the plebiscite took place and only ten out of the 13 provinces voted “for” inclusion in the autonomous region. The Marcos administration oversaw the Agreement’s implementation by issuing Presidential Decree No. 1618, creating two autonomous governments in Central and Western Mindanao comprising the ten provinces, which the MNLF’s Central Committee did not recognize. In spite of the numerous negotiations, the Philippine government ultimately decided to neglect and disregard the MNLF’s input, thus fueling the already heightened perception of injustice against the Moro people. The MNLF subsequently accused the government of deception, further fostering the feelings of mistrust between the parties.

Although both sides did sign the Tripoli Agreement, in view of its failed implementation, the breakdown of negotiations, and the resumption of hostilities in its wake, it is considered a collapsed agreement. The Agreement may have been effective

12 Ibid.

in “the establishment of Autonomy in the Southern Philippines,” 14 but its execution did not align with the MNLF’s ideal of one autonomous region, and many of its other provisions were not implemented. Therefore, the Agreement was also ineffective in its implicit aim of resolving the Moro conflict, with the principal stumbling block to its potential successful outcome being the Philippine government itself.

Impact

The MNLF and the Moro felt betrayed by the government’s execution of the referendum and the creation of two regional governments. Disillusioned by the outcome of the Agreement and the collapse of negotiations, Misuari and the MNLF reverted to armed struggle in its continuing effort to achieve Moro independence. An unintended consequence of the Agreement’s collapse was the resumption of hostilities not long after the Philippine government began to implement the Agreement. Talks between the MNLF and the Philippine government would not resume for another decade.

The breakdown of the Philippine government-MNLF negotiations also fostered discord within the MNLF. Frustrated with the lack of progress, MNLF Foreign Affairs Head Salamat Hashim viewed Misuari and other negotiators too willing to comply with the government’s conditions. Hashim also thought that Misuari focused excessively on secular elements and not enough on the MNLF’s Islamic principles. As a consequence, Hashim and his followers would break away from the MNLF in 1984, renaming their group the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) which would become a significant actor in the continuing fight for Moro independence.

In spite of its collapse and virtual failure as a bilateral peace accord, one positive outcome of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement was the MNLF’s concession of shifting from its initial demand for complete independence from the Philippine state, to agreeing to autonomy for the Moro region within Philippine territory, which allowed for negotiations to proceed. It would also provide the basis for subsequent peace negotiations between the Philippine government and Moro NSAGs for the next two decades.

**Sustainability**

The Tripoli Agreement was far from sustainable, being problematic from the outset. It was inadequate in its specificity: its vague provisions, lack of a detailed timeline, and openness to interpretation left it vulnerable to self-serving abuse. It was implemented unilaterally by the Marcos administration, contributing to tensions with the MNLF and fostering feelings of mistrust. In addition to the divergent opinions on the Agreement, it lacked a basic monitoring mechanism for its proper implementation. An impasse was almost certainly inevitable.

**The Jeddah Accord and the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, 1986-1989**

**Overview**

The assassination of Senator Benigno Aquino II, Marcos’ chief political rival, catalyzed the movement that would put an end to Marcos’ 21-year reign. Corazon Aquino, the Senator’s widow, won the election following the People Power Revolution of 1986, the *coup d’état* that led to Marcos’ ouster. Peace had emerged as a vital concept in life post-People Power, the manifestation of the Filipinos’ increasing yearning for social justice. The government was fully aware that the success of the
Philippine peace movement required the drafting of a new constitution and the resolution of insurgencies through formal negotiations. President Aquino’s administration sought national reconciliation with the Moro NSAGs. In a gesture of peace and good faith, Aquino herself went to meet with Misuari in Jolo, the capital of Sulu. Soon thereafter, Misuari met with delegates from the Aquino administration in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to explore the possibility of resuming formal negotiations.

Precision

The Tripoli Agreement had only allowed for 13 of the 23 provinces in the Philippine south to be potentially granted autonomy, and Marcos’ unilateral implementation included only the 10 provinces which voted for autonomy in the MNLF-opposed referendum. However, in exploring the potential reopening of peace talks, the MNLF had added to its conditions, asking that all 23 provinces of Mindanao be included in the autonomous territory. The Jeddah Accord stated that the Philippine government and MNLF panel agreed to continue discussions on the newly proposed scope of autonomy, “subject to democratic processes.” Another significant component of the Accord was the establishment of a joint commission comprising three representatives from both parties to refine the details of the proposed autonomy, which would have 90 days to complete its work. The deadline was a welcome change from the vague, indefinite terms of the Tripoli Agreement. As work on drafting a new


Philippine Constitution was taking place at the same time as negotiations on the Jeddah Accord, the Accord also proposed the issuance of an Executive Order that would effectively suspend any provisions within the draft constitution pertaining to Moro autonomy in order to give the MNLF time to consult with its constituents.

Effectiveness

The Jeddah Accord aimed to establish a joint commission to discuss and draft the mechanism and details for the proposal to grant autonomy to Mindanao, as well as create committees at the provincial level to implement and monitor the cessation of hostilities between both parties.\textsuperscript{17} It ultimately failed in its aims and no agreement was reached. The Jeddah Accord between the Philippine government and the MNLF is not included in the Philippine government’s archives of signed agreements on the Moro peace process.

In the course of the Jeddah Accord negotiations, the MNLF claimed that the government panel made a verbal commitment to grant autonomy to all 23 provinces.\textsuperscript{18} The government panel issued a press statement clarifying that no such verbal pledge was ever given, and that the Accord pertained only to discussions on the MNLF’s proposed terms. Mistrust again began to surface between the two parties, with the MNLF claiming that the government panel “made a lot of commitments they cannot fulfill.”\textsuperscript{19} The issue of the demarcation of the territory covered within the proposed autonomous region was another significant point of contention. In the Jeddah Accord,

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.


the MNLF proposed autonomy for 23 Mindanaon provinces: the 13 original provinces specified in the Tripoli Agreement and an additional 10 provinces, subject to plebiscitary consent following a transitional period. The Philippine government countered with a proposal to maintain the autonomous area of 10 provinces (that voted for autonomy in the Marcos-era referendum) and hold a plebiscite for the additional three, thereby restoring the Tripoli Agreement’s original proposal of 13 autonomous provinces. The MNLF rejected this proposal and, following three months of fruitless negotiations, the talks collapsed. Both parties again stood at an impasse, but this time, the MNLF did not revert to armed struggle.

Impact

The establishment of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) without MNLF involvement was an unintended, long-term outcome of the unsuccessful Jeddah Accord. Despite the failure of the peace talks, the Aquino administration continued to push for regional autonomy, continuing the unilateral implementation of earlier provisions of the Tripoli Agreement, but within the mandate of the new constitution. The 1987 Philippine Constitution explicitly provided for the establishment of an autonomous regional government in Mindanao, conditional to the creation of a Regional Constitutional Commission that would help Congress formulate the Organic Act granting autonomy. Following nearly two decades of authoritarian rule, in an effort to emphasize the democratic process, the constitutional provision also stated that the creation of an autonomous region would be subject to plebiscitary consent of the region’s inhabitants. Aquino’s administration had expanded the degree of autonomy in comparison to the Tripoli Agreement, detailing the establishment of the
Shari‘ah courts, economic powers, and the creation of a special regional police force. Nevertheless, the MNLF called for the plebiscite’s suspension and asked Moros to boycott it, but it was nonetheless held in 1989. Only four of the 13 provinces in question voted to be included in the ARMM, disillusioning many Moros who had placed hope on the prospect of autonomy. The creation of the ARMM entered into force in 1990, but in spite of the purported sovereignty of the region, both the MNLF and MILF remained unconvinced by this unilateral attempt at resolving the Moro conflict.

Sustainability

The Jeddah Accord itself cannot be evaluated on its sustainability in view of the non-achievement of its aims and its non-ratification. The Philippine government’s decision to pursue the establishment of the ARMM via the constitution and Regional Constitutional Commission did not entail negotiations with the MNLF and cannot be evaluated within the context of attempts at peace with Moro NSAGs.

The Final Peace Agreement, 1996

Overview

During his administration in the mid-1990s, President Fidel Ramos acknowledged the need for a sustainable peace in the southern Philippines. He expressed a desire to find an effective resolution to the impasse that resulted from the failed implementation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement and the collapsed peace efforts of the Aquino administration. The Ramos administration underscored the need for

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reconciliation and national unification. Ramos acknowledged that the social fragmentation and resulting instability in Mindanao had a deleterious effect on the rest of the country’s welfare, impeding the broader economic development he sought for the Philippines, and that finding a solution to the Moro conflict would be to the benefit of all parties concerned.

To this end, Ramos embarked on resuming peace negotiations with the MNLF. He created the National Unification Commission (NUC) to launch efforts in developing a broad, comprehensive peace strategy. Ramos then established the Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process (OPAPP), charged with continuing the NUC’s tasks as well as handling all matters related to peace processes with insurgent groups such as the MNLF and MILF. Over the course of four years, the Philippine government engaged with the MNLF leadership to pursue the task of developing and expanding upon the provisions of the Tripoli Agreement that were left to be discussed at a later date.

In 1996, Ramos’ efforts in brokering peace with the MNLF, still the OIC’s only recognized representative for Muslim Filipinos, resulted in the signing of the Final Peace Agreement (FPA) in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Precision

Although described by the government as the “full implementation” of the provisions detailed in the Tripoli Agreement, the FPA deviated from the 1976 document, and the Philippine government largely formulated the peace plan.22 The 1995 Interim Agreement was a precursor to the FPA and its approximately 123

“consensus points” between the MNLF panel and the Philippine government laid the foundations for the FPA. A much more specific and precise document than the Tripoli Agreement, some of the FPA’s main points included:

- Establishing the Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD), Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), and Consultative Assembly;
- Expanding the territory of the ARMM;
- Integrating former MNLF forces into the AFP and PNP;
- Establishing a Special Regional Security Force for the ARMM;
- Establishing a Regional Assembly;
- ARMM citizens’ right to representation in all organs of the Central government;
- Establishment of Shari’ah courts.23

In lieu of the MNLF-supported provisional government stipulated in the Tripoli Agreement, the Philippine government laid out a two-phase transition. Phase I of the FPA entailed a three-year extendable transitional structure during which the SPCPD would be established, falling under the purview of the OPAPP. Phase I would give the MNLF a trial period to prove their capability to govern the now-14 provinces in the SZOPAD in preparation for the eventual formation of their new autonomous Muslim region. Another significant part of Phase I was the integration of 7,500 former MNLF members into the AFP and PNP. Phase II entailed the operation of the newly formed Regional Autonomous Government24 following the transition phase, and also featured the requirement for a plebiscite in the SZOPAD to determine which provinces would

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constitute the final autonomous territory, a point of contention throughout the negotiations.

In addition to progress achieved in the Jakarta Accord, as the FPA is also known, the MNLF and the Philippine national government also became more agreeable: the MNLF allied with President Ramos’ *Lakas* party in order to win the ARMM elections, providing Misuari the opportunity to become the region’s governor legally until the FPA’s provisions entered into force.

**Effectiveness**

The product of four years of negotiations during the Ramos administration, the FPA is considered an agreement. The FPA set out to resume discussions and elaborate upon the provisions of the Tripoli Agreement that were left for further discussion, while at the same time reaffirming the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines. It was the magnum opus in a four-year negotiation process, one that was more detailed and consultative in nature than its predecessors. Despite the two decades between them, like the Tripoli Agreement, the FPA prescribed autonomy as a cure-all for the Mindanao region’s endemic conflict.

The FPA itself was a milestone in the peace process between the Philippine government and a Moro NSAG. However, in spite of its feasibility on paper, its successful implementation posed many problems. One of the issues with the FPA and the related Executive Order was the divide between the Executive and Congress. The FPA did not garner full Congressional support. Six senators and nine congressmen filed a petition with the Supreme Court to invalidate the FPA. These Christian Filipino

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24 Santos, Jr., “War and Peace on the Moro Front,” 68.
politicians were opposed to the FPA’s implementation, considering it unfair to the non-Moro communities living within the proposed provinces of the expanded ARMM, fearing they would be subjected to Muslim dominance and Shari’ah law. The consequence of this Congressional backlash was a weakened Executive Order.

The MNLF found the Accord’s implementation insufficient. Executive Order 371, the presidential decree that initiated the Agreement, featured imprecise provisions and notable omissions. The FPA’s provision regarding 44 MNLF members in the creation of the Consultative Assembly was dropped, as well as the provisions on the government agencies that fell under the purview of the SPCPD. The Executive Order also excluded the FPA provision on the allocation of funds for the regional organs, a consequential move that had a direct and adverse impact on the success of the new autonomous region.

The FPA resulted in the establishment of several key institutions in the ARMM, but they were created in an environment that was not conducive to their success. Their impacts were limited by lack of funding, no police powers, and no control over national programs and projects that were to be within their purview. In essence, these ARMM transitional organs’ function was to provide the President’s office with recommendations. As a result of the Executive Order’s omission of certain details of the FPA’s provisions on the funding of the autonomous institutions, the Philippine government failed to provide the ARMM’s fledgling administrative systems with the

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\[\text{25 Carolan, “Solving the Moro Problem,” 217.}
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\[\text{26 Ibid.}
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resources necessary to bolster the region’s economic development and provide for its constituents.

The MNLF blamed the national government for not generating the necessary resources to provide the population of the ARMM with basic goods and services, leaving the region to continue its struggle with extreme poverty. They again felt that the government was ignoring the Moro people in the ARMM anew, and even its non-Moro constituents. The MNLF believed that the Philippine government was actively marginalizing and undermining them in implementing the Accord. The once-optimistic Misuari voiced these mounting disappointments with the execution of the FPA. He warned that socioeconomic conditions needed to improve, otherwise the MNLF fighters may return to the hills or perhaps join the more militant MILF. Misuari expressed dismay at the government’s decision again to implement the peace agreement unilaterally, while never fully acknowledging his own leadership failures and mismanagement of the ARMM government as its elected governor.27

Impact

Although the FPA itself looked good on paper, problems arose anew in its implementation. Executive Order 371, the presidential decree initiating the FPA, was lacking in precision and specificity. As a consequence, much like the Tripoli Agreement, implementation proved controversial. The MNLF holds the general view that it has been marginalized from participation in the peace process, and following yet another perceived betrayal, the Moro people have come to view the proposed solution of autonomy in a negative light.

An unintended outcome of the FPA was increased tensions with other non-MNLF Mindanaon. The lumad, indigenous groups, resented the lack of representation in these continuous government negotiations. The MILF also threatened any prospects of peace, as it rejected the FPA. The Philippine government erred in consulting only with the MNLF and excluding the rest of the communities in Mindanao.

Nevertheless, there were some small gains from the FPA. The MNLF had espoused the idea of “Liberation through Peace and Development,” moving away from combatant and guerilla tactics. The demobilization—not disarmament—of MNLF armed forces was a positive consequence. Although they did not agree to disarm altogether, the Philippine national government was satisfied with the MNLF’s demobilization effort, and included the FPA provision to integrate former MNLF forces into the AFP and PNP in the Executive Order.

The FPA also allowed the MNLF to shift from an NSAG to a more political role. The MNLF was at the helm of the ARMM’s government for two successive terms (1996-2005) and its leaders were able successfully to run for local government posts. However, the MNLF realized that it is “harder to run a government than to rebel against it.”

Despite the challenges in implementation, the FPA featured some positive gains for the Moro in terms of “recognition, representation, participation, and power-

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28 Ibid.

29 Santos, Jr. “War and Peace on the Moro Front,” 74.
sharing.”30 Another positive, albeit unintended outcome of the FPA is how it illustrated that granting autonomy is not the panacea to the Moro conflict. Instead, it underscored that the Moro conflict’s root causes, core issues dating back centuries, deserve attention, in particular, the profound divide between the Moros and Christians, and the complicated issue of land ownership, among others.

Sustainability

The FPA may have bolstered the structure of the ARMM by providing a Moro executive and legislature, as well as autonomous economic and education systems. However, the Executive Order that was charged with its implementation did not have the same degree of precision as the FPA itself. Despite the enthusiasm of the Philippine government and the MNLF in signing a more detailed Agreement that laid the groundwork for pursuing the Moro’s long sought after self-determination, the FPA’s envisaged provisions failed to manifest. The Moros saw the FPA as yet another instance of government betrayal and broken promises. Executive Order 371 significantly weakened the effectiveness of the FPA’s implementation, which contributed to its unsuitability as a solution to the Moro conflict.

The FPA proved insufficient and unsustainable in its explicit aim of resolving the Moro conflict, and turned out to be far from the final peace agreement between the Philippine government and Moro NSAGs.

30 Santos, Jr., “Delays in the Peace Negotiations between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front,” 5.
The Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain, 2008

Overview

The Philippine peace process in Mindanao was set back significantly by President Joseph Estrada. In 2000, while in the thick of peace negotiations with the MILF, Estrada violated the ceasefire and authorized the AFP to seize the insurgent group’s camps, declaring what he referred to as “all out war.” The AFP’s aggressive military campaign revived the violent conflict in Mindanao. Its chief consequence was the dissolution of the MILF peace panel and the effective halting of peace negotiations with the Philippine government. Another key outcome of Estrada’s All Out War was the MILF reverting from conventional to guerrilla warfare; and, more notably, the MILF’s declaration of a jihad against the Philippine government in the context of its betrayal in having violated the ceasefire.

Shortly after becoming president in 2001, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo\(^31\) sought to rectify her predecessor’s error and resumed peace negotiations with the MILF. With Malaysian assistance, the Arroyo administration was able to begin the peace talks anew, which eventually resulted in the 2001 Tripoli Agreement on Peace. Unlike the original Tripoli Agreement of 1976, which featured provisions on the proposed autonomy of the Moro, the 2001 Agreement featured implementation guidelines on the security aspect of negotiations between the Philippine government and MILF.\(^32\) It

\(^31\) Arroyo was elected Vice-President of the Republic of the Philippines but assumed the presidency following the ouster of President Joseph Estrada in the Second People Power Revolution.

divided negotiations into three clusters: security, humanitarian aid and development, and ancestral domain. The first two clusters established the Bangsamoro Development Agency and an International Monitoring Team to oversee the implementation of any future agreements. The cluster on ancestral domain would prove the most contentious.

The subsequent years would see more intermittent conflict between the Moro NSAGs and Philippine forces, and also among the NSAGs themselves. However, the peace process continued and, by July 2008, both sides reached a breakthrough on the complicated issue of ancestral domain. The Philippine government and MILF leaders initialed the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) on July 27, 2008, with the signing ceremony scheduled for August 5. However, the ceremony was canceled following the Supreme Court’s issuance of a temporary restraining order to allow for deliberations on the MOA-AD’s constitutionality. The immediate consequence: renewed fighting between the MILF and Philippine forces.

Precision

The MOA-AD was designed as the roadmap for peace in Mindanao. Compared to other attempts at peace, the MOA-AD was considered the most precise, given the specificity of its provisions and the timeline of further discussions on certain matters such as governance (rather than postponing them indefinitely which the Tripoli Agreement of 1976 did). The proposed landmark legislation attempted to address the injustices against the Moro and indigenous peoples: the occupation and seizure of their ancestral territory. One of its chief aims was the establishment of a homeland for the Moro, the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE). This “state within a state” was to have an “associate” relationship with the Philippine central government in Manila, which
was broadly interpreted as equal weight between the two parties on various aspects of BJE governance. The BJE would also have its own legislative, judicial, administrative, security, economic, and educational systems.

The MOA-AD would have given the Moro more control over their economic future. Wealth-sharing in the context of income derived from the region’s natural resources saw a large improvement: 75:25 in favor of the BJE. In contrast to previous agreements, the MOA-AD would have finally allowed the Moro to manage and reap significant economic benefits from its own natural resources. However, the Agreement’s most controversial aspect was that it also gives the BJE the freedom to enter into trade and economic relations with foreign nations, provided these “do not include aggression against” the Philippines’ central government. Opposition lawmakers considered this provision treasonous.

Although the MOA-AD was more specific on governance than prior agreements, the Agreement was deliberately vague in this regard. The Agreement provided that the BJE’s relationship with the Philippine government would have been “associative, characterized by shared authority and responsibility,” but it delegated further discussions on this matter to the Comprehensive Compact, which was provided three months to detail the proposed shared sovereignty.

Most of the MOA’s main provisions were considered “consensus points” between the two parties, but the most significant novelty in the MOA-AD was its recognition and definition of the Bangsamoro. Literally translated as the “Moro Nation,” the MOA-AD’s definition was expanded to include “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.”

More importantly, the MOA-AD also recognized the Bangsamoro as a First Nation, opening up discussions on ancestral domain. Previous attempts at peace never acknowledged the ARMM and its surrounding provinces as the ancestral territory, and this highly contentious provision of the MOA-AD differed significantly from previous agreements in this respect. The MOA-AD had a more expansive geographic scope than any of the earlier agreements on the creation of an autonomous Muslim region. The proposed BJE would comprise the ARMM, six municipalities in Lanao del Norte province (which voted “yes” in previous plebiscites), as well as 737 Muslim-majority villages. The geographic element of the BJE was most controversial, as it would have meant a significant increase in Muslim-governed territory in the majority Christian Philippines.

Effectiveness

If implemented, the MOA-AD could have resulted in increased peace in the Mindanao region in the context of conflict with the MNLF and MILF. The Moro people would finally have been granted a higher degree of autonomy, enabling them to govern most of what was considered their ancestral territory.

A major contributing factor to the failure to ratify the MOA-AD was the Supreme Court’s decision on its constitutionality. The expanded territory and sweeping powers of the BJE did not bode well with Christian Filipino politicians whose jurisdictions would be adversely affected, and more importantly, were not consulted in

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the negotiations. They rejected the terms of the MOA-AD given that the Agreement was developed without broad consultation with the region’s other non-Muslim inhabitants from both settler and indigenous communities. Self-interested local leaders, referred to as “warlord politicians” by the MILF, were key to killing the MOA-AD. Fearing reduced political power, they sought an injunction from the Philippine Supreme Court to halt the signing of the agreement. The Supreme Court issued the temporary restraining order and, after two months of deliberations, declared aspects of the MOA-AD unconstitutional on several grounds.

The MOA-AD was deemed unconstitutional in its violation of the 1997 Indigenous Peoples Rights Act, which gives indigenous cultural communities the right to fully participate in matters that may affect their lives. The drafting of the MOA-AD did not involve consultations with stakeholders other than the MILF and, in this regard, the Court said the peace panel transcended the boundaries of its authority. The MOA-AD was also considered unconstitutional in its declaration that all provisions would enter into force upon signing of the Comprehensive Compact, which the Court considered as “virtually guaranteeing” the enactment of relevant laws without Congressional approval, essentially tantamount to usurping the Legislative’s powers. The Supreme Court ruling tabled the MOA-AD and stopped it in its tracks.

Impact

A substantial although unintended negative outcome of the MOA-AD—or rather, its blocked signing—was the resumption of violent conflict between the MILF

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35 Ibid.
and the Philippine government. Many Moros were disillusioned and viewed the Supreme Court ruling as another instance of the Philippine government’s broken promises. Following the Supreme Court’s decision, the MILF concluded that the government would never grant the Bangsamoro genuine self-rule. Disgruntled, rogue MILF commanders attacked Christian communities, reigniting secular violence. More than 500,000 were displaced as a result of the renewed fighting.36

The MOA-AD addressed important Moro grievances by acknowledging the Bangsamoro as a First Nation and the existence of Moro ancestral domain. Although it is likely that both parties would have had to extend the proposed timeline to detail provisions on governance, and accept modifications in order to move forward, the MOA-AD, despite its failure to become law, still represented the best roadmap to peace at that juncture.

Sustainability

Instead of laying the groundwork for sustainable peace as was intended, the failure of the MOA-AD led to renewed eruption of conflict in Mindanao. There was another upsurge of violence in 2008, following the Supreme Court’s declaration that the MOA-AD was unconstitutional. In retaliation for this perceived injustice and betrayal, the MILF turned its attention to civilians, launching attacks resulting in at

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least 300 deaths, including 104 civilians. The violent conflict resulted in the displacement of about one million people in the southern Philippines.

The breakdown of the peace process following the failure to ratify the MOA-AD was critical in that it stemmed not from the revival of violent conflict itself, but from deep skepticism about the MOA-AD’s substance. In contrast to other peace negotiations and their “pick-up-from-where-we-left-off” nature, this break is fundamentally different in that some of the MOA-AD’s key principles were deemed unconstitutional. In addition, the MILF and Moro people lost trust in the Philippine government yet again, rendering the prospect of resuming negotiations in the near future nearly impossible.

It was not until July 2009 that both the government and the MILF declared suspension of their respective military operations with a view to revive the peace process. This ceasefire seemed to hold and, in 2010, the MILF was able to begin pursuing negotiations with the administration of President Benigno Aquino III.

**The Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro and the Bangsamoro Basic Law, 2014**

In 2010, Benigno Aquino III, son of former President Corazon Aquino, campaigned for the Philippine presidency with a political platform that underscored the need for a lasting peace in the Philippine south. Peace with the MILF was a key part of his campaign, and Aquino III promised a consultative, transparent peace process with

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the Moro NSAG, as well as a thorough assessment of the law that established the ARMM.\textsuperscript{40} Aquino III won, with one of the largest electoral margins in the history of the Philippines.

Like his mother before him, in an effort to foster trust between the MILF and the Philippine government, Aquino III decided to personally meet with the MILF leadership. Aquino III and MILF Chairman Ebrahim met in Japan to advance the peace process. Negotiations did not go off to a smooth start, however, given that the MILF wanted to revert to the 2008 MOA-AD, which had been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. In contrast, the Philippine government sought to develop a peacebuilding framework that was constitutionally watertight, hoping to avoid repeating the disastrous outcomes of the failed MOA-AD. To this end, they developed the Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro (FAB) in 2012, followed by the Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro (CAB) in 2014.\textsuperscript{41} The CAB provided a detailed peacebuilding and peacekeeping framework that would adjust and consolidate all previous agreements between the two parties since Philippine government-MILF negotiations began in 1997.

Precision

The provisions of the FAB differed greatly from the unsuccessful MOA-AD. One of the key differences between the two was the MILF’s agreement to plebiscitary consent to determine the territories encompassed in the Bangsamoro, accepting the possibility of losing part of its ancestral domain or “core territory.” Congressional

\textsuperscript{40} “The Philippines: Renewing Prospects for Peace in Mindanao,” 5.

approval was necessary to enable any legislation that may potentially replace the existing ARMM, and a plebiscite would be held no later than 120 days afterward.42

The FAB, recognizing the Bangsamoro people, laid the foundation for the establishment of an autonomous entity with the powers of law, taxation, and justice, within the broad outline of Philippine law.43 The FAB gave both parties a year to come to an agreement on all aspects of its four annexes: Transitional Arrangements and Modalities, Revenue Generation and Wealth Sharing, Power Sharing, and Normalization (human and security issues, including transitional justice and disarmament). The highly detailed annexes provided for the creation of a Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) to draft the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) that would eventually establish the Bangsamoro political entity; provide details on revenue sharing and other aspects of autonomous fiscal administration; specify the concurrent and exclusive powers of both parties; as well as disbanding NSAGs and decommissioning arms—not disarming—under an international body, among others.44

These efforts were also to help ensure clear, detailed provisions on the nature of the relationship between the MILF and the Philippine government once the Bangsamoro


would come into existence.45

The historic peace plan was signed in October 2012, a significant moment as the leaders of the MILF, a Moro NSAG and once a separatist group, set foot in Malacañan Palace for the first time. The next step was the BTC’s formulation of the BBL, which would be considered the most expansive, inclusive, and detailed of all peacebuilding and peacekeeping agreements formulated by the Philippine government and Moro leaders.

Effectiveness

The signing of the CAB by both parties was a positive indicator of potential progress. However, passing the BBL, part of the CAB, would prove to be yet another point of profound contention in Philippine politics. It centered on the creation of a new, self-governing body that would have replaced the ARMM in an MILF-led process. The Bangsamoro government would operate on a parliamentary system, in contrast to the bicameral model of the Philippine national government.46

Unlike the armed conflicts with the MNLF and MILF, the BBL presented another constitutional challenge. Drafting legislation that would be within the limits of the Philippine Constitution and, at the same time, satisfactory to all parties involved was a daunting task. The topics that needed to be addressed and agreed included the sharing of power over Bangsamoro waters, resolving problems of ancestral domain, and disarmament of the MILF, among others. Perhaps indicative of its commitment to


ending the conflict and finding a lasting peace, the MILF had even begun to formalize the electoral participation of its political arm, the United Bangsamoro Justice Party, hoping to increase its influence in the finalization of the BBL.

A major factor that contributed to the non-achievement of the CAB was the Congressional stumbling block. The Philippine Congress is largely modeled after the American bicameral system, with committees in each chamber tasked with considering and amending proposed bills, then deliberating them in a joint session. An ad hoc committee was formed in the House of Representatives to evaluate the provisions of the Bangsamoro bill, holding public hearings and executive sessions to evaluate the possibility of finalizing the BBL. By December 2014, neither the House of Representatives’ nor the Senate’s committee had submitted its report on the BBL. Nevertheless, Congressional leaders said that it would be passed early the following year, which turned out to be a grave miscalculation. Although Aquino III, riding a wave of public approval, had used his popularity to tilt the scales in the BBL’s favor, it was no match for the Christian Filipino’s unfortunately ingrained anti-Moro sentiments. The negative attitudes towards the Moro were reflective of the deep schism between the Christian Filipinos and the Moro Filipinos, an unfortunate consequence of centuries under the colonial powers’ use of the “divide-and-rule” strategy. Similarly, the Moros also had their reservations on engaging with Christian Filipinos, fearing another betrayal at the hands of the Christian bureaucratic hegemon.

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However, the event that truly reversed the course of any possible progress under the BBL and CAB was the Mamasapano incident, the botched PNP Special Action Forces (PNP-SAF) mission in Mamasapano, Maguindanao, where they clashed with MILF and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).\textsuperscript{48} The PNP-SAF mission aimed to arrest two explosives experts affiliated with the Indonesian terrorist organization Jemaah Islamiyah, who were hiding in a BIFF camp surrounded by MILF-controlled territory. The PNP had failed to notify MILF officials of the secret operation, and, when the SAF entered the BIFF camp, a skirmish ensued. The bloody conflict resulted in the deaths of 44 SAF, 18 MILF members, 5 civilians, and an unknown number of BIFF fighters. The Mamasapano incident indefinitely suspended the Congressional hearings on the BBL’s provisions. However, hearings on its constitutionality continued until Senator Ferdinand Marcos Jr., son of the former president, used his chairmanship of several key committees to postpone indefinitely all deliberations on the BBL.

Impact

The Mamasapano incident complicated the peace process because of the MILF’s involvement in the skirmish. However, the group maintained that their troops were acting in self-defense, since the PNP-SAF did not coordinate with the MILF as required by the provisions of the ceasefire. To move the peace process forward, both parties conducted investigations on the Mamasapano clash. The long, drawn out

\textsuperscript{48} The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters splintered from the MILF and promised to continue their fight for independence and the creation of an Islamic state, engaging in what the Philippine government qualifies as radical terrorist activity.
government investigation into the matter also had high media coverage, which only amplified national mistrust in the Moro population.

Nevertheless, an unfortunate consequence of the Mamasapano ordeal was that it exacerbated the fears that the CAB would only bring more violence to Mindanao and possibly to the rest of the nation. People feared that bolstering Moro autonomy would also strengthen Muslim separatism and foment violent extremism in Mindanao. The Mamasapano incident revived the notion that a lasting peace in the southern Philippines may not be possible.

Sustainability

The Mamasapano incident and the heightened anti-Moro sentiment also had an influence on the next steps for and the future of the BBL. The Senate renamed the BBL as the Basic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (BLBAR) in order to redefine its provisions on power sharing with an emphasis on Manila’s greater authority. Important provisions on the Moro’s exclusive powers were either omitted, reduced, or shifted to the other categories of concurrent or reserved powers.49 It also significantly decreased the authorities of the existing ARMM government, particularly those on economic administration such as budgeting, permits and licensing for agricultural forest and land management, as well as foreign investments. Moro purview on governance, taxation, and natural resource management was also negatively affected. Congress seized upon the re-emergence of negative perceptions of the Moro essentially to gut the progressive BBL, and its provisions were no longer compatible with the CAB. Efforts in political self-preservation continue to encourage

Congressional leaders, who fear the reputation of having quashed the BBL, to leave the legislation in the air by skipping deliberations to ensure there is no quorum, precluding resolution of the issue.

Although both the Philippine government and MILF peace panels ratified the CAB, the absence of Congressional approval for the BBL is an impediment to the fulfillment the CAB’s provisions, which means that none of the peacekeeping and peacebuilding institutions it envisaged have been established. However, its effects on the sustainability of peace in the Mindanao may be the lessons learned from this Congressional stumbling block. It underscores the point that autonomy can no longer be seen as the panacea to the Moro conflict, but rather evaluating the significance of autonomy to the Moro could be an effective means to address the key issues behind the Moro conflict. The CAB endeavored to address sustainably the long-standing injustices that had not been considered with this degree of precision in prior peace agreements, such as the issues on land ownership and ancestral domain, power and wealth sharing, as well as indigenous people’s rights. The sustainability of the CAB can also be seen in its impact on future peace talks, explicitly promising to avoid unilateral implementation and fostering the notion of parties as partners in a fruitful and productive peace process.
CHAPTER IV

RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE QUEST FOR A JUST, SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND FINAL THOUGHTS

Peace and justice are two sides of the same coin.

– President Dwight Eisenhower

The Philippine government and the Moro NSAGs have engaged in numerous negotiations over the last four decades in their efforts to find a just, lasting peace, but the quest continues. Given its sheer depth and complexity, there is no panacea; no single, clear-cut solution to finding the just, sustainable peace that the Moros have long yearned for. Chapter IV proposes peace initiatives that could be adopted and adapted to address and resolve the Moro conflict to pursue a comprehensive, just, sustainable peace. Given that values issues are present in a multitude of aspects of the extremely protracted Moro conflict, Chapter IV provides its recommendations for peace from a values perspective, emphasizing the value of peace.

Peace in the context of the Moro conflict does not mean the mere absence of violence and armed conflict. Rather, those ravaged by decades of conflict are seeking a sustainable, long-term peace, one that establishes the conditions under which they can benefit from political stability and economic opportunity,¹ much like those who live outside of conflict-ridden areas. Peacebuilding in the Moro conflict entails the efforts to achieve sustainable peace writ large, through the creation of a governance framework that enables stakeholders to resolve their disputes without resorting to violence. To achieve peace in the Moro context, three dimensions need to be

addressed: negotiating and policymaking at the macro-level; community-based peacebuilding at the meso-level; and healing and nurturing non-violence and peace at the individual level.

Negotiating and Policymaking toward Peacebuilding

This dimension of the search for peace takes place at the macro-level,\(^2\) which involves the Philippine state, Moro NSAGs, and the various international actors engaged in the peacemaking process.

*The Philippine Government*

The rule of law is requisite for a lasting, sustainable peace. It is essential to prevent and resolve violent conflict, achieve justice, and maintain peace and security, among others. The Philippine government remains one of the primary actors in the peace process, considering its mandate to ensure the rule of law prevails in the country.

The following are recommendations for the Philippine government to advance the peace process:

- In its efforts to pursue peace in Mindanao, future negotiations with Moro NSAGs should use the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro as their foundation, just as the 1976 Tripoli Agreement served as a benchmark for such negotiations over two decades. Despite its shortcomings, the CAB is the most in-depth attempt at addressing the various grievances of the Moro people, particularly in its agreement to “work out a program for transitional justice to address the legitimate grievances of the Bangsamoro people, correct historical injustices, and address human rights violations.”\(^3\)

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\(^3\) GPH Peace Panel and MILF Peace Panel, “The Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro.”
• The Philippine government should attempt to expedite the approval of legislation that would establish the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity or a similar autonomous region.

• The Philippine government should launch a communication strategy emphasizing Filipino unity in a bid to quell anti-Moro sentiment and to also prepare the rest of the Philippines for Bangsamoro autonomy. Such educational efforts are needed to generate public support for any new peace agreement. Popular support is beneficial to the peace process and for allowing a new version of the CAB to make its way into law while avoiding legislative stumbling blocks. More importantly, such a campaign aids the endeavor of effacing the negative perceptions of the Moro and halting their continued marginalization.

• The Philippine government should use its capacity to establish a framework to pursue restorative justice. As in Rwanda, Timor Leste, and other conflict-ridden countries, the pursuit of justice and reconciliation is helpful in promoting the coexistence of communities in conflict. Rather than criminal justice which is punitive only for the perpetrator, and which is almost impossible to exercise in conflicts where both sides have likely committed atrocities, restorative justice emphasizes the reconciliation for the victim, perpetrator, and the community as well.4

The Moro NSAGs who catalyzed the contemporary conflict in their quest for self-determination have since changed their goal to increased autonomy within the Philippine sovereign state. Both the MNLF and MILF understand that the most effective way to realize this goal is through peaceful negotiation and engagement with the Philippine government and other relevant stakeholders, such as the affected communities themselves, local social movements, INGOs and CSOs. The following are recommended actions for the Moro NSAGs in their continued quest for peace in Mindanao.

• The MNLF and MILF should continue to maintain their sense of Moro unity, placing primacy on the importance of security and rehabilitation to a peaceful

Mindanao. Moro NSAG leadership should encourage the membership to ensure that the ceasefires with one another and also the Philippine government hold. Preparing an environment that conducive to peace agreements is vital to the success of negotiation and to foster confidence in the possibility of a prosperous, autonomous region.

- Moro NSAGs should continue to demonstrate flexibility on the terms of Moro autonomy and its implementation. Despite the ultimate failure in ratification, the success of previous negotiations like the MOA-AD and CAB hinged upon the flexibility of both parties; in particular, the Moro’s openness to compromise on how to address the loss of self-determination, which is one of their chief grievances.

- The MILF should continue its efforts in legitimizing its political party, the United Bangsamoro Justice Party, also broadening its political base to be more inclusive of non-Moros (Christians, lumad), women, and youth.

- In view of the Moro’s hope for well-functioning, autonomous Bangsamoro region, efforts in bolstering its capacity for governance are important. Seeking talent to support this endeavor is important, and although emphasizing Moro talent is an understandable cause, inclusivity would be beneficial. Nurturing talent across social, gender, religious, and ethnic groups will enhance the Bangsamoro’s chances for having a well-functioning state that effectively serves its constituency.

- Moro NSAGs should engage in community outreach efforts with non-Moro constituencies. Community-building endeavors such as interfaith dialogue and cultural exchanges can help smooth tensions. In addition, engaging with the non-Moro inhabitants of the potential autonomous region would be ideal to reduce any sentiments of fear or threat, and to encourage peaceful coexistence.

**International Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil Society Organizations**

The Philippine government cannot develop solutions to the Moro conflict on its own, particularly because the profundity of the tension between the parties and the prevailing climate of mistrust have rendered it extremely challenging to achieve progress without external mediation. The Philippine peace process has operated largely in a culture of consultation, with external actors having significant access to and influence on the negotiations. International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) should continue to play a significant,
constructive role in helping the region find a sustainable peace. The International Monitoring Team, requested in one of the peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the MILF, currently comprises members from Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Japan, and the EU. Such international actors can continue to apply political pressure on both parties to honor the agreements and to try to maintain the gains achieved in the peace process thus far. International organizations can contribute to sustaining both parties’ commitment to finding a comprehensive and sustainable solution to the Moro conflict, and also try to reestablish the eroded mutual trust.

The management of international aid is also paramount to the region’s development and rehabilitation, but any future endeavors must be well-attuned to the region’s needs and protected from misuse and exploitation. To stay on target, international aid organizations should coordinate with local stakeholders in order to avoid competition and determine how aid can best be allocated. Engaging local populations in the process of developing aid programs can be achieved by working with local CSOs and NGOs, also bolstering trust between the Moro and indigenous peoples and their international benefactors. Of importance is the balanced and equitable distribution of benefits between parties, in order to prevent the perception of a lack of impartiality. Working with groups that already have extensive experience with foreign aid can be beneficial. The Bangsamoro Development Authority (BDA) has some experience in this regard, and working with the organization and the MILF’s

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political arm can incentivize the group to work to sustain peace in the region. These
groups can also continue to engage with local stakeholders, including the BDA, to
develop capacity-building initiatives that aid the rehabilitation and relief efforts for
those whose lives have been devastated by the drawn-out conflict.

*Values Issue: Integrity*

Integrity is a value essential to the success of any attempts at peace by the
Philippine government and Moro NSAGs. These parties’ previous efforts in
negotiating for peace over the decades have been clouded by lack of trust between the
parties involved. The Philippine government has been accused of lacking integrity in
its previous decisions to unilaterally implement peace agreements and in interpreting
legislation in a self-serving manner, thus leading to the collapse of accords. Even the
drafting of proposed legislation on the Moro question entails problems of integrity, in
view of the sometimes clear dominance of the Christian Filipino agenda on
Bangsamoro-related matters. Integrity also plays a vital part in fostering trust, and the
various breaches of confidence by the Philippine government have negatively affected
peace negotiations, casting doubt on whether provisions of agreements will ever be
faithfully executed and questioning their merits. Many Moros are skeptical of the peace
process, owing to previous failures in achieving Bangsamoro autonomy, and have
come to view negotiations and accords as broken promises. Integrity is critically
important in the successful formulation of a peace agreement which requires that all
parties negotiate in good faith. Similarly, integrity is requisite in the effective
implementation of a peace accord so its provisions are faithfully executed as agreed, without self-serving interpretations and unilateral implementation.

Community-Based Peacebuilding

Community-based peacebuilding is paramount to the Moro peace process. Advocacy and educational efforts at local levels are effective in promoting peace. A lesson learned from previous attempts at peace is the importance of local stakeholders in the peace process. Peacebuilding at the micro level, which comprises social movements and community actors, is imperative to putting a successful end to the Moro conflict.

Peace and Conflict Impact Assessments

Peace and Conflict Impact Assessments (PCIA) implemented at the community level would be a useful tool for the Moro question. PCIA is defined as the “process of anticipating potential peace and conflict impacts of initiatives in conflict-affected areas.” PCIA has been employed by local community leaders in their peace endeavors, becoming a go-to suggestion for issues that call for a greater level of discernment. PCIA would allow communities to evaluate the various factors that could enhance the prospects for peace, as well as those that could contribute to a resurgence of conflict. Through structured trainings and learning exercises, community leaders are encouraged to expand on what conflict and peace mean to them, providing context for their impact assessment. PCIA also involves the assessment of risks and of the

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environment in an attempt to understand the factors that may have an impact on a peace initiative.

PCIA encourages community efforts and local governance systems to view the Moro conflict through a “peace and conflict” lens. In Mindanao, PCIA can examine existing local governance systems to see the impacts of their policymaking, conflict resolution efforts, delivery of basic services, etc. in order to assess their effectiveness and develop strategies that could mitigate conflict impacts and bolster peace.

Conducting conflict sensitivity assessments at the local level is recommended to better understand, from the macro level, the impact that broad legislation and peacemaking efforts has on these communities. Assessments can be conducted on relief and rehabilitation efforts, local governance processes, conflict resolution frameworks, natural resource management, among others.\(^7\) PCIA allows for communities to inform peacemaking efforts by taking a longer-term perspective on the effects of short-term projects in their communities.

Conflict-sensitive impact assessments conducted on a local level would be beneficial in better understanding conflict dynamics between the Moro and Christian populations in Mindanao and how peace initiatives have reinforced or strained their relationships. This provides useful information in the formulation of future peace agreements.

*Interfaith and Community Dialogue*

Encouraging interfaith dialogue would be beneficial to fostering understanding. For instance, organizations such as the Bishops-Ulamas Conference (BUC) engage in

\(^7\) Virola-Gardiola, “Beyond the Lens: PCIA as Peace Sensibility in the Philippines.”
community development and peacebuilding endeavors in the Philippine south. The BUC comprises Mindanaon Catholic and Protestant bishops and Moro ulamas (religious leaders), emphasizing the faith dimension in the search for peace. The BUC has, in its successful push for peace, led others to also establish interfaith organizations at a local level, promoting the ideals of mutual respect and acceptance between and among Moro, Christian, and Lumad communities.

Values Issues: Faith, Community, and Diversity

The value of faith is ever present throughout the Moro conflict. Owing to its Christian v. Muslim aspect, those who are unfamiliar with the ethno-historical and sociopolitical dimensions of this multi-faceted struggle sometimes mischaracterize the Moro conflict as a purely religious one. The Moro conflict has been considered broadly as stemming from the Muslim Filipinos’ defense of their faith from attempted conversion by Christians. On the other hand, Christians were trying to exercise an aspect of their faith that involved saving the souls of others who had yet to understand what they considered to be the glory of God. In the context of the Moro conflict, acknowledging the validity of the other faith is seen as the invalidation of one’s own system of belief.  

However, the separation between Christian Filipino and Muslim Filipino identity emerged during the Spanish colonial era, a product of the internal divisions deliberately created by the colonial rulers to bolster their “divide-and-rule” strategy and maintain a solid hold on the Filipino people. The dichotomy between these two “imagined nations” plays a significant role in the persisting tensions between Muslim

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8 Chetail and Jütersone, “Peacebuilding: A Review of the Academic Literature.”
and Christian Filipinos. Both Christian and Muslim Filipinos rely on defining their identities based on their faith, deriving aspects of who they are from conflicting belief systems. The invented identities of Muslim and Christian Filipinos, based on this religious divide, plays heavily into the deep fracture, creating a major impediment to peace.

The sense of community is present throughout the Moro conflict. Both Muslim and Christian Filipinos derive their sense of community and collective identity from aspects of their faith, as well as from their ethnic and cultural traditions. These strong ties to community are visible in the Moro conflict when considering the main actors, who rely on their respective communities to engage collectively in pursuing independence and autonomy in the case of the Moro, or preserving the sovereignty of the state in the case of the non-Muslim Filipino.

Efforts in celebrating the Philippines’ cultural diversity are beneficial to peace in Mindanao. Identity conflict plays a role in the Moro problem, with the marginalization of non-mainstream communities such as the Moro and the Lumad. Rather than highlighting being the dominant community and promoting divisions between various ethnocultures, embracing the diversity of the Filipino nation can foster a broader sense of Filipino community. Peacebuilding efforts should involve community-driven endeavors that foster interconnectedness between the Moro and Christian communities in the south. Peacebuilding and peacekeeping should focus on celebrating diversity and nurturing a sense of human community and solidarity, regardless of ethnohistory or religious affiliation.
Individual Peacebuilding: Nurturing Peace and Non-Violent Action

Many aspects of the conflict pertain to their struggle for justice in light of the grave injustices experienced by the Moro people. Peacebuilding on an individual level involves first healing internal conflicts for those who have suffered from violence. Efforts in nurturing active non-violence and maintaining a subjective disposition also play a role in the Moro peace process.\(^9\) Such endeavors in self-transformation are being taught at Mindanao State University, encouraging Moro to pursue personal justice. Participants in the process attempt to reconcile their internal conflicts resulting from their traumatic war experiences and foster non-violent attitudes.

Mahatma Gandhi said, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” In this vein, focusing on the individual is useful to the Moro peace process as it encourages understanding of the benefits of achieving peace, providing a personal context to its pursuit. Justice experienced at the individual level—then collectively—could result in comprehensive, lasting peace.

Final Thoughts

Although incidents of violence from the MNLF and MILF have declined over the years, other actors have since emerged, and putting an end to this protracted conflict still poses a formidable challenge. The Philippines’ colonial past contributed significantly to the formation of the island nation’s unique and distinct ethnohistory. However, the resulting Christian-Western orientation of the Philippine ethos has also resulted in an unfortunate polarity: The Filipino identity is associated with Christianity and Catholicism, while anything else—such as lumad or Moro—is considered “other.”

\(^9\) Montiel et al., “The Moro Struggle in the Southern Philippines.”
Filipinos, citizens of the Philippine sovereign state, still wrangle with the legacies of its colonial past: the profound societal fragmentation that persists today. These deep societal divisions in Philippine society still play an unfortunately substantial role in hindering the progress of the peace process, perhaps owing to an unconscious (or conscious) bias of the “other.” These biases play a role in the extent to which these peace agreements can succeed, and their effective implementation would be impossible if both parties continue to violate human rights laws and operate with reckless disregard for the security and safety of civilians on account of their prejudices. Efforts in promoting cultural understanding and peacebuilding are imperative to the much needed normalization in the conflict-affected southern Philippines.

One of the lasting impacts of the Philippine subjugation under colonial powers and the ineffectiveness of the national government’s policies is the essential transformation of what was once a prosperous region comprised of sultanates in Mindanao to a region that fluctuates in and out of resembling a failed state despite the absence of UN peacekeeping forces on Philippine soil. It is worth bearing in mind that the Bangsamoro struggle for its right to self-determination essentially began about two and a half centuries ago, when Spain established its first colony in Cebu. Since then, the Bangsamoro have contended with the Americans, the Japanese, and the Philippine government. Erasing these deep-seated sentiments and addressing these justified grievances are nearly impossible tasks, but progress has been made over the course of 40 years.

Upon signing the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro in October 12, President Aquino said that it would “finally seal [a] genuine, lasting peace in
Mindanao.” It is 2017, and the people of the southern Philippines whose lives have been ravaged by four decades of violence are still dreaming of that “genuine, lasting peace.” Instead, they continue to live with the consequences of this protracted, seemingly never-ending conflict. The aim is now to one day “win the peace” rather than just “win the war”. One can only hope that the Moro’s dreams of a just and sustainable peace, and the chance to rebuild their shattered lives can someday, in the not too distant future, become reality.


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