Ethnicity, Identity and Conflict: The Ethnogenesis of the Philippine Moro [1]

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The object of this paper is to describe how ethnicity is formed by or responds to conflict, using the case of the Moros (for Muslims) in the Mindanao region,[2] a minority community of about five percent of the Philippines' 60 million people. That figure translates to some 3 million people, which is about the size of the population of Singapore. In this paper, conflict is taken as an outcome of intergroup relations based on two levels of dialectics: one, physical confrontation in which members of one group attempt to injure or eliminate those from another group, and second, ideological clash in which two cultures or world views are trying to incorporate each other. The ideological conflict is particularly relevant in the Philippine case, considering the historical underpinnings of state formation and Filipino character, which consequently gave shape to the unique Moro identity among the Muslims in the south.

Conceptualizing Ethnicity

Ethnicity is an old term from the Greek *ethnikos*, referring to a "people" or "nation" (Cashmore, 1994:102). Thus an ethnic group refers to people who express a distinctive and enduring collective identity based on shared experiences and cultural traits, fortified by a myth or history. The group defines itself and may be defined by others in terms of some of these traits: religious belief, language, physical appearance, region of residence, and an history of conquest and repression by other peoples (Gurr, 1993; Yinger, 1994; Barth, 1969). Various usages in the literature equate ethnic groups with ethnonationals, minorities (Gurr, 1993), and social organization (Barth, 1981). Riggs (1989) presents a variety of dimensions in the way the term ethnicity has been used or applied by researchers.

The literature provides two approaches to the study of ethnicity: one is *primordialist*, the other *instrumentalist*. The primordialist view takes ethnicity as having "natural," instinctive, pre-rational, and even genetic type of attachments or feelings due to religion, racial color and territory. It argues "that people are naturally ethnocentric, exhibiting trust and preference for those of their cultural group while feeling more distant

from, and distrustful of, those of other cultural groups" (Brown, 1994: xiii). An emerging "school" called sociobiology (Van den Berghe, 1987) subscribes to this approach, but there are others, such as Clifford Geertz and Edward Shils. The dialectic arising between society and state is a case of persistence of ethnicity as a salient affiliation other than that based on social class.

The other view, *instrumentalism*, assumes that ethnicity – like other classifications – is constructed by the social and political environments (Brown, 1994; Mach, 1993); subjectivity and self-consciousness are important aspects of ethnicity and that identity is a "symbolic construction based on changing relations with the external world" (Mach, 1993;263). Ethnic groups are synonymous with minorities or identity groups, because of self-definitions and consciousness of kind among the members who make a distinction between "we" and "they" that divide perceivers into "insiders" and "outsiders." Many studies of ethnic behaviors and ethnic relations follow this perspective under the assumption that human society is a product of culture or that culture itself is an historical creation of the time.

This paper takes the second perspective as its conceptual frame, not that this perspective is popular in the literature but that it is useful in the historical construction of ethnic identities. However, it recognizes that ethnicity in the Philippines does not behave according to some underlying, primordial sentiments. This paper does not view ethnicity as a mechanistic or passive response of people from external stimuli, for they, the people, also have the capacity to change these stimuli at will or even ignore them. Rather, it takes ethnicity as a form of abstraction with different levels of conceptualization, depending on the group's definition of its boundaries (Riggs, 1989). Thus, a nation can be composed almost entirely of an ethnic group or several groups who form a bond by social contract, or even by conquest. An ethnic group is therefore a situational, context-specific perception of self in reference to others. For it to be forceful, however, it must operate on certain "givens": common history, language and territory. More of this matter will be made clear later.

Moros and Filipinos as External Labeling

At the outset, it is worthwhile mentioning that the names "Moro" for Muslims and "Filipino" for the Christian majority in the Philippines are artifacts of colonization and cultural imperialism. These are generic labels popularized by the Spaniards, but later came to be accepted by the natives in what is now known as the Philippines (named after King Philip II of Spain). *Moro*, on the other hand, refers to the Muslims in the Mindanao and Sulu archipelago. For their part, Filipinos were island-born Spaniards as distinguished from those who came from Spain. Most of the natives who now embrace the Roman Catholic faith were then called *Indios*. In due time, the label *Indios* became *Filipinos* (thanks to Dr. Jose Rizal), a radical shift in identity, when the nationalists accepted this tag.

Ethnicity as Ideology

If ethnicity is a social organization, it is also an ideology (Barth, 1981). We can enlarge its scope to mean social classification based on some "civilized" order, such as the "Great Traditions" that have swept across Southeast Asia. Thus, Philippine society today may be likened to an entity whose outer cover consists of several layers of cultural, religious and ideological influences – each layer being associated with a particular civilization or world view, namely: paganism, Islam and Christianity. This feature, of course, is not unique to the Philippines; its Southeast Asian neighbors display the same pattern because of their syncretic character.

Such viewpoint suggests three groups of peoples in the Philippines: the Christian Filipinos, the Muslims, and the hilltribes (see Kroeber, 1973). This classification is useful, because of the ideological contrast between Islam and Christianity in the Philippines, as well as the varying degrees of access to power under the majority-minority perspectives (Saber, 1975). This trichotomy is not very neat, however. It can decompose into several subtypes or groupings, into smaller, more enduring cultural units. In fact, the Philippines has 87 ethno-linguistic groups: 17 or so are pagans (now called *Lumads*), 13 are Moro and the rest are Christians. Each subgroup speaks a language which is generally not understood by the others. Writers maintain that with the possible exception of the Aeta, all Filipino groups come from the same root source.

Popular usage in the Philippines views ethnicity in terms of a dichotomy of "Filipino society" (or inappropriately, of the Filipino "race," as popularized during Rizal's time) and "others" – the latter referring to peoples who are still in the fringe of nation-building. Philippine society is supposedly a conglomerate of several "assimilated" ethnics who now think of "Filipino" as an entity larger than their being Tagalog, Ilocano, Cebuano, etc. However, expression of Filipino identity can be peculiarly regional (Hornedo, 1987), or majoritarian (Saber, 1975) in relation to "minorities." This varying senses of conceptualization indicates that ethnicity is relational, situational and a resilient mode of group identification.

Further analysis of ethnicity in the Philippine context suggests that it is of recent vintage: it has been used since the 18th century with reference to or in service of a hegemonic group or public. Being "ethnic" reflects the concern for "pure" or exotic cultural groups, such as those presented for theatrical or touristic purposes, or else are portrayals of extreme behavior (e.g., crime, conflict) which incur some media mileage (Maslog & Villadolid, 1991). It was conveniently reserved for "tribe," "non-Christian," or "cultural minority" – which are all majoritarian or colonial creations. Writing to Ferdinand Blumentritt on December 30, 1886, Filipino national hero Jose Rizal said (*Rizal-Blumentritt Correspondence*, 1961-33) of the word "tribe": "We also give the name to a people of more than half a million souls that you call 'nations,' but we don't call 'nations' peoples that are not independent... Tribe is less than race; it is part of race."

Hornedo (1987) traced the etiology of the name Kalinga from the Cordilleras, which means "enemy" in the vocabulary of their christianized and dominant neighbor, the Ibanag.[3] Another case is the Isneg, a group minoritized through this process by those who spoke Ibanag in the lower Cagayan Valley, and those who spoke Ilocano in the coastal plain. The duo submitted to Spanish domination, but the Isneg, who lived in the mountains, did not (Scott, 1982:40-41), hence:

...as the years of occupation passed, the Ilocanos and Ibanags gave up more and more of their own cultures to assimilate more and more of their conqueror's culture. In the process, they became more and more like each other and less and less like their ancestors. The Isnegs, on the other hand, preserved more of the culture of their ancestors and so came to look less and less like their acculturating neighboring. By the end of the Spanish regime, this divergence had created a real Filipino majority for the first time in history – those Filipinos who had the same king – the Spanish King. And those who did not were just cultural communities. Thus, by the magic of colonial alchemy, those who changed least were actually denied this designation...a *cultural minority was created where none had existed* (emphasis added).

The degree of one's ethnicity, however, falls into its own ethnocentric trap. One can see, as just illustrated, how many Filipinos mistook their ethnic identity for how much of the alien, civilizational influences they have imbibed. Someone who behaved otherwise (e.g., wore no shoes or used his hand to eat with) or had changed very little was "backward" and at the "other side." The Ilocanos called then *taga-barbaryu* (from the isolated village); to the Tagalogs, they are *taga-bundok* or *taga-gulod* (from the hills).[4] In truth, those tribes or pagans are the "original" Filipinos who have not lost their innocence. And so, "nationalism, understood as nation-building in the late 19th century, gives an ironic connotation of "tribe building" (Hornedo, 1991:57).

Origin of Moro

A little more on the Moros: they are peoples from southern Philippines, Mindanao, who profess the religion Islam. "Moro" was previously a derogatory, colonial term coined by the Spaniards to describe the Muslim natives when they colonized the Philippine Islands in 1565; it reminds one of "Indian," the name Columbus gave to the indigenous peoples of northern America. To the Spanish mind, Moro was synonymous to Maurus or Mauri, those islamic warriors of Berber extraction from the ancient Roman province of Mauritania, which now forms the Kingdom of Morocco and the state of Mauritania. As history shows, the Moors conquered the Iberian peninsula (Spain and Portugal) and established the Caliphate there for over 700 years. The Spanish Crusaders drove them away and, when Christian Spain became an imperialist, they met native peoples from Mindanao and Sulu who, aside from being Muslims were like the hostile Moors. From then on, Moro was associated with "piracy," slavery, treachery, the amok, and other negative connotations.

But Islam as a minority religion in the Philippines hides many significant aspects. In Southeast Asia, Muslims form a vast majority of population larger than that of the Middle East. Islam is the oldest religion in the Philippines next to animism; it antedates Christianity by about 100 years. It came to Sulu in 1450 with the formation of a sultanate which had risen to a powerful maritime state and continued to be so during the next two hundred years of Spanish colonization of the islands. Another sultanate was formed on Mindanao alongside with the development of Islam; its leader was a noble from Johore. Three hundred years of Spanish colonization, however, failed to subjugate the Moros. This is why the Moros exhibit a strong feeling of ethnocentrism today.

On Mindanao, a story goes that if the Spaniards came to the Philippines a little later, the Philippines would have been a Muslim state, like its neighbors. Perhaps, it would now have a Christian issue similar to East Timor instead of the Muslim problem.

Impact on Recent History

The peculiar relations existing between Moros and Christian Filipinos is due to a colonial history that spans over 400 years of contact. Such relations prior to the 20th century were mainly characterized by conflict, *jihad* (holy war), occasioned by intense wars with the Spanish colonial government from 1578 to 1898 (Majul, 1973). Although the Moros had a single enemy, the Spaniards, they fought separately and brought the war into the territories of the christianized natives in the form of raid and slave hunting (Warren, 1985). In 1898, the United States replaced the colonial administration of the islands. An important feature of the American regime during its first decade of rule was the establishment of two types of government for the natives, one for the christianized Filipinos and another for the "warlike" Moros and other tribes. For the latter, pacification was a model using its own experience with the Indian problem during the heyday of winning the western frontier.

The American colonial regime saw it fit to establish the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes. By its name, the Bureau obviously defined all peoples who did not believe in Christianity as subject to this special program. In effect, the tribal peoples – which comprised about 10 percent of the total population – acquired a legal status as "minorities." In time, the Bureau's functions were later confined to those "non-Christians" on Luzon while the Moros were thrown to the lap of the American army in 1903 under the Moro Province. Administering the Moros under a military rule was justified by the belief that the use of force was necessary to keep then at bay, while preparation of the natives for independence was being undertaken. However, the military treated the Moros and other "wild tribes" on Mindanao as "wards" of the government, as they were dependent on the state for protection. Gradual integration of both Moros and christianized Filipinos was also recognized as consistent with an envisioned Filipino nationhood. However, many Moros construed such government, says Saber (1975), as a *gobirno a sarwang a tao* (government of a different people).

The dual system of governance (military and civil), while important for the colonial administration, was in effect counter-productive to the announced independence for the Filipinos (Magdalena, 1996). It gave the Moros the impression of a continuing dependence on America and even made them ask that Moro territory (which was more than half of Mindanao) be annexed to the United States. Thus, this policy betrays a sinister design that later challenged the formation of the Philippine state based on a "two-nation" theory. The common man's logic was this: after defeating and disarming the intractable Moros, the American soldiers could not give them away to their ancestral enemies, the christianized Filipinos, who never won a single piece of Moro territory.

When the Filipinos began agitating for independence during the 1920s until the early 1930s, the issue badly factionalized the Moros into those who asked that Americans stay and annex Mindanao and Sulu into the US territory, and those who favored early independence for the Filipinos with the Moros joining them. Mindanao would have been

the 50th state of the United States instead of Hawaii, if only the Moros had a strong lobby group in Washington or if the American planters on Mindanao had lobbied more than they did in 1910 and 1923.

Post-independence Philippines continued the unfinished program of integration amidst some protests among Moros. Land resettlement became a central program which brought to the south thousands of Christians, inspired by President Quezon's slogan of "Mindanao as a land of promise." Migration was unprecedented. Between 1948 and 1960, Mindanao's population increased from less than 3 million to over 5 million, or more than double the national average growth. In 1960 one out of four Mindanaoans was a migrant. What started as the Christian migration of the 1930s appeared to be an "invasion" of the Moro homeland. In the 1960s, two important programs were launched: the Commission on National Integration and the establishment of Mindanao State University. Both provided opportunities for young Muslims to get higher education. Unlike CNI, however, MSU offered higher education right in Moro country and is now the second largest state university in the Philippines. In 1968, the functions of CNI were abolished with the creation of PANAMIN (Presidential Assistant for National Minorities) which flourished during martial law. Curiously, PANAMIN operated with a dual personality – as a government agency with the status of a cabinet, and as a private foundation. It glorified the cultural minorities, even added one more tribe (the stone-age Tasaday) to the list, only to delist or detribalize it later.

Meanwhile, the Muslim Filipinos carried out their own education through the islamic and Arabic schools, the *madrasah*, which was the main vehicle that deepened their consciousness of Islam. After World War II, more and more *madaris* were opened as many young Muslims studied abroad and foreign missionaries came to Mindanao. In time, a sizeable number of *ulama* grew and made a significant impact on Islam as practiced by Moros. There are about 1,000 madaris in operation through Mindanao and Sulu, catering to at least 150,000 young Muslims in 1986. To these days, the *madaris* have remained ecclesiastical schools providing secondary education at the most, with a status that is neither private nor public. Their graduates, however, lack technical skills and cannot find gainful employment elsewhere or transfer to Philippine universities to pursue college degrees.

The number of Muslim Filipinos performing the obligatory *hajj* or pilgrimage to Mecca also continued to increase. Western and islamic educated individuals ironically blended to sow the seeds of Moro nationalism, which was beginning to burst out while the Muslim communities remained poor and miserable.

On the economic scene, Mindanao appeared to have "developed" but not for those who live there. To some of these people, development has become an obnoxious term, like Mindanao being Manila's "colony" or "milking cow." Others saw another pattern, that the frontier has failed to live up to the expectancy of institutional changes, as had happened in the winning of America's wild west. The living conditions did not improve much; many Muslims and Christians are still impoverished (Canoy, 1987). However, if Mindanao is backward by Philippine standard, Muslim Mindanao is worse.[5]

Violent Confrontations, 1950-1975

As the government settled the frontier question on Mindanao during the 1930s, it became oblivious to the fact that Muslims also needed development. This neglect sustained their insecurities. One writer (Willies, 1968:103) has observed that the government's failure in approach to the Muslims was just inactivity. Whatever, the inactivity or neglect has led to the government being perceived as discriminatory and biased. Christian prejudice also became a tall order, as reflected in history books not according the Moro any heroism, in the old traditional theatrical play of the "moro-moro," and in the media exhibiting some anti-Moro biases. Time and again, pocket rebellions in the Moro communities occurred, such as those stirred by Tawan-Tawan in Lanao and by Kamlon in Sulu in the 1950s. A government study discovered that these problems were symptoms of Muslim alienation; the "Muslims do not feel that they are part of this nation."

Nationalistic but resentful of government programs, many Muslims have become vociferous and later posed an armed challenge to the state. What the government called integration, the Muslims interpreted as assimilation or, worse, Moro "ethnocide" (Gowing & McAmis, 1974). They regarded the government land resettlement program as a Filipino version of colonial policy to drive away Muslims from their homeland (Asani, 1976). The Jabidah massacre of March 1968, in which a group of young Muslim soldiers were killed, incensed the Muslim community.[6] Among those who reacted were university students from whose core sprang the Moro National Liberation Front or MNLF (Jubair, 1984; Tan, 1990).

Not long after, a civilian conflict occurred between Muslims and Christians. Between 1970 and 1972, the newspapers reported over 2,000 persons killed in a fratricidal strife between Muslim and Christian civilians, attributed mostly to three vigilante groups: the *Ilaga* (for "rat"), Blackshirt and *Barracuda* (ferocious fish). The situation was aggravated when the country was placed under Martial Law in 1972, turning Mindanao into a killing field of sorts as three-fourths of the Philippine Armed Forces confronted the MNLF. Some 50,000 people were estimated to have died in two decades of violence on Mindanao and neighboring islands, which also produced at least 100,000 refugees to nearby Sabah. In 1976, the government and the MNLF signed a peace accord in Tripoli, Libya, to be known as the Tripoli Agreement, brokered by the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), The accord stipulated an "autonomous" Moro government (instead of a separate Muslim state) in the Mindanao areas.

During the 1970s, the government nonetheless responded to the Moro problem in positive ways. Thus, Muslim holidays are now recognized and practiced in Muslim Mindanao; and islamic bank has been established; a development-oriented agency has been created for the Muslims; ambassadorial posts to the Middle East countries are filled by Muslim Filipinos; a Muslim has been appointed in the Supreme Court; two state universities and several colleges now have Muslim presidents, and more. Some Muslims, however, decry these efforts as mere symbolic gestures.

Moro Identity: the "Other" Filipino

The Moro search for identity is credited in no small measure to the MNLF whose cause may be seen as an attempt to preserve that identity, even at the cost of a violent struggle. Recall that the MNLF sought to establish an independent Islamic Republic on Mindanao in the 1970s. Later, it scaled down this demand to autonomy upon advice of the OIC (Karachi declaration, 1983). Its ideology is interesting, because it gave legitimacy and meaning to the word "Moro" as a new form of ethnicity encompassing the 13 Muslim groups in the Philippines (Jubair, 1984; Abbahil, 1984a; Tan, 1990). Now, Moro is an acceptable term which identifies a member of any of these groups. It means "Moro bravo" just like the nationalistic slogan of long ago, "Indio bravo," attributed to the Filipino hero, Jose Rizal.

The Muslim Filipinos did not find the word "Muslim" a meaningful category as such, because there are many other Muslim groups elsewhere. Moro is all right, because it refers to a people with a common sense of history and territory. Thus, today Moro has lost its pejorative meaning. Another popular usage is "Bangsa Moro" which is unique, for *Bangsa* means "nation" or "community"; it identifies them more rightly to the land where they have been born. A quotation from the MNLF will illustrate this concept:

> From this very moment, there shall be no stressing the fact that one is a Tausug, a Samal, a Yakan, a Subanon, a Kalagan, a Maguindanao, a Maranao, or a Badjao. He is only a Moro. Indeed even those of other faith who have long established residence in the Bangsa Moro homeland and whose goodwill and sympathy are with the Bangsa Moro Revolution shall for purposes of national identification be considered Moros. In other words, the term Moro is a national concept that must be understood as all-embracing for all Bangsa Moro people within the length and breadth of our national boundaries. (Boransing, 1986:86-87)

Interestingly, Moro nationality as defined by the MNLF includes not only Muslims but also Lumads and eve Christian Filipinos who have been living in Moroland for some time. In practice, however, the prevailing usage limits Moro to the Muslims and to some extent the Lumads, but exclude the Christian altogether.[7]

A deeper analysis will show that the unfortunate circumstances of colonialism and imperialism are what gave form to the Moro image. Corpuz (1989:579) argues that the Moro problem is actually a Christian problem:

> It was a ghost from the Spanish era. The Christian lawyers in the Malolos Congress suffered from the mental baggage from their Spanish heritage and did not appreciate Aguinaldo's call for fraternity in a federal union with the Muslims. The Muslims were not part of the Revolution because they were not part of the colonized Filipinas; moreover, they hade been at war with the Spaniards since the sixteenth century. The rebellion of the MNLF was the inevitable fruit of neglect by the Christian governments...

The problem, therefore, is a lingering symbol of failure by Christian Filipinos to define Moro as part of Filipino identity.[8] Cultural markers like the flag, national anthem and national history, for example, symbolically exclude the Moros or deny their

participation. The denial that "the Moros were not, and indeed had no desire to become Filipinos" (Asani, 1976:17) is probably just a reflection of that identity crises. On the other hand, the acceptance of "Moro" by Muslim Filipinos is ironic. It is an affirmation of the "other side" of Filipino colonial identity. This time, however, the Moros do it with a vengeance. Juxtaposed together, the Bangsa Moro and Bansa Filipino are contrasting caricatures of the past which prove too embarrassing to imagine. It portrays two "nations" struggling together to define an identity, the first by incorporation, the second by separation. Acknowledgment of this identity crisis is now a conscious part of the Moro experience. Philippine society also needs to recognize these difference as part of the national community (Gowing &McAmis, 1974; Tan, 1990).

Problems of Moro Ideology

Aside from the obvious fact that Moro means members of the religious community of Islam, an important aspect of this new ethnicity is how it specifies the content of its ideology, the driving spirit or psychological focus of "moro-ness." Its lack of focus, in fact, was the most pressing drawback of the MNLF as a revolutionary group at the beginning. The inability to articulate it clearly led to a rift and factionalism in the MNLF into three groups following the contours of "tribalism." For example, the MNLF is associated with the Tausug ethnolinguistic group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front with the Maguindanao, and the MNLF-Reformist Group with the Maranao. MNLF is characterized as modernistic, and the MILF as islamic.

There appears to be three competing ideological trends which divide the Moros: the pursuit of an *ummah*, the sustenance of an indigenous spirit of *bangsa*, and the modernization of Muslims (see Bauzon, 1991).

Ummah is an Arabic term for community, derived from *umm* (mother). *Ummah* in Islam, however, signifies more than the motherland. *Ummat as-Islam* comprises the entire collectivity of Muslims living anywhere, regardless of their geographical boundaries. It is a qur'anic concept which was applied to the then nascent islamic community of Madinah (Kaali, n.d.). To the Moros, the aspiration for an *ummah* means following the pathways prescribed of an islamic community using the *Shari'ah* laws and living a\strictly under the guidance of the Qur'an. It is thus the way to create *dar al-Islam* (abode of Muslim believers) on Mindanao.

But the *ummah* as the animating ideology of the Moros collides with another set of beliefs. Bauzon (1991) argues that the *ummah* and the islamic cosmology which comes with it articulates a paradigm entirely different from and in conflict with the western liberal thought that characterizes the philippine state. The conflict "is not too much caused by guns as by conflicting conceptions of nationality." On the ground, certain realities unfold. First, the Moros live in a secularized, non-Muslim state, as a demographic minority. They are numerically dominant only in four or five out of 23 provinces. They are also a minority even in the 13 provinces identified for inclusion into the Bangsa Moro homeland.[9]

On the other hand, the maintenance or enhancement of the Bangsa Moro as a rallying symbol of a unique, indigenous nationality on Mindanao appears to be a zero-sum game. It only re-echoes the same crisis besetting Filipino identity today which has

been called split-level personality, or folk-Christianity. The same if true with the Moros whose *adat* or customary practices are at times in conflict with the islamic concept of justice (*shari'ah*), as well as the almost mystical rituals based on animism or islamic *Sufism*.

Others point out that Moros cannot become nationals and incorporate others into that nationality without mutual consent. They cannot put asunder the ideology of other ethnic groups which are equally rooted in the same homeland. As a writer pointed out, they are "two hills" of the same land. The MNLF has therefore laid a claim for indigenous symbolisms on sovereignty (*gaus baugbug* and *kaadilan* in Tausug). The question is: How should the indigenization process take place without hurting other groups?

Quite unique to the MNLF as a revolutionary movement is its "internal" struggle as defined by the islamic injunction for *jihad*. It found in the old aristocracy of datuism and the sultanate an anachronism in modern society (Cayongcat, 1986:79-81). Although the datus gave support to the movement in the beginning, MNLF chief Nur Misuari saw them as political warlords who obstructed meaningful changes in Moroland. A new leadership from the masses was needed. Such disenchantment can also be discerned from the poetry and songs of dissent, lamenting the "sell-out" of the Bangsa Moro homeland by so-called secularized and co-opted Moro leaders.

Finally, the MNLF views modernization as a discourse of development for the Moro masses so they may rise above poverty and marginal status. There is not doubt that the economy of the Moro areas is in an extremely bad shape despite its rich natural resources. These areas are not only the poorest regions in the country; they also have the lowest literacy rate.[10] However, since the model for "development" as articulated by the MNLF was ambiguous, people are left guessing as to what it means.[11] Will it be Marxism, for which the MNLF leadership was once identified? Or will it follow a secular pattern, as in Indonesia or Egypt? Or, maybe a protectionist model like that of Malaysia for its *bumiputra* population, or a consociational pattern similar to Singapore's? Whatever, the Moro nation does not have a clear vision of its becoming.

Moro Autonomy: Social and Political Problems

A much bigger question lurks. The grant of political freedom to the Moros entails changing the lever of power and economic relations between Moros and Christians. More specifically, autonomy is perceived by the Christian majority on Mindanao as a triumph of Moro domination in the civil service, a return of Muslim-Christian conflict, corruption, governance by the *shari'ah*, and deterioration of educational standards, among others (see Sarangani, 1985). Although irrational and unfounded, such expectancy is reinforced by some reality on the ground, such as the bombing of two churches in Zamboanga and Davao, kidnapping of Christians, and occasional murder of vendors and hunters who strayed into Moro territory. The legal basis of what constitutes Moro territory – the locus of power and economics – appears more terrifying. For one, the constitutional provision for "Muslim Mindanao" implies exclusion of Christians in the affairs of the regional Moro autonomy.[12] But to many

Moros, "Muslim Mindanao" is equally objectionable, as it restricts the space for Moro identity. Hence, a battle in terminology is apparent.

Soon after Corazon Aquino came to power in 1986, another "secessionist" group called Mindanao Independence Movement came to the scene. The MIM hoisted the banner of "Mindanao for Mindanaoans" and aspired to create a "Federal Republic of Mindanao" (Canoy, 1987). It argued that Muslims are not alone in their sufferings; the Christians too, the whole Mindanao population, are discriminated against and colonized by the Manila government and has been so since time immemorial. Reuben Canoy (1987:211), MIM leader, pointed out to MNLF chief Nur Misuari "the logic and necessity of keeping the whole of Mindanao intact for economic reasons." Persuaded, the MNLF took upon itself the MIM cause and fashioned a new agenda for peace with the government.[13] The success of that solidarity is measured by the MNLF securing another agreement called the "Jeddah Accord" in 1987. However, like the Tripoli Agreement, the Accord could not be implemented. The fragile coalition between MIM and the MNLF vanished just as soon the Constitution was ratified in 1987 and when the officers of MIM faced legal sanctions for "sedition."

Perhaps the anticipated fears among non-Moros are what stall the peace process for Moro autonomy. Thus, the Tripoli Agreement and the Jeddah Accord have remained as mere scraps of paper for peace, although discussion is still going on about the future of Moro autonomy. For one, defining what constitutes the territorial domain of the Moro autonomous region appears to be a major stumbling block. Only four of the 13 provinces of the identified Bangsa Moro homeland opted to join the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) during the plebiscite in 1990.

Speaking of the incipient autonomous government in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which began in 1991, it must be mentioned that its implementation suffers from many predicaments. The ARMM is not acceptable to the MNLF which believes that it is a unilateral implementation by the government of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement. There are reports that it is scandal-ridden with funds mismanagement hinging upon corruption and ethnic nepotism. Finally, the substantive issues of autonomy, such as security, economy and education have not been resolved yet due to the hardline position of both government and the MNLF.

Meanwhile, some sectors of the Moro society could not wait any longer. They have become impatient and radicalized, or so they have appeared. While the MNLF and the government are discussing peace, islamic extremists such as the Abbu Sayyaf have come up with new agenda. The serial kidnapping of Christians and religious missionaries on Basilan island in 1993-1994, and the April 3, 1995 attack of Ipil town on mainland Mindanao sent a spectre of "islamic terrorism." Many leaders, both Muslims and Christians have condemned the killing as "barbaric" and "unislamic." While this group is small and its acts are isolated, it has sounded an alarm, albeit a remote one, that Mindanao could be a new Bosnia.

Discussion

After a quick review of the situation, three points are worth noting on the ethnogenensis of the Moro.

First, the Moros have finally found themselves after having been sedated by centuries of conflict and colonialism. The old "ugly" Moro has been transformed into a newfound ethnicity, the *Bangsa Moro*, whose meaning has shifted to a positive tone. The contours of Moro identity, however, are still changing. The peculiar relationships of the Moro with the Spaniards, the Americans and later the Christian Filipinos has given shape to his status as that of a people "in" but not "of" the Philippines, so that the Moro today is of entirely different genre. The threat of Moro separatism has succeeded in deconstructing that old, dubious Moro image by challenging the premise of indivisible unity between Filipino identity and the three stars of the Republic. Now, the Filipino begins looking at himself from the outside.

Second, a strong communal solidarity has developed, thereby binding the Moros as "a people" with a common aspiration to survive as a Muslim community. The *madrasah* school, the learned class or *ulama*, and the MNLF freedom fighters, have contributed largely to this social bond forged by a religious *élan*, Islam. Moro nationalism and its attendant mobilization capability is now too strong to ignore. It united the Bangsa Moro during the 1970s to fight as one people, rather than separately – a unique achievement without parallel during the three centuries of Moro wars with colonial governments.

The empirical delineation of Moro identity remains somewhat problematic, however. Internally, becoming a Moro entails, as it were, liberating the masses from the clutches of datuism or elitism, detribalizing the old ethno-linguistic structures and, at the same time, modernizing the Moro constituency. Externally, Moro nationality, as envisioned by the MNLF, cannot prosper without the cooperation of the Christian majority. Thus, both processes call for a radical restructuring of classes within Moro society and, perhaps, a redrawing of the Moro boundary. Either way, the process carries with it a formidable dialectic of its own.

And third, the Moro problem is not yet over. The search for an ideology and a homeland is now the twin concerns of the Moro. For without a guiding spirit and a home, the Bangsa Moro cannot exist physically. But the search is faced with untold obstacles. The big question is this: Is the *ummah* feasible within the larger non-*ummah* entities in the same homeland without denying them their rights to self-determination? Note that to many Moros, home means the 13 provinces on Mindanao, but that is also considered by an even larger number of Lumads and Christians who have been there for generations.

Assuming that the Moros will eventually solve these predicaments, the approach requires reforming the prevalent mode of thinking of the Manila government and of the Christian majority. These are problems that in time may find solutions so long as people keep on talking rather than shooting each other. At least these have been signs recently. The Ramos government has sued for peace with the right- and the left-wing groups, recognizing that without peace there can be no development.

Meanwhile, it appears that the conflict has assumed another essence. For the Moro, it is a greater *jihad* in which the enemy is both the self and society, and that war is a total process of purification and soul-searching. In the islamic context, this process implies a battle against all evils – those that come from within and those that emanate from the outside.

For Philippine society, the lesson of Moro imagery is the challenge against the myth of a homogenous nation symbolized by *isang bansa, isang diwa* (one nation, one thought). The Moro is the "other" Filipino consciously asserting the virtue of his identity. However, a greater threat lies not in the secessionist aspiration of a "suppressed" minority, for this is already contained or pre-empted by the 1987 Constitution, but in the awareness that Filipino identity is also nourished by those who elect to subscribe to it.

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NOTES

[1] A similar version of this paper had been earlier presented in a seminar at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, June 15, 1995. The author wishes to acknowledge the fellowship grant provided by ISEAS in the preparation of this paper.

[2] Including the island provinces of Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and southern Palawan

[3] The Cordilleras is a region granted political autonomy by the 1987 Philippine Constitution. The other region enjoying this status is "Muslim Mindanao," the focus of this study.

[4] An interesting case is how a "tribe" reacts to the lowlanders perception. On Mindoro, the Mangyans used the adjective "hanunoo" for their name, which means "genuine" (Rice, 1991).

[5] While the average income for the Philippines during 1980 and 1990 were P40,408 and P63,186, in Regions 9 and 12 where Muslims are dominant, the figures were much lower (Region 9, P31,984 and P42,622, and Region 12, P35,090 and P43,677).

[6] In a speech delivered in Iligan City in 1986, MNLF Chief Nur Misuari acknowledged that this event triggered the birth of the Moro National Liberation Front at the beginning of 1970 (transcript of speech in the possession of this writer).

[7] However, a few non-Moros think of themselves as Bangsamoro. Two Catholic missionaries, Fr. Florio Falcon and Rev. Absalon Cerveza, have sat in the MNLF panel during the 1986 and 1995 negotiations for peace.

[8] Many Moros currently define themselves as "non-Filipinos." A recent study (Lacar, 1993), for instance, showed that 61 percent of a Muslim sample did not consider themselves as Filipino citizens. An earlier study (Abbahil, 1984b) among Moro college students indicated a higher rate of rejection at 89.4 percent; they preferred to be called Moros or Muslims rather than Filipinos. However, among themselves they identified

their groups as Tausugs, Maranaos, Maguindánaos, etc. and gave their own estimate of the "tribal" character of the ethnic Moro groups.

[9] The MNLF counters that these figures are "colonial statistics," that the Bangsa Moro form the "majority."

[10] The literacy rate for the Philippines during 1970, 1980 and 1990 gives these statistics: 83.4, 82.7 and 93.5. In contrast, the data for part of Muslim Mindanao are: Region 9, 65.5, 65.0 and 81.3, while that for Region 12, 66.7, 64.6 and 83.0.

[11] Stauffer (1983:26) points out: "The greatest weakness in the Islamic world country's role in the MNLF struggle is its inability to provide an alternative development model to counter that which is available to the Philippine government. Its implicit claim that Islam is the model remains unconvincing in view of the obvious in-roads that the capitalist model has made in the Islamic world."

[12] Local autonomy or Muslim Mindanao means three things: (1) the 13 provinces identified by the Tripoli Agreement, (2) those areas where the Muslims are predominant, and (3) those provinces and cities voting to become members of the autonomous Muslim Mindanao. The MNLF desires the first, the 1987 Philippine Constitution uses the second, while the plebiscite will yield the third.

[13] On a broader level, the territorial demand of the MNLF scaled up to include the whole Mindanao, Sulu, Palawan, Tawi-Tawi and Basilan – all 23 provinces instead of the 13 as stipulated in the Tripoli agreement (see *Aide Memoire*, 1987).