

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The decade-long armed conflict between Muslims and Christians in Mindanao, Southern Philippines, stems from its deep-rooted history. The conflict is mainly caused by the feelings of marginalisation of the Muslim community by the foreign colonisers and even later by the Philippine's government. The Muslim Filipinos are commonly referred to as Moros or Bangsamoro (Moro nation). This has led to a shared identity, culture and history which unites them to form separatist movements to fight against the Philippines government to establish an independent state. However, in order to achieve a sense of self-determination, these opposition groups have resorted to armed violence, which forced the Philippine's army to intervene. The Philippines government along with international forces have formulated several peace agreements with the Bangsamoro but without much success. As such, this chapter will briefly account the Mindanao conflict in terms of its causes, the combatants, foreign actors involved in conflict resolution and the responses during this conflict.

In present day, even as the last peace settlement has been ratified in January 25, 2019, called the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) which grants them a wider

autonomous region, the future status of Bangsamoro is still in transition.¹ The question remains whether the Bangsamoro will cooperate with the newly established memorandum or will they bypass the Philippine's government.

The roots of marginalisation can be traced back to Spanish colonisation and the conquest of dispersing Muslim communities in the region. In 1350, Islam spread northward from Indonesia to the Philippines, making the majority of Muslims concentrated in the islands of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan.² When the Spaniards entered the archipelago in 1565, they began their long process of Christian indoctrination to all the provinces including Mindanao.³ The process of Christianisation by the Spaniards was regarded as violent to the Moros since they were treated inhumanely; killed mercilessly and burning their villages.⁴ The Muslims in Mindanao were referred to as 'Moros' by the Spanish rulers to differentiate them from the Christian Filipinos.⁵ The term Moro was coined for Muslims of Mixed Arab and Barber descent. This was first applied to the Muslims in Manila because there were similar attributes between them.⁶ Later, the term was applied to the Muslims in Mindanao as they remained hostile as the Spaniards failed to convert them to Christianity.

¹ Gutierrez, Beatrice Jilie. 2019. "Fast Facts on the Bangsamoro Organic Law." PIA News. Philippine Information Agency. February 12, 2019. <https://pia.gov.ph/features/articles/1018364>.

² Jack Miller, "Religion in the Philippines," Asia Society, accessed in February 21, 2020, <https://asiasociety.org/education/religion-philippines>.

³ Miller, "Religion in the Philippines,"

⁴ Anushka D. Kapahi and Gabriel Tañada, "Identity Struggle and the Bangsamoro Basic Law as the Path to Peace," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol.10, No. 7 (2018), 1-7

⁵ Kapahi and Tañada, "Bangsamoro Basic Law," 4

⁶ Kapahi and Tañada, "Bangsamoro Basic Law," 5

Not long after Spain departed, the Philippines was under US control. Although the US rulers were not as belligerent in converting the Moros, they were still neglected socioeconomic wise.⁷ Even as the Philippines gained independence from the US in 1946, there were no efforts in improving their welfare except to transfer leadership of administration to the Christian Filipino elite. In efforts to increase the Christian demography, the Philippines government under American colonial rule, adopted a migration policy for the purpose of resettlement which allowed the Christians from the north to settle in the south. This prompted the Christians to have access to vast amount of land. The sole purpose of this policy is to eradicate the Hukbalahap base used to operate communist guerrilla movements in Central Luzon and to level the rural areas through organised resettlements.⁸ This resulted in the shifting demographics in Mindanao making a drastic change in the Muslim to non-Muslim population. The mass migration of Christians into the south heightened the socioeconomic imbalance. Not only did they seized agricultural land from the Moro farmers, but also grant more positions of power to the Christians.⁹

In the wake of the Jabidah Massacre 1968 in Corregidor, Moros formed a stronger sense of solidarity by instigating separatist groups. The Marcos' government tried to cover up the massacre with claims that it never happened.¹⁰ In

⁷ Kapahi and Tañada, "Bangsamoro Basic Law," 6

⁸ Naoyuki Ochiai, "The Mindanao Conflict: Efforts for Building Peace through Development." *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (2016), 37-59.

⁹ Ochiai, "Efforts for Building Peace," 40

¹⁰ Amir Mawallil, *Human sacrifice in Corregidor: 50 years after the Jabidah Massacre*. March 21. Accessed September 11, 2020.
<https://cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/2018/03/21/operation-merdeka-50-years-later.html>.

2013 President Benigno Aquino III made a commemoration on behalf of the lives lost, making him the first president to acknowledge the tragedy as part of Philippines' history.¹¹ The two most prominent separatist groups are the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The MNLF was a splinter group formed from the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM) in 1972. Since the MIM did not fight for the struggle against the Philippines government, Nur Misauri, Salamat Hashim along with other leaders formed the MNLF, which appointed Nur Misauri as the chairman.¹² It became the representation of the Bangsamoro struggle for independence, advocating for freedom and recognition of the Bangsamoro identity. The MNLF backed itself with an official army called the Bang Moro Army (BMA) to defend itself against the government. The MNLF fight for independence against the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP), cost a significant portion of Marcos' government and caused 50,000 deaths.¹³

In order to defuse and prevent further hostilities negotiations were initiated with the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) as an intermediary. The OIC threatened to impose an oil embargo in the Philippines which put pressure on the MNLF, and the negotiations began in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.¹⁴ These peace talks resulted in the signing of the Tripoli Agreement in 15 December 1976 granting

¹¹ "Human sacrifice in Corregidor," Amir Mawallil

¹² Mozammel Haque, "Filipino Muslims' Struggle for Independence and the Manila-Mindanao Peace Pact," *Pakistan Horizon* Vol.49, No. 4 (1996), 43-59

¹³ Haque, "Filipino Muslims' Struggle for Independence," 48

¹⁴ Haque, "Filipino Muslims' Struggle for Independence," 55

them an autonomous state instead of the originally desired independence. The 1976 Tripoli Agreement was unilaterally signed by the three parties, creating the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).¹⁵ Through many negotiations, with the help of Indonesia and Libya, the MNLF and GRP signed the Final Peace Agreement in Jakarta in 1996. Tensions heightened between the change of presidents and it resulted in the Bangsamoro to demand once again for independence which prompted the formation of the MILF.¹⁶ In response to the breakaway of another series of revolts, demanding a wider autonomous region, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region Muslim in Mindanao (BARMM) became the newly-established Moroland in present day.

The involvement of international actors can be seen through the efforts made beginning from the first peace talks. The OIC has been observing the situation in Mindanao and has dedicated their efforts in conducting responses to the cause by adopting the resolution ‘The Conditions of Muslims in the Philippines’.¹⁷ The OIC, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Japan, Norway, and the International Monitoring Team (IMT) were involved in the peace talks, providing assistance for development, and to relieve poverty. The OIC provided a pathway for the MNLF/MILF to properly negotiate with the GRP and demand their cause for self-determination.¹⁸ Malaysia and Libya particularly, were seen to have mutual relation

¹⁵ William A. Stuebner and Richard Hirsch, “Mindanao: A Community-based Approach to Counterinsurgency,” *PRISM*, Vol.1, No. 3 (2016), 129-138

¹⁶ Stuebner and Hirsch, “Mindanao: A Community-based Approach to Counterinsurgency,” 132

¹⁷ Alpaslan Özerdem, “The Contribution of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference to the Peace Process in Mindanao,” 407-409

¹⁸ Özerdem, “The Contribution of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference,” 407

on the basis of Islam as a ground for shared values.¹⁹ Although the intention was to broker a ceasefire and eventually end the civil war, there was no denying that the international parties did not bring their own agenda to the peace processes.

Transparency, accountability and proper monitoring should be a priority for the Philippines government and the international actors for sustainable peace in Mindanao. Since the BARMM is still in transition, there are hopes this is the last string of the alienation of the Muslims and separation from the Filipinos. To understand the international relations aspect behind this research, Neoliberalism theory will be used to explain the nature of the Mindanao conflict. As the foundation of the conflict is to eliminate conflict altogether between the Bangsamoro and the Philippines government and the involvement of international actors, the concept of international cooperation and conflict resolution will be used.

1.2 Research Questions

To achieve a comprehensive analysis, this research paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the factors that led into the establishment of Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)?
2. What are the roles of international actors in the ratification of ARMM and BARMM?

1.3 Research Objectives

¹⁹ Özerdem, “The Contribution of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference,” 410

The objectives of this research are to understand the reasons for the struggle for self-determination of the Bangsamoro against the Philippines government. It also aims to dissect the factors of the eventual establishment of the ARMM and BARMM as a way to end the civil war between the Bangsamoro and the GRP. Lastly, it identifies the international actors involved and the interest of each party in contributing to the peace process.

1.4 Research Significance

This research topic is pertinent to the field of International Relations as it discusses the regional and international levels of analysis. As this research discusses the struggle for self-determination and the road to an autonomous region, it provides a look at how it is common in the Southeast Asian region, namely Aceh and Pattani. Not to mention separatist movements are common around the world, such as the case of Catalonia, Spain. This highlights the ethnic and sentimental struggle of identity within a state that calls for independence or autonomy.

1.5 Structure of Writing

The first chapter (introduction) states the general overview of the topic. This includes a brief description on the background of the topic, the aim of this research, the research questions, and the significance in writing this thesis.

The second chapter (theoretical framework) explains the international relations theories and concepts used within this thesis. It also reviews literature gathered from peer-reviewed articles and books to form the foundation of the Mindanao conflict, mainly international cooperation, conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.

The third chapter (research methodology) provides a look into the explanation on the research approach, research method and data collection techniques used in gathering information. This chapter presents on the methods used in order to answer the research questions.

The fourth chapter (discussion), displays the findings to answer the research questions; the factors to the establishment of ARMM and BARMM and how the international actors contributed to these two arrangements. The findings are then analysed by incorporating the theory and concepts presented in Chapter II.

The fifth chapter (conclusion), summarises the analysis in Chapter IV by highlighting the key points and concludes the thesis.

