

# The classes and class struggles contents of the Bangsamoro question

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – There is a noticeable dearth of literature offering Marxist perspectives and analyses on the Bangsamoro struggles for self-determination, ethnic and religious identities and social justice. A reason for this may lie in the general derision of bourgeois academics and conventional commentators on the supposed paucity of Marxist theories on nationalism, ethnicity and religion. This may have influenced, ironically, Filipino Marxist thinkers into being indifferent to this research topic. Far from the truth, however, that Marxism is essentially an economic determinist social conflict theory, its historical materialism offers a rich treasury of analyses and perspectives on nationalism, self-determination, religion and ethnic identity within the context of class struggles as the acme of the theory of scientific socialism. The paper, therefore, offers a scientific analysis of the Bangsamoro Question from a Marxist standpoint beyond the perspectives of psychologism, naturalism and ethno-racialism, which are usually deployed by traditional and uninformed commentators in analyzing ethnicity questions and quests for separatism.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper employs the historical and class analysis of the dynamics, relationships and struggles of classes in the history of the Bangsamoro struggles against colonialism and the subsequent postcolonial regimes up to the present time.

**Findings** – As a scientific paradigm, historical materialism presents itself as a general scientific social conflict theory. Using this framework through historical and class analyses, the paper proves the improbability of the Moros' quest for separatism or genuine autonomy at this historical point. It, therefore, asserts the linking of the Moro struggles to the more immense struggles of the Filipinos for national and social liberation from imperialism.

**Research limitations/implications** – The paper is limited to the historical and class analyses of classes' dynamics and struggles. It is, therefore, far from an exhaustive analysis of the Moro struggles using different non-Marxist social conflict theories.

**Practical implications** – The research can be considered a practical guide in analyzing and predicting the trajectories of the Moro struggles in Mindanao and Sulu.

**Social implications** – The work addresses the question from radical and Marxist premises.

**Originality/value** – This is a highly original and valuable work from the point of view of Marxist social conflict theory.

**Keywords** Bangsamoro, Ethnic Identity, Islam, Social justice, Belligerency and historical materialism

**Paper type** Research paper

... the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

**-Karl Marx, Frederick Engels-** The Communist Manifesto [1]

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The history of the Moslems of the Philippine South and the lives of their sultans are not devoid of an epic character. That a great deal of cruelty, tears and suffering have followed the wake of their depredations and persistent struggle against aims to conquer them is not to be denied; but these are merely responses to similar inflictions upon them. In all life-and-death

struggles, no contestant has a monopoly on virtue or vice. Yet the foe had observed the invariant bravery, stoicism in defeat and, in general, magnanimity in the moment of Muslim victory.

-Cesar Adib Majul- The Role of Islam in the History of the Filipino People [2]

### **Introduction: class struggles as the motive force of the Moro belligerency**

The bourgeois academics, reactionary sociologists, radical nationalists and even the petty-bourgeois secular leaders of the Bangsamoro people themselves (of course, the Islam fundamentalists may have different motivations) are maybe in unity, one way or another, that the focal points of the Bangsamoro struggles lie mainly on ethnic and Islam identities, subordinating class struggles and the economic basis of such. Bereft of any theoretical foregrounding on Marxism, these bourgeois thinkers and commentators are unaware that ethnic and religious identities are mere necessary manifestations of the existence of classes and class struggles in the long history of the Bangsamoro people. The same narrative is intertwined with the forces and the development of colonialism in Southeast Asia for three hundred years preceding the criminal war of aggression waged by the US against the Philippines in the closing years of the 19th century.

These uninformed commentators and reactionary leaders tend to reduce the social and material inequalities in Mindanao and Sulu as the products of the clash of civilizations and the difference in religious creeds and ethnicity. They harp on eclectic psychologism, naturalism, and ethno-racialism, ignoring the facts that such inequities are concrete products of the marginalization of the Bangsamoro people by colonialism in history. That such marginalization is an outcome of class struggles in the historical development of these people.

That Islam itself was born as a response to economic and hence, class struggles in ancient Arabia, while the Moro identity has been carved out through the people's historical resistance against the violent but largely unsuccessful incursions of Spanish colonialism across three centuries and the equally brutal American imperialist subjugation of Mindanao and Sulu in the early 20th century – are but solid historical truths demonstrating that both Islam and the Moro identity are the necessary outcomes and on the other level, manifestations of class struggles in Arabia and Mindanao and Sulu. The same had been sustained since Islam set foot in Mindanao in 1450. Such class struggles took their sharpest violent crescendos during the Moro-Spanish Wars, the destruction of Balangini in 1850 by Spanish steam-powered boats, and the criminal war of aggression by the Americans in 1899, shortly after they invaded Luzon and the Visayas. It peaked with the Muslims' heroic resistance that turned out as massacres in Bud Bajo and Bud Bagsak in 1906 and 1913, respectively.

The same class struggles resulted in the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)-led secessionist wars in the 1970s, which resulted in the forging of the Tripoli Agreement in 1976. After the Marcos dictatorship reneged on its promises in the agreement, the periodic outbursts of violence from that period up to the establishment of the MNLF-led Autonomous Regions in Muslim Mindanao (ARRM), the creation of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)-led Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) in 2020, also marked the twists and turns of these otherwise latent and hidden at times, yet primarily brutal and open class struggles throughout history.

While these struggles from time to time hit their sharpest military forms, as mentioned above, sustained yet sporadic ebullitions are rampant as well throughout Mindanao's and Sulu's history. The same manifested in the vicious cleavages of animosity between the

Christian settlers and the Muslim people from the 1950s and onwards with various violent skirmishes, the perennial attacks of MNLF, MILF and other insurgent Moro forces on some Christian cities and communities in the South, and even the banditry of the Abu Sayyaf and other fundamentalist groups which have been hitting the headlines since the 2000s.

The mechanical Marxists will rejoice in these identified historical class struggles between the Moro people against colonialism, imperialism and the local ruling classes. The dialectical materialists, however, would tend to point out that those manifestations of class struggles mentioned above are but the fundamental expressions of them. They are the most prominent forms of class struggles between the enormous forces of colonialism and imperialism against the Moro people and Islam. Yet, they are mere symptoms of a disease, a cacophony of indications emitted by the unresolved historical Moro question.

However, there are other forms and expressions of class struggle within the history of the Bangsamoro people. These took forms as secondary contradictions surrounding the primary contradiction between the Bangsamoro people and colonialism, and among them are,

- (1) The class struggles, albeit in subordinate form, between the masses of the Moro people against their traditional leaders who, from time to time, betray the aspirations of their people. This has been evident in the Kiram-Bates Agreement, wherein Sultan Kiram succumbed to US imperialism and betrayed the Moro aspiration for nationhood. Of course, the treachery of some secular leaders who capitulated with Marcos at the height of the MNLF-led secessionist wars was another manifestation of the inter-Muslim class struggles. The entrenchment at the local government level of Moro datus and other secular leaders who turned out to be warlords like the Dimaporos and the Ampatuans is another expression of class divisions and struggles among the Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu.
- (2) The class-based fault lines between the secular against the purest religious leaders and the fundamentalists among the Moro people. This has been demonstrated with the break-up of the Movement for the Independent Mindanao (MIM), the schism within the MNLF triggering the formation of the MILF and other insurgent groups. The breakaway of the Abu Sayyaf from the mainstream insurgent formations is in no way could be interpreted but as an expression of class struggles among the Moro people, whose estrangement can be located on various ethnicities in Mindanao and Sulu. Further, the fact that these fundamentalist Islam groups trace their origin to the brainchild of imperialism, a Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) creation as a countervailing force of the US against the rise of secular Islamism in the Middle East, North Africa and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, adds some rich textures of class struggles in the cold war epoch spilling into Muslim Mindanao and South East Asia in the recent past.
- (3) The class struggles between Muslims, the Christian settlers in Mindanao and the non-Muslim Lumads. From time to time, these struggles break into bloody ruptures, like in the formation of the murderous armed Christian group, the Ilaga band in the 1960s. Such sowed terror in the South. Although these struggles are tempered by the local government units and the state military imposing bourgeois' laws and state-sponsored violence, both the Christian militant groups and some Muslim communities would be engaged in sporadic clashes from time to time. At some points, the terrorist Muslim groups would target Catholic churches and priests through bombings and assassinations which are bizarre expressions of class struggles in religious and terrorist forms. Squeezed between various warring forces and with their interests in the recoupment of their ancestral domain, the Lumads tend to side with the Muslims. Some of them would align, from time to time, with Marxist revolutionary forces operating in Mindanao.

- (4) The inter-elite class struggles between the well-entrenched Muslim warlords, Christian political dynasties and landlords and the Manila government for budgetary allotments, political favors and the sharing of economic spoils add to the complexities of class struggles in Mindanao and Sulu.

Overall, the inextricability of these otherwise intertwined class struggles forming a complex wave of social contradictions could be deciphered only by a Marxist paradigm. No bourgeois social theory of conflict could understand these phenomena. Neither the same could be detached from the historical development of the Moro belligerency nor the material bases of the above-identified class struggles.

First, we speak of four centuries of Moro struggles against colonialism and imperialism and against the subsequent post-colonial governments allowing them to fashion out peculiar ethnic and religious identities tempered by these class struggles. Second, we are dealing here with the material bases of these class struggles, tracing back to the rise of the Sultanates of Buayan, Maguindanao and Sulu in the 16th century which developed into robust political economies participating in global trade and commerce between Europe and China and only to be destroyed by the Spaniards in 1845. The third and the most important material basis of class struggle in Mindanao and Sulu was the Americans' dispossession of Muslims' ancestral domains. Such dispossession has become a policy of the post-colonial regimes encouraging the resettlement of Christians in Mindanao and allowing multinational and transnational corporations to possess vast tracks of lands that were previously owned by the Muslims.

These historical and material bases of class struggles in Mindanao and Sulu must be deciphered from the Marxist context of historical materialism with the hope that the Moro people will look at their history, struggles, identity and religion beyond the limited confines of bourgeois social sciences and religious precepts. Instead, it appears compelling to these people to leverage on the Marxist theory of social conflict through historical materialism for them to understand the nature of their historical struggles, peculiar identity and religion and be able, to a certain extent, to chart their destinies within the framework of the theory of self-determination.

While this paper is far from proposing any viable solution to the Moro insurgency question based on bourgeois social development and conflict resolution theories, it seeks to advance the Marxist conception that the resolution of these class contradictions and their concomitant class struggles can be located within the framework of the larger struggle of the Filipinos against imperialism, and its local minions in the Philippines, an appendage of global monopoly capitalism.

### **The development of Islam and the Moro identity**

That class struggles generally engendered the development of Islam is evident in history. The religion was founded in the 7th century by the prophet Muhammad in Mecca, a notable commercial hub occupied by various merchants and traders from different tribes. Being well-traveled himself, Muhammad understood that the unification of several tribes who were in trade and commerce businesses would give them an utmost advantage over commercial traders in other places. As quoted by Kumar, Tarig notes,

Muhammad's spiritual drive was partially fueled by socioeconomic passions, the desire to strengthen the commercial standing of the Arabs, and the need to impose a set of standard rules. His vision encompassed a tribal confederation united by common goals and loyal to a single faith. Islam became the cement utilized by Muhammad to unite the Arab tribes, and from the beginning, it regarded commerce as the only noble occupation [3].

Clearly, the economic motivations of Muhammad were tangled with the founding of Islam and the desire to impose social codes on its followers. We advance, therefore, that such was a manifestation of class struggle between Muhammad and his followers against their business

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competitors in the Arab world and Muhammad with his followers themselves. Not shortly after his death, in fact, Islam would come into a great schism between the Sunni and the Shiite sects leading to the murder of one of Muhammad's sons. Class struggle was pulsating within Muhammad's tribes as each tribe fought for supremacy and leadership positions over the others.

However, Islam would develop as a great religion of peace. Within Islam territories and empires, there was a clear divide between the religious and secular leaders – the ulamas, the caliphs and the sultans. The moral codes imposed by this nascent religion were effective in social organizations that even internal dissent was prohibited in favor of peaceful and harmonious coexistence within the Islam fold. This reign of peace, nonetheless, would be disturbed for nearly three centuries when the European Catholics launched the Crusades against the Muslims in the 10th century. For several hundred years, the Muslims and the Christians came into violent conflict through various episodes over the so-called holy lands, Turkey and several parts of Italy. The crusades were punctuated by the birth of the renaissance leading to the industrial revolution and the dawning of capitalism in the 17th century.

With capitalism, as Kumar [4] would provide, secularization and modernization became inevitable for several Islam territories and empires. At this point, Islam ceased to play a central role in social organizations. With the loss of their various territories to colonial powers, the Muslim leaders were compelled to respond, and Kumar stresses,

In response to the loss of their territories to European colonial powers, the Muslim rulers of the Ottoman, Egyptian and Persian empires introduced programs of modernization, capitalistic reforms and Westernization. While the goal of the various despots was to find ways to develop their military, they also transformed their economic and political systems. The result was a series of military, administrative, educational, financial, legal and social reforms, strongly influenced and inspired by the West that gradually displaced Islam as the basis of Muslim society and put secularism in its place. Additionally, a new Western-educated secular middle class came into being that assumed positions of importance in government, education and law, eroding the traditional basis of the ulama's power [5] (Kumar, 2016-17, par. 22)

Kumar [6] further posits that the Muslim leaders of the Ottoman, Egyptian and Persian empires were the first to take the head for modernization, capitalist reforms and Westernization to secure their respective rules against internal challenges and that of the global ones of capitalism and modernism. For one, the Egyptian ruler Memit Ali pushed the modernization of factories as the country's army needed textiles and clothing, dockyards and factories for arms, munitions and bayonets. This resulted in the wholesale restructuring and modernization of Egyptian society.

Kumar adds,

The Ottomans in Turkey similarly carried out a series of reforms—they built schools, roads and canals, curbed excessive taxation and set up a modern financial system. Persia under the Qajar dynasty in the 18th and 19th centuries attempted to pass similar reforms but had less success than their Egyptian and Ottoman counterparts. There was also a move to establish modern states in all three cases [7].

These structural reforms paved the way for a new class: the middle-class Muslims who were educated in European schools and embraced secularization and modernity as the way forward for Muslim societies and religion. Among the most outstanding scions of this new class was Mustafa Kemal or Ataturuk, who instituted sweeping and radical reforms in Turkey, unparalleled in any other Muslim country. According to Kumar [8], to consolidate Ataturuk's own authoritarian rule in 1924, "he abolished the caliphate, closed down the madrassas or religious schools, replaced Sharia with the Swiss civil code and expunged the reference to Islam as the state religion of Turkey in its constitution. Ataturk was fiercely secularist, and the Turkish army carried on the Kemalist legacy after his death [9]".

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Because of this, the movement for return to traditional Islam, named Salafism, reverberated across the Arab world, calling for unity between the ulama and the modern state leaders while rejecting modernism and capitalism. The Muslim Brotherhood, which originated in Egypt for one, carried the position that the “Koran is our constitution.” The same was an outstanding example of Islam revivalist movements seeking the unity of the church and state. These revivalist upswings, however, were drowned by the more powerful radical Muslim movements which developed as a response to the fast globalizing world under monopoly capitalism. These radical Muslim movements located their countries in the peripheries of global capitalism, being subordinated and exploited therein.

According to Kumar [10], the dominant political philosophy of the then-colonized Muslim nations from Indonesia to Algeria was radical nationalism with variants of Marxism on various levels. For instance, Indonesia’s Suharto flirted with communism with his alliance with the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI). Egypt’s Nasser proclaimed “Arab Socialism” as Libya’s Khadafi declared his “Green Socialist Revolution,” and so with Mossadegh with his Iranian brand of socialism and nationalism.

The possible nationalization and even socialization of oil industries in the Arab World through these leaders were both feared and loathed by Britain and the US, which have stakes with the exploration and exploitation of oil therein. They thus used Saudi Arabia’s King Saud and his successor, King Fahd, to counter the rising pan-Arabic nationalism and socialism. With its surplus in petrodollars, Saudi initiated the funding of different countries, banks and Muslim organizations to establish the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Such was designed to secure its hegemony over Muslim countries and organizations. From then on, Saudi became a willing partner and a platform for the British and Americans in deposing the Shah of Iran, Khadafi of Egypt, Saddam of Iraq and other leaders who were maybe unfriendly to imperialists’ interests in the Middle East and North Africa.

Under the backdrop of the cold war, Saudi with the aid of various multilateral organizations and the covert operations of the CIA, financed and organized the Mujahedeens to subvert the occupation of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. An explicit creation of both the Saudis through Bin Laden and the CIA, these Mujahedeens, after they seized Afghanistan, would later organize several terrorist networks across the globe, rocking from time to time various countries with their signature bombings and other terrorist attacks. The most dramatic of which was the 9/11 bombings in the US. Such signals thus what Kumar [11] terms as the development of the modern “political Islam.”

It is evident, therefore, that the establishment and development of Islam were based on and intertwined with class struggles. From its founding, the crusades, Islam’s flirtation with nationalism and socialism and the countervailing offensive of imperialist powers through Saudi Arabia, it is apparent that this religion and its followers were embroiled with colonialism and the oil and hegemonic interests of the imperialist powers in geopolitics. Either this religion was used to push for the independence of Muslim countries or served as a platform to advance the interests of imperialism in oil and global politics—is undeniable, and that the same religion was at the center of the dynamics and interplay of power struggles, hence, class struggles in various countries and regional and global politics.

Similarly, the founding and the development of Islam in the Philippines hinged on class struggles. Through the scholarships of Cesar Adib Majul [12], Najeeb Saleeby [13] (1973, 2019) and Francis James Warren (1985a, b) [14], we were able to know the development and the historical and cultural trajectories of the Moro people. Islam was implanted in Sulu in about 1450 by Arab traders, and a certain Abu Bakr was proclaimed as the first Sultan or Imam in Sulu. Tracing the genealogy of Sulu, Majul, through his study of the Tarsilas, the records of rulers in Sulu and Mindanao across generations, was able to establish the succession of rulers in the Sultanate and the general history of the Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu.

The scholarships of Saleeby [15] (1973, 2019) and Warren (1985a, b) [16] are instructive, on the other hand, on the political economy of the Sulu Sultanate and, to some extent, that of the Sultanates of Maguindanao and Buayan. These scholars traced back the history of these Sultanates, whose developed culture, religion and political economies were based on the precepts of the Islam religion.

For one, the Sultanate of Sulu has had a long history of resistance against Spanish colonialism. Drawn to the international trade between Europe, China and other Southeast Asian countries – Sulu resorted to piracy, marauding and slave trading to sustain the production through slave labor of highly demanded exotic items such as sea cucumbers and bird nests. For close to 200 years, between the 17th and 19th centuries, the Sulu Sultanate was a maritime power, resisting effectively and ferociously the military and political incursions of the Spanish colonialists from Visayas and Luzon. Further, at the outset of the 20th century, the new colonizing Americans waged brutal military campaigns against the recalcitrant Muslims in the South. These campaigns were so savage that even the literary giant Mark Twain raised a powerful opposition voice to the seemingly ethnic cleansing operations in Mindanao and Sulu being committed then by the Americans.

No doubt that since the granting of nominal independence to the Philippines by its former colonizer in 1946—open rebellion, banditry and even sustained insurgency were cogent and recurring realities in Muslim Mindanao and the archipelago of Sulu. Several local peace agreements and internationally-brokered accords have been reached between the belligerent forces of Muslim insurgents and the Philippine state since the 1970s, yet to no avail. At the time of the Marcos dictatorship, coinciding with the rise of pan-Islamic nationalism in the Middle East, the Muslims did rise again in a ferocious rebellion triggered by the deepening violence between the Christian settlers and the now-considered Muslim minority in Mindanao.

*What does this Muslim history tell us about?*

The Muslims, especially the Tausogs, Maguinadanons and Maranaos are engulfed by the history of resistance and class struggles in defense of their religion, land and culture. These struggles against colonialism and the otherwise colonial and neo-colonial Philippine state ruled mostly by Christians have exacerbated the Muslim's cultural insecurities, given that historically, the Muslims and Christians were at war for centuries. The Muslims view Catholicism as colonialism, and therefore, most Catholics who now wield control of the Philippine state are seen as potential enemies and are inimical to the Muslims' well-being as a people and as faithfuls.

From the perspectives of history and religion, therefore, the Muslim identity, character and culture were shaped tremendously by class struggles in the form of their ferocious resistance against colonialism and Catholicism. No one will be surprised thus if one asks a Muslim if he is a Filipino or a Muslim. As provided by various pieces of literature, the answer would always be a Muslim. In a word, the Muslims do not feel any affinity, connection, or identification with the concepts of being Filipinos within the supposed Filipino framework of nationhood.

Who could blame them anyway for their recalcitrance to identify with the Filipino nation? After all, this nation has remained underdeveloped since the turn of the last century and has been consigned by the US and other imperialist powers to the role of supplier of raw materials and a dumping site of the global monopoly capitalists' surplus products. This is a nation ruled by predatory political dynasties whose interest is rent-seeking through the deployment of state apparatuses and influences rather than for genuine national development through land reform and industrialization.

The question of identity is a profound cultural question. What separates perhaps the Muslim identity from the uniqueness of other ethnic groups in the Philippines lies in the fact that this identity is fashioned out by brutal and sustained class struggles for survival in

defense of Islam religion, culture, and ancestral domain. Again, this peculiar Muslim identity has been reinforced and hardened, to use some modest terms, by the dispossession of their ancestral domains by the Americans and the ensuing post-colonial regimes, governmental neglect of the development in Mindanao, cooptation of the elite Muslims with the government in Manila, lack of social services and the chauvinism of the Catholic Church by way of rituals, fiestas and other religions symbols subtly attacking the Muslim faith. Among these Catholic practices are the celebrations of Moro-Moro, wherein Muslims are portrayed as bandits and savages, the arch-enemies of the Christian faith.

Therefore, how will one define the Muslim identity concerning the Filipino nation-state?

It is a highly insecure, suspicious and inward-looking ethnic and religious identity that brushes aside Filipino citizenship and nationhood concepts. While at the same time, most of the Muslims are compelled to eke out an economic and social life in Mindanao and Sulu or even elsewhere in the Philippines (in Baclaran, Baguio and Pampanga as traders, for instance)—the undercurrent of their collective identity and psyche borders on insecurity, suspicion, and to a certain extent, contempt with the Christian majority, and the state.

This serves as one explanation of the perennial outbursts of rebellion and banditry in Mindanao and Sulu. Or should we say, this perennial rebellion is but an expression of cultural identity carved out by class struggles against colonialism and the colonized Filipinos over various centuries?

### **The marginalization of the Moros and the consolidation of imperialists' and local elite's economic interests in Mindanao**

The Bangsamoro people have mainly remained unconquered by Spain. In fact, in the Treaty of Paris which ceded the Spanish colony Philippines to the US—Sulu and Mindanao were referred to as foreign territories. These people have withstood American aggression through the fiercest armed resistance ever demonstrated in the country's history. That caliber 45 pistol, invented and designed by the Americans mainly against the most ferocious individual Muslim warrior, is a testimony of the general viciousness of the Moro people's struggle against colonialism. As a result, the imperialist aggressors had to deploy and maintain thousands of expansionist military forces in Mindanao and Sulu from 1903 onwards.

The Americans may have to some extent, subjugated Mindanao and Sulu by deploying and maintaining thousands of expeditionary troops until the Second World War when the forces were recalled due to the expediencies of war. These expeditionary forces had committed wanton atrocities in their scorched-earth policies of hamlet, torture, burning villages and massacres of unarmed civilians—killing all men, women and children found in the paths of the American military campaigns. That the US war of aggression was referred to as the first Vietnam War can be considered as an understatement of the brutality of their forces against the Filipinos, especially the Bangsamoro people.

Using the dual tactics of genocidal violence and trickery, the American aggressors dangled monetary incentives to the Muslim sultans and datus and forged the Kiram-Bates Treaty of 1898 [17], a trick designed to open up Sulu to American intervention. They created the Moro Province in 1903 under the Office of the US governor-general, established the Department of Mindanao and Sulu in 1915, and created the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes in 1920. Nonetheless, it was only in 1950 that the provinces of Lanao and Cotabato were put into the hands of the Filipinos. After the signing of the Treaty of Paris up to the 1950s, the Moro homeland was directly occupied by the atrocious and war-criminal American aggressors.

With the relative pacification of Mindanao in the 1920s, the American aggressors set forth the systematic dispossession of the Moro people's lands. Melencio [18] lists down the various measures adopted by the Americans to loot out the Muslims of their ancestral domain, and among those were,



- (1) The Land Registration Act (Act No. 496) required the registration of all lands occupied by any person, group, or corporation. Most Moros lost their communal lands in this way.
- (2) Public Land Act No. 718 was enacted by the Philippine Commission in April 1903. This decreed null and voided all land grants made by Moro sultans and datu.
- (3) Public Act No. 926, enacted in October 1903, decreed that all lands not registered under Act No. 496 were public lands and, therefore, available for homesteading, sale, or lease to individuals or corporations.
- (4) The Mining Law of 1905 declared all public lands free, open for exploration, occupation and even purchase by Americans.
- (5) The Cadastral Act of 1907 facilitated the acquisition of new landholdings.
- (6) Acts 2254 and 2280 of 1913 created agricultural colonies and encouraged Filipino migrants from the north to settle in the so-called public lands in Mindanao and Sulu. Act 2254 awarded the Filipino settler a 16-hectare lot, while Moros were allowed to own only eight hectares.
- (7) The Public Land Act 2874 in 1919 allowed a Filipino to own a 24-hectare lot, while a Moro was allowed only ten hectares.
- (8) Legislative Act 4197, enacted in February 1935, was also known as the Quirino-Recto Colonization Act. The government declared settlement as the only lasting solution to the Mindanao and Sulu problem.
- (9) The Commonwealth Act 141 in November 1936 declared all Moro ancestral landholdings as public lands. A Moro was allowed only four hectares, while a Filipino could own up to twenty-four; a wholly non-Moro corporation was allowed 1024 hectares. (Melencio, 2007, par. 17-26).

Melencio [19] contends that as early as 1913, with the passage of Acts 2254 and 2280 (the Agricultural Colonization Acts), the Americans have already encouraged Christian settlers from Central Luzon and Negros, together with affluent families from Ilocos, Cebu and Iloilo who became carpetbaggers, loggers, ranchers and bankers in Mindanao.

Accordingly, multinational corporations like B.F. Goodrich, Delmonte and Goodyear amassed vast landholdings through legal and illegal land grabbing. With the institutionalization in 1950 of the Land Settlement Development Corporation (LASEDECO) and the Homestead Act, lands were given to former soldiers mixed with ex-Hukbalahap guerrillas to function as stabilizers in Muslim villages. On the other hand, private corporations sneaked through the scene, like the Bislig Bay Lumber which acquired 141,000 hectares for logging operations, and the Firestone Corporation which was awarded 1,000 hectares of land in Cotabato for a rubber plantation in 1957. The Dole Philippines, a subsidiary of Castle and Cook, took vast tracts of land in Mindanao for its pineapple business in 1963 as well, while the Weyerhouse Corporation obtained 72,000 hectares of forest lands for its logging operations in 1966. The Boise-Cascade Corporation got a 42,000-hectare timber concession in 1968.

The colonial state continued granting lands to private corporations whose owners include the names of the Sarmientos, Magsaysays, Sorianos, Cojuangcos, Puyats, Alcantaras, Ayalas, Floreindos, Yuchengcos and many more. They emerged as the wealthy clans in Mindanao together with absentee landlords like the Elizaldes and Roceses. The massive resettlements and land-grabbing campaigns of the colonial and the subsequent post-colonial state in Manila marginalized the Moro people of Mindanao. Melencio [20] affirms that in 1903,

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the Moros constituted 76% of the entire population of Mindanao and Sulu, while in 1990, the same was reduced to just about 19%. Similarly, before the land-grabbing and resettlements, the Muslims owned approximately 75% of Mindanao and Sulu lands. It was reduced to a mere 17% in 1980, even as those landholdings owned by the Moros are primarily located in barren mountains, needing enormous marketing, infrastructure facilities and agricultural inputs to be productive.

Thus, by the 1960s, Mindanao and Sulu became fertile grounds for dissent and rebellion, revealing the sharp cleavages of animosity between the affluent Christian settlers, the multinational corporations, on one hand, against the dispossessed Muslim minority, on the other. Agitations for a renewed struggle for the Moro homeland peaked before the declaration of Martial Law as the economic crisis of the ruling system sharpened, triggered by global recessions and the crisis of overproduction in the world capitalist economy. This has been coupled with the wanton corruption of the Marcos dictatorship and his minions of technocrats, compradors and landlords.

The class struggles between the Moros and imperialism were vented against the most isolated, yet treacherous and brutal representative of imperialism in the Philippines—the Marcos dictatorship.

### **The secessionist fight of the MNLF, MILF and other armed groups: modern class struggles in military forms**

McKenna [21] asserts that various conditions converged, igniting the renewed class struggle for the Moro homeland through a separatist armed movement. First, the worsening economic crisis within the ruling system rendered Muslims poor, landless and marginalized. Second, the widespread sectarian violence in Mindanao and Sulu which resulted from armed Christian groups' atrocities against Muslims. Third, the rise of the counter-elite group from young professionals and students who were sent on scholarship grants by the government to Manila universities and even to Middle East countries in an attempt to coop the emergent generation of Muslim leaders. Among them were Nur Misauri and Hassim Salamat. Fourth, the immense inspiration was drawn from militant and nationalist Muslim movements led by Nasser of Egypt and Mosaddegh of Iran, among others.

Under such an acute crisis in Mindanao and the entire country, the Movement for Independent Mindanao (MIM) was formed. It eventually metamorphosed into the armed MNLF under Misuari and Salamat leadership. Without a doubt, the Moro people rallied behind the armed struggle of the MNLF aimed at the creation of an independent state through secession from the Manila government. A brutal war ensued in 1972, compelling the Manila government to deploy 75% of its entire military forces to Mindanao and Sulu against the armed Moro people. Such led to a military stalemate in 1976 and the subsequent Tripoli Agreement of 1979.

With the dictator Marcos renegeing on his promises for the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement provisions, the war dragged on albeit on a lesser scale, even as Marcos tricked some of the MNLF political leaders and military commanders into surrendering and conspiring with him by way of monetary incentives and other concessions. Disgusted by the inability of the MNLF leadership to push the war for independence further, some disgruntled leaders of the movement with much religious zeal, criticized the MNLF for secularism. Thus, Salamat and his group, who were products of Islam education in the Middle East, broke away in 1979 to form the MILF. The same group renewed the Bangsamoro people's protracted armed struggle in the 1990s and 2000s, securing a peace agreement with the Manila government after a long drawn-out negotiation brokered by Malaysia. To date, the transition committee is in place between the failed Misuari-led ARRM toward the full implementation of the BBL.

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Will the BBL succeed? We shall have more of this in the succeeding parts of the paper. Yet, several armed factions have already broken ties with the MILF, which include the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BFFF) led by Kumander Umbra Kato. At the same time, the MNLF remains a force to reckon with, given the continuing existence of its armed regulars of about five thousand fighters. In fact, on two occasions, the MNLF had invaded the City of Zamboanga for a few days, demonstrating its capability to continue the fight for the Moro homeland.

### **Beyond the bourgeois conception of the nation-state**

The predominantly Christian and bourgeois notion that the Moro people belong to an indigenous minority in the Philippines and thus may not pass on as a nation in both concrete and historically constituted terms—exposes at great length the deep-seated religious chauvinism of the Christian majority in the Philippines. This majority constituted themselves as the leading ruling elite of the country after Spanish colonialism and the US' nominal granting of Philippine independence at the end of the Second World War when all the ingredients of national elite cooptation had been completed by US imperialism.

That the label of Moro, which is akin to the Moors who fought the Spaniards in the Iberian Peninsula has been coined by the Spanish colonial military and religious leaders to denote a necessarily evil, bandit, savage and uncivilized “Other” people in Mindanao and Sulu—fits into the chauvinist description. That such “Other” was immortalized in the famous religious play of “Moro-Moro” and was incepted into the colonial people’s culture—represents the Spanish attempt to exclude and compellingly exterminate both the religion of Islam and, at the same time, the wide anti-colonial stance of the Moro people who largely remained free from Spanish colonialism and who fought with unparalleled ferocity in the subsequent American colonial criminal war of aggression at the turn of the last century.

As discussed in the preceding sections, the Sulu Sultanate developed into a flourishing polity whose political economy was akin to a modern state in a capitalist-based category. If such was not a state based on the capitalist definition way back before the arrival of the Spaniards, then one must ask what constitutes a state and how a nation is to be defined.

We will cease to argue from the legalistically rigid bourgeois political economy definitions of the nation and the state. Instead, we will direct our course with the Marxist definitions of them, which in our view, are far more advanced and deeply grounded on the concrete capitalist political economy. Unlike that of [Anderson \(1983\) \[22\]](#) who advances that communities and nations are constituted through the imagination of the people by the unifying power of the vernacular and the power of the print, the Marxist analysis of a nation-state is historically grounded on the political economy of each stage of development of a particular economy within the encompassing world economy in general and the theories of historical materialism and class struggle.

The Marxists may concede that a nation may consist of common territories, shared beliefs and culture, common languages and the broad specificity of the dominant mode of production, which deals with both production and distribution. All four elements may supply the conditions for forming a nation-state, as shown by the formation of nation-states in Europe during the transition from feudalism to capitalism and those latter-day pronounced nation-states resulting from anti-colonial and nationalist struggles in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Strictly speaking, nonetheless, the nation-state both as a theory and an economic-political polity and classification, emerged only during capitalism after the industrial revolution, and thus technically, there were no nation-states before capitalism.

The basic confines, for instance, of a specific community-based economic production and distribution during the nomadic stage in the evolution of societies was within tribes and clans which later became the city-states in slave societies, e.g. Greek, Rome and Sparta, and

developed further to fiefs, feudal states and kingdoms during the middle ages of feudalism. The notion, therefore, of the nation-state is only consistent with the advances in capitalist development within the specificity of its mode of production and distribution of resources. In Marxist terms, the concept of a nation-state denotes the peculiar type and unit by which the capitalist class rules within particular territorial bounds, specific legal statutes and common culture while liquidating in the process the pre-capitalist feudal mode of relations and cementing the capitalist rule in connection with the world capitalist economic system itself.

The prevailing bourgeois notion is that those pre-capitalist tribes, clans, indigenous peoples and their modes of production and distribution which may have been ameliorated into the capitalist nation-state whether by force, cooptation and consent—may form part of the capitalist nation whose head is a capitalist state representing the interests of the bourgeois ruling class over the ruled workingmen, other classes and ethnicities.

The bourgeois apologists will argue, therefore, that the Moro people are now the minority people in Mindanao and Sulu as the American colonizers subdued their polities. Thus, the appropriating local ruling classes of landlords and compradors in the succeeding neo-colonial state would now rightfully inherit such a minority under the thesis that the Moro polities in the South, which Spain did not subjugate, fought the Americans and the subsequent post-colonial regimes fiercely—have been generally vanquished through the combination of brute force and the cooptation of their leaders and rulers. From the bourgeois legalistic point of view of what may constitute a nation and a state—the Bangsamoro people have now been vanquished by colonialism, and the inheriting local ruling classes of the country may bequeath them as a token to their resistance, the peculiarity of their religion and culture and their minority stature—with an autonomous status beneath the Moro people's cry for self-determination.

Relative to this bourgeois' conception, the Filipino ruling elite has doled out the same concession of autonomy to the Muslims of Mindanao and Sulu through the Tripoli Agreement of 1979, the 1994 Agreement with the MNLF and the BBL of 2015. The BBL now serves as the framework for rolling out partial political autonomy to several provinces in Mindanao and Sulu. However, such autonomy is bound to fail, as demonstrated by the 1994 agreement and the actual practice of autonomous rule. Given the fact that such a concession is merely designed to appease the Muslim elites who have been fragmented by cooptation with the Manila government of landlords and compradors since the Second World War, we see no future with such an undertaking.

MNLF's Misuari has been coopted for one, and his autonomous governance was a dismal failure that wallowed in corruption, mismanagement and total dependence on the Manila government. Misuari failed to implement meaningful reforms like instituting gainful livelihood to ordinary Muslims as he had no power over the imminent domain of land and other natural resources in the autonomous region. His governorship of the region was nominal. Although it had specific budgetary allocation, the autonomous regional government was powerless to institute sweeping and far-reaching fundamental reforms for the Moro people. The same is bound to happen with the BBL-framed autonomy.

Autonomy could never be the answer to the Bangsamoro question. The Moros need the repossession of their ancestral domain which has been systematically looted away by the American aggressors and the subsequent Filipino post-colonial regimes which colluded with imperialism. Autonomy will not solve poverty, disenfranchisement and recurring rebellion. It will not give peace to Mindanao and Sulu as long as the Bangsamoro people suffer from debilitating poverty and lack of opportunities. And whilst the corrupted Muslim rulers and leaders enjoyed the spoils of war and the concessions given by the Manila-based ruling elite, restiveness among the ordinary Moro people will continue either in the form of a genuinely revolutionary class struggle for self-determination, terrorism and banditry as long as the Moro people are poor, dispossessed and marginalized.

While it can be conceded in bourgeois legalistic terms and definition that Mindanao and Sulu cannot be constituted as a nation-state given the fact that their leaders and rulers have been both vanquished and coopted by the Americans and the subsequent local ruling elite, the Marxist view may assert otherwise: that the Bangsamoro people of Mindanao and Sulu are a historically-constituted nation.

First, there is an amalgamation of familiar territories, cultures, languages and outlooks galvanized by Islam. Second, nominal and historic states existed through the Sulu, Maguindanao and Buayan Sultanates. Third, the same predated the arrival of Spanish conquerors whom the Spaniards had never defeated for more than three hundred years. Fourth, the Americans annexed Mindanao and Sulu through a criminal war of aggression and genocidal campaigns, violating even the Treaty of Paris, which indicated that Mindanao and Sulu were foreign territories. Fifth, the systematic dispossession of the Bangsamoro people of their ancestral domain which we discussed above closely resembles that of the dispossession of land by other peoples of the world, e.g. the Palestinians. Sixth, and most importantly, there is an unabated resistance from the Moros since the war of aggression by the Americans. That this resistance was either in the forms of a genuine struggle for independence, banditry or simple protests, has stimulated and firmed up the Moro resolve for generations that the Bangsamoro question must be resolved once and for all in favor of their inalienable right to self-determination.

Such cited above elements present an always fertile condition for any stirrings of revolts, uprisings and the general struggle for independence, which historically has been proven to be the cyclical history of the Bangsamoro people. The historical subjugation, on the one hand, and the historical struggle, on the other hand, of these people have mutated intensely into the consciousness of the past and will mutate as well into the future generations of Moros that theirs is a historically conceived nation, beyond the legalistic definition of the bourgeoisie. One is tempted to ask: when shall this end and will be resolved? We maintain that it may not end at all. It may not be resolved at all. Like the Palestinians, the Moro people, or the Bangsamoro people, a term coined to denote a nation and a people—will continue the struggle as long as their right to self-determination is recognized by the belligerent Philippine state and by US imperialism.

However, given the consolidation and development of the Philippine neo-colonial state since the nominal granting of the Philippine independence by American imperialism in 1946 and as shown by the history of the Bangsamoro struggle itself, the same struggle cannot be won without integrating itself into the larger national democratic struggle of the Filipino workers, peasants and other classes. The Bangsamoro people may not liberate themselves by themselves alone. They may have to rethink the Bangsamoro question within the larger national democratic struggle of the Filipino workers and people against imperialism. Otherwise, the cycle of regional wars, bogus autonomy, cooptation and corruption of their rulers and leaders will perpetuate for a long time.

Without recognizing the nature of the struggle as fundamentally a class struggle, the Moro people will be trapped within the dreams of ethnic and religious identities and the hallucinations of separatism without an end and resolution in sight.

### **The Marxist class theory and the trajectory of the Moro struggles**

Contrary to the fantastic notion of bourgeois academics and uninformed social commentators that the concepts of class and class struggles were pure concoctions of Marx and Engels, the same concepts have never been invented but only discovered by Marx and Engels as intrinsic features bound by certain economic specificities within definitive historical epochs. When these concepts were attributed to him, he could only smirk and say, “And now, as to myself, no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society. What I did

that was new was to prove that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production” [23] (Marx & Engels, 1969, p. 679).

Such was one of the bases when both Marx and Engels [24] declared in the Communist Manifesto that, “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes [25].”

Therefore, class struggles are the necessary resultants of the existence of classes. The very basis of such existence is the individual and group of people’s positions within the social production process, their relationship to the ownership of the productive tools and their positionality in the distribution of the fruits of such social production in the form of surplus labor. The distinction of classes is so evident in a capitalist society that it is almost homogeneously divided into the proletarian working class, which does not own the productive forces and who toils through social labor in one camp, and the capitalist class in another camp, which owns the productive forces and privately appropriates the products of the proletarian class’ socialized labor. Labor itself becomes a commodity and is owned by the capitalist class through its purchase of the same from the proletariat. In short, by selling their labor force which is their only means of existence and subsistence, the proletariat class has become modern-day slaves of the capitalist class.

In capitalist societies, therefore, where classes have been transformed into two dominant camps—the contents and forms of class struggles for the working class take on the direction for social emancipation through the socialization of the means of production (productive tools and forces = technology) and the equitable distribution of surplus value and capital which the capitalists have been privately appropriating unto themselves to create more capital in an unceasing mode of appropriation and ceaseless accumulation. The direction of the workers’ struggle henceforth has to take toward socialism to abate the private accumulation of the surplus value, which is capital in itself, and the pursuit of socialization of the ownership of production.

In peripheral societies of capitalism like the Philippines, where various classes exist and form a complex wave of class relationships and struggles between and among themselves and that of the exploiting classes—class struggle takes the direction for the national emancipation from imperialist countries, the liquidation of the feudal remnants and the upholding of the democratic rights and demands of various classes and sectors, one of which is the demand for land by the peasants and that of the self-determination by the ethnic minorities to include the Bangsamoro people. Under this context, the prevailing primary contradiction in class struggles is between the marginalized people (including the ethnic and religious minority) against imperialism and their cohort classes of landlords, compradors and adjunct businessmen who maintain and facilitate both the economic relations of the Philippines and that of global monopoly capital and who dominate the state, culture and other superstructures to maintain class rule.

In a word, the domestic, national and international division of labor determines the forms of class struggles in specific historical contexts.

Latter-Marxist philosopher Losurdo as cited by Moussaly [26] would affirm that the social protagonists of the struggle against capitalist domination have historically been the proletariat, colonized populations and women: “Each of these three struggles challenges the prevailing division of labor internationally, nationally and within the family [27].” Citing Losurdo, Moussaly continues,

By “prevailing division,” he means the patriarchal and racially based hegemonic capitalism humanity has experienced over the last few centuries. He goes on to state that these struggles

challenge, each in their way, an aspect of the relations of compulsion capitalism imposes on subaltern groups: “The three struggles for emancipation challenge the three fundamental ‘relations of compulsion’ constitutive of the capitalist system as a whole” (Losurdo, 2016, p. 44). His historical assessment of capitalism and his identification of the fundamental protagonists are convincing and well-documented. Losurdo affirmed that Marx & Engels, elaborated, without systematizing it in a single treatise, what he termed a general theory of social conflict. One element that appears underdeveloped in Losurdo’s genealogy of the concept of social class is what G.A. Cohen calls the primacy of the productive forces. Marx emphasized that certain forces of production allow specific types of social relations to come into being. This is the key to understanding the economic structure of a given society and the forms of class power [28].

Under this power dynamics of classes and the economic specificity of the country as an adjunct periphery of imperialism, can the Bangsamoro people demand self-determination at this point in history? Can such demand possibly be reduced to a genuine autonomy status in the bargaining table with the ruling elite and imperialism? What are the conditions and the class-based requirements by which such demand for self-determination and genuine autonomy be fulfilled? To answer these questions, a thorough Marxist inventory of classes in Mindanao and Sulu has to be undertaken to expose the hidden interests of these classes which compound the ensuing class struggles of different classes in the interplay of classes and their struggles within the historical question.

First, there are the big businesses and forces representing the interests of imperialism through the multinational and translational corporations which hold vast tracts of lands as discussed above and are operating lucrative businesses in Mindanao. They are the Dole Philippines B.F. Goodrich, Delmonte, Goodyear and many others.

Second, there are landed gentries in Mindanao representing their imperialist-business partners or are operating through their owned businesses as well. Among them are the Sarmientos, Magsaysays, Sorianos, Cojuangcos, Puyats, Alcantaras, Ayalas, Floreindos, Yuchengcos, Elizaldes, Roceses and others.

Third, there are landlord politicians like the Duterte, Zubiris, Pimentels, Emanos, Antonios, Chiongbians, Ramiros, Acostas, Cagases, Palma Gils and others.

Fourth, there are Muslim-landlord politicians in Mindanao and Sulu who represent their distinct interests, and among them are the Alontos, Lucmans, Adiongs, Dimaporos, Macarambons, Dimakutas, Amilbangsas, Rasuls, Abubakars, Ututalums, Tulawies, Pendatuns, Masturas, Datumanongs, Matalams, Mangilens, Sinsuat and others.

The above classes stand for both the status and the Philippine state. Another class aligned with the status quo comprises the petty-bourgeois professionals, OFWs and other classes and their familial origins of middle-class peasants (also petty-bourgeois) who were transported to Mindanao as Christian settlers. They represent the core-base constituency of local and national elite politics in Mindanao. They now number around 22 million compared to the Moro people of about five million and the Lumad minority of approximately a million. Whilst these 22 million are distributed into different classes, they are culturally and politically homogenous within the Christian fold and are the most avowed defenders of the status quo in Mindanao and Sulu.

The above classes and interests represent the status quo. They are desirous of perpetuating the same status quo as their class interests are intrinsically tied-up to their monopoly of land, businesses and political power at the local levels. The later classification of Muslim politicians across ethnic and minority divides simply upholds their class interests for land and power. Neither are they sympathetic to the Muslim cause but, on various occasions, would harp and pay lip service to reason merely to gain concessions through blackmail from the national government in Manila, demanding political favors, budgetary allocations and favorable division of economic spoils and to win votes from the Muslim constituency during elections.

Again, the Moro people, as discussed above and while constituting a minority people and are religiously homogenous in Islam, are also divided into different classes of small peasants and

marginalized fisher folks, the proletariat and semi-proletariat, lumpen-proletariat and the diasporic settlers throughout the country like the Sama Dilauts or Badjaos. Of these minority classes, only about four million currently reside in Mindanao, as the other million are scattered throughout the country and abroad as traders, OFWs, professional practitioners and workers. On top of these classes and sectors are the Muslim petty-bourgeois leaders like Misuari, Ebrahim, Iqbal, Macapaar and others at the helm of the mainstream secessionist or autonomist movements.

The dwindling population of the Bangsamoro people in Mindanao and Sulu shows the extent to which imperialism and the local ruling elite have disenfranchised them by way of the latter's offensive and consolidation of their hold through legal and illegal land grabbing of the Moros' ancestral domain, the institutionalization of bourgeois politics and by populating the Moro homeland with Christian settlers. These are the evident results of the historical class struggles in Mindanao and Sulu.

Under this backdrop of the inventory of classes in Mindanao and Sulu within the context of a national political economy which is an appendage of the global capitalist system—in which direction is the struggle of the Bangsamoro people heads?

Certainly, it could not take the form of a national question like in the class struggles of the Irish, the East Timorese people and the Palestinians. The reason is simple. The Bangsamoro people have been so marginalized that they now constitute a tiny minority in Mindanao and Sulu and are incapable of waging a regional struggle for their national emancipation owing to their minority status. Even if they could qualify as a historically constituted nation, their tiny and even diasporic population concerning the Christian majority in Mindanao and Sulu could only be drowned in actual struggles. Both their political and armed resistance could be easily dismissed as mere protests and even as acts of terrorism by the state, leveraging on the Christian majority in Mindanao and Sulu.

While the MNLF had once declared the secession of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan from the Philippines, the fact that it could not consolidate the entire region toward its cause of separation because the partisans are in the minority, the same reason will frustrate whatever desire to sever the region from the rest of the archipelago. Likewise, the petty-bourgeois leadership of the Bangsamoro movements has shown a vacillating stance against imperialism and the cause of secession.

#### *What about autonomy?*

On three occasions, autonomy was doled out by the Manila elite government to the Bangsamoro people. These were through the Tripoli Agreement of 1976, the Misuari-led ARMM and the current MILF-brand BBL. While the latter is being implemented, the former two failed dismally because of the foregoing factors:

First, the recouping of the dispossessed Moro ancestral domain has only sometimes been on the agenda. Such is impossible as the class interests of imperialism and its cohort classes on land are firmly planted in Mindanao. The question of land is an irreconcilable issue between the ruling classes, imperialism and the Moro people. The same occupies the central demand of the Moro belligerency and rebellion throughout history. Without resolving this historical question in favor of the original owners of land in Mindanao and Sulu, class struggles would continue in the region the way the land question fuels class struggles in Luzon and the Visayas, every now and then, since the breakout of the bourgeois revolution of 1896.

Second, with the autonomous framework's lack of a clear direction toward self-determination and self-rule of the Bangsamoro people which remain an adjunct administrative body of the national government—the same is bound to be corrupted by the system itself. The petty-bourgeois nature of the leadership of the autonomous region serves as a fertile ground for corruption and cooptation. This has been shown by the dismal performance of Misuari in steering the ARMM and will be shown further by the ongoing implementation of BBL.



Third, since the autonomous government is merely a governing arm rather than a comprehensive political-economic polity, it would be dependent on the Manila government for allocation, resources and favors and is therefore bound to be used by politicians whose motives in Mindanao and Sulu are for the furtherance of their economic and political class interests not to mention the corruptible petty bourgeois leaders of the autonomous unit who are also at the helm of the Bangsamoro movement.

Unless the Bangsamoro people's struggle aligns and integrates itself with the more immense class struggles of the Filipino people for national independence from global monopoly capitalism aiming at resolving the question of land and the democratic aspirations of the people, the Bangsamoro quests for the recoument of their lands and the realization of their democratic rights would continue to fall into the snares of either the doled-out but unfeasible autonomy from the Manila Christian and elite government and/or to the inchoate promises of religious fundamentalism.

Under such a situation, the Moro people's aspirations for land, religious, ethnic identity and self-determination would remain in a crisis in what Antonio Gramsci (1971) calls, "the old is dying, and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear [29]."

While capitalism is dying historically, the Moro aspiration for a nation cannot yet be born and among the morbid symptoms are the massive poverty, landlessness and powerlessness of the Moro people, their diaspora, displacement, degradation of their environment, periodic wars, terrorism and of being held hostage by the promises of politicians, religious leaders and the petty-bourgeois kingpins of their own movements. The search for a genuinely viable alternative for the Bangsamoro people is compelling.

This alternative may require an emphasis on class and class struggles theories rather than from the perspectives of emotional Muslim ethnic identity and that of the eschatological Islamism.

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