

Identity and Politics of Bangsamoro People in Mindanao

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Abstract

Analysis of social movement and transformation requires an understanding of identity and politics. About 23-25 million war-related deaths in developing countries are directly attributed to identity conflict or ethno-nationalism over the last century. (Morgan, 2004) The conflict in Mindanao has direct relation with identity and often it is misconstrued or an obstacle to peace.

The purpose of the study is threefold: to provide an in-depth analysis of how the *Bangsamoro* identity was constructed, to understand how this has influenced the politics of peace talks between the Government and the forefront Muslim secessionist groups, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and to identify the factors that led to the failure of peace talks.

Statement of the Problem

Many factors impede the realization of a peaceful, politically mature and economically sustainable Muslim Mindanao. The lack of Philippine Government historical awareness and its consistent pursuit of colonial and militaristic approach towards the problem have produced decades of war leading to social protracted conflict. As a result, the *Bangsamoro* identity has evolved into a deeper socio-political identity. They believe that only a political structure tailored-fit to their unique socio-cultural and political identity would pave the way to sustainable peace. Until these aspirations are met, they will continue their fight for self-determination and maintain their belligerent stance against the government.

Research Questions:

This paper aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) How was the *Bangsamoro* identity constructed and its evolution?
- 2) How has the *Bangsamoro* identity influenced peace negotiations vis-à-vis the perception of non-Muslim Filipinos of a *Bangsamoro* identity?
- 3) What are the contributory factors to the failure of peace negotiations?

Methods in answering the questions:

This study applies two frameworks: Social Constructionism, which deals with the formation of the *Bangsamoro* political identity; and the work of Fen Osler Hampson on “why peace settlements succeed or fail.” Specific frameworks studied in the review of literature include primordialism, social constructionism, instrumentalism, and third-party mediation, and interviews from key informants.

Conclusion:

Research findings reveal that the concept of *Bangsamoro* was introduced in the 1970's to consolidate a common identity among the different Muslim ethno-linguistic groups and the other non-Muslim native inhabitants of Mindanao. However, in recent years, the *Bangsamoro* political identity has undergone transformation and many Muslims preferred to be called *Bangsamoro* as their identity as suppose to Filipino Muslim. The evolution is imperative for its political survival and to accommodate changes and other stakeholders. The failure of peace negotiations stems from the lack of historical awareness of government, participation from grassroots level and the involvement is very selective, elite-based, and sometimes biased, and this goes with who ever define the *Bangsamoro* has the power to alienate or include stakeholders from the peace dividends.