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The Philippine Left and Problematizing Peace Building in Muslim Mindanao

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About the Network

The Swedish Network of Peace, Conflict and Development Research is a joint effort of three departments conducting research on these topics at three different universities. The three departments have built a network among researchers of the universities and university colleges in their respective regions. The Department of Political Science of Umeå University is responsible for network activities in the northern part of the country, while the Department of Peace and Development Studies of Gothenburg University does the same in the South and Western part of Sweden. The Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University brings together the researchers from the rest of the country.

Support for Research

The need for a combined approach towards security and development has already become a priority for many involved in peace building and development cooperation. In order to assist conflict prevention policymaking vis-à-vis developing countries the Network will pursue three aims:

Aims of the Network

1. Support, promote and link Swedish researchers from different universities and university colleges to conduct research on the peace and conflict dimensions of development studies, and development dimensions of peace and conflict research;
2. Assist Swedish researchers to establish and develop linkages and collaboration with researchers in the developing world;
3. Facilitate the dissemination of research findings among the interested public, academics, and practitioners interested in peace building and development cooperation.

In addition, the forum will strive to promote dialogue and exchange of information between researchers, policymakers and practitioners. Furthermore it aims at contributing to knowledge, experience and suggestions for implementing conflict prevention strategies in the developing world.

What Causes Major Violent Conflicts?

Violent conflicts occur in a series of stages at which international intervention may occur. In an increasingly interdependent world, what concrete measures exist that are likely to be effective in addressing violent conflict? The causes of violent conflict need to be assessed and monitored, particularly in developing countries. The significant issues for a particular developing country, region, continent, or generally in the developing world need to be identified, and strategies for approaching them should be worked out in cooperation with policy makers and practitioners involved in peace building and development cooperation.

Objectives

The objective of this network is to strengthen Swedish research on peace and conflict studies in the developing world, and to provide assistance to policy makers and practitioners to develop tools to cope with the most salient situations of violent conflict in the South.

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Topic: “The Philippine Left and Peace Building in Muslim Mindanao”

Abstract

This paper seeks to examine how former members of the mainstream Left, i.e., the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), its armed component, the New People’s Army (NPA) and its united front, the National Democratic Front (NDF) as well as other members of the left movement have problematized the Moro question in their efforts towards peace building in Muslim Mindanao. There is a consensus that the Moro question should not just be solely looked upon in terms of the class issue but one must also consider the importance of integrating ethnicity, religion and identity with regards to understanding the Moro problem and to emphasize this in peace building efforts. Thus, these former members of the Left who are now engaged in peace building see the importance of pursuing a strategy towards the development of a culture of peace with emphasis on identity-building and a bottom-up approach. They, however, also see the importance of linking this with the politico-economic dimension of peace building which includes the following: 1) Muslim representation in national politics; 2) Resolving local politics and clan wars; 3) Approaching peace building through a tri-peoples’ strategy, i.e., taking into consideration the Moros, the Christians and the *lumads* (indigenous peoples) concern for peace and development; 4) development assistance; and 5) the issue of secession.

The Philippine Left and Problematizing Peace Building in Muslim Mindanao*

Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem**

Introduction

The mainstream Philippine Left, i.e., the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA) and its underground united front, the National Democratic Front (NDF) or the CPP-NPA-NDF was the only major social force which engaged the government with regard to the problem of the Muslim insurgency in the Mindanao. However, the CPP-NPA-NDF basically viewed the Muslims in a utilitarian fashion, that is, an ally by which the Philippine government could be overthrown. For the Left, the cause of the impoverishment of the Muslims in particular and the national minorities in general is because of economic exploitation particularly caused by their displacement from their ancestral lands. This they blame on the "oppression of the feudal system as imposed by the U.S.-Marcos dictatorship" and multinational corporations (*Ang Bayan* 1978: 11). During the martial law period, the CPP-NPA-NDF saw the solution to their problem through the armed struggle. That is, to link the Moro's struggle with the national-democratic (ND) revolution which is headed by the CPP (*Ang Bayan* 1978: 11). To attain this, the CPP sought to develop the closest and most fruitful relations with the Moros as they fight for their rights (*Ang Bayan* 1988: 5-9). The armed struggle seemed to be a point of agreement between the CPP and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and later on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)¹ during the earlier years of the martial law period. For the Moros, the armed struggle represents the assertion of the Moro people's right to self-determination. It is a means by which their ultimate goal of independence can be achieved (Evangelista 2001: 44).

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¹The Moro National Liberation Movement (MNLF) was founded in 1968 by Nur Misuari. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) broke away from the MNLF in 1984 under Hashim Salamat. Since 1997, the once monolithic MNLF has been divided into three factions headed by Nur Misuari, Salamat Hashim and Dimas Pundato respectively (Galang, 1986: 14).

Two major events would, however, marginalize the armed struggle as the solution to the Moro problem. One was the forging of the Tripoli Agreement in 1986 which the MNLF officials entered into with the Marcos government and was brokered by the Libyan government.² The second was the split in the CPP-NPA-NDF in 1993 which witnessed former Party members bringing out into the open different views by which more “peaceful” means could bring about radical change. The impetus for this was brought about by the shift in the political dispensation from an authoritarian regime to an “elite democracy” ushered in by the 1986 People Power Revolution. These alternative perspectives were to be contextualized within the rubric of peace building.

This paper will, therefore, examine how former members of the Left, i.e., mainly those who are no longer with the Party, have problematized the Moro question in Mindanao and the efforts by which they have pursued peace building within this context. Their endeavor will also be discussed within the context of other perspectives coming from non-Left NGO practitioners who are also involved in the peace building process in Mindanao and from Moro leaders as well as Philippine scholars and public intellectuals on Muslim concerns. The first part will discuss the impetus which lead to peace-building efforts and the importance placed on ethnicity and identity. The second and third parts, on the other hand, will focus on the Left’s alternative views in understanding ethnicity and the strategies by which they sought to integrate such views in their peace building efforts respectively. The integration of ethnic concerns within the politico-economic dimensions of the peace building efforts will be discussed in the last part. This paper, thus, aims to contribute to the growing discussion of how former members of the Left are contributing to opening up new spaces for dialogue with Moros in new ways, in this case through peace-building efforts. Because there is still very little in the form of documents which are available with regards to this, much of the insights on such an endeavor were culled from in-depth interviews to draw out new and fresh perspectives of such a change within the Left movement.

I. Impetus for Peace-building

For members of the Left, the impetus for peace-building was mainly brought about by the advent of the February 1986 People Power Revolution which placed an end to martial law. Members of the Left began to propose that radical change in society can be brought about through peaceful means rather than through the armed struggle. A sector of the national democrats, for example, believed that traditional elite democracy can now be replaced with “popular democracy”, i.e., the people’s exercise of direct participation in government so as to be able to exert a certain amount of power (Timberman, 1991: 310-312). They became known as the popular democrats. The popular democrats opted for critical collaboration with the Aquino government. Peace-building initiatives were

²Under the Tripoli Agreement, the MNLF “submitted to the principle that the Moro question was within the framework of Philippine national sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the same time, the MNLF gained recognition for its status of belligerency, especially among the Islamic states” (Sison 1992: 4).

further given impetus with the emergence of electoral politics as the arena of struggle. That is, elections were once again viewed as the legitimate way by which power could be attained and even the Left joined in the electoral bandwagon. The Left's political party was the *Partido ng Bayan* or PnB (Party of the Nation)³ and it placed emphasis on "new politics", i.e., a politics based on issues and not on personalities. A third impetus were the peace talks and national reconciliation initiated by the Aquino government in its effort to bring about a more pluralist society. All these paved the way in viewing the importance of shifting from the political to the economic, i.e., from armed struggle to development work, which is particularly carried out by non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

What pushed further the quest for peace was the weakening of the CPP itself. This included the weakening of its mass base which witnessed the growing strength of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) vis-à-vis the NPA which only had relatively low-powered arms and had no longer the money to purchase new ones (Timberman 1991: 303). It did not also help much that the NPA's support from its network of solidarity groups in North America and Western Europe has been limited to propaganda and symbolic material support (Hanisch 1991: 254). What further killed such a support was the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. The NDF's membership also declined during the post-martial law years. The movement lost prominent businessmen and professionals who have either joined the Aquino government or have been disillusioned with the NDF. The capture of ranking members and staff of the CPP's United Front Commission also crippled the urban protest in 1988. Further aggravating this situation were the bloody internal purges which occurred in Mindanao and Southern Tagalog as a result of the paranoia of "deep penetration agents" (DPAs), i.e., government agents who have infiltrated the CPP-NPA-NDF. This has claimed at least 700 lives thus weakening the movement further (FOPA 1993:15). All these contributed to the split in the CPP on 10 December 1992 between the "reaffirmists" (RAs) and the "rejectionists" (RJs). The RAs, are those who continue to support the party leadership and its principles, among which is the primacy of the armed struggle while the RJs are those who reject the principles of the Party leadership. The RJs would constitute the bulk of former members of the Left who have pursued peaceful means for change. Another section of the "RJs" would continue to support the armed struggle but in the urban rather than rural areas.

Peacebuilding and the Moro conflict. Members of the Left who have opted for peaceful means to bring about change were more in tune with the efforts of Moro leaders who have sought peace talks even during the martial law period. The ultimate expression of this was the Tripoli Agreement. The Tripoli Agreement emerged because of the pressure from the oil-rich Arab world on President Marcos to adopt political negotiations instead of ethnic annihilation in addressing the conflict in Muslim Mindanao (Wurfel 1988: 160). The CPP leadership did not look at this positively from the vantage point of the armed struggle. For CPP leader Sison, the Agreement induced "the highest MNLF

³PnB is the precursor of the present party-list party *Bayan Muna* (Nation First) which is identified with the Left movement. The party-list system is an attempt to give a voice to the marginalized sectors in society in the light of elite-domination of the electoral system. A party-list party which is able to garner six per cent of the votes cast for the party-list electoral system is given three seats in the House of Representatives, the most a party-list party could attain.

officials, local MNLF commanders and units to expose themselves in displays of strength before the eyes of the AFP during prolonged ceasefire. Consequently, the political agents of Marcos were able to offer material concessions to specific MNLF officials and commanders and their families and persuaded them to leave the MNLF". For Sison, "since the Tripoli Agreement, the MNLF has been weakened by breakaways and desertion" (Sison, 1992: 4).

Further impetus for peace building in Muslim Mindanao was provided for in the 1987 Philippine Constitution which provided for the creation by Congress of autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao and the Cordilleras. As stipulated by the Philippine Constitution, such regions shall consist "of provinces, cities, municipalities, and geographic areas sharing common and distinctive historical and cultural heritage, economic and social structures, and other relevant characteristics within the framework of the constitution and the national sovereignty as well as territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines" (Philippines, Constitution, 1987, Art. X, sec. 15). The efforts of former members of the Left to pursue peace-building in this particular time when the Moro conflict remains unresolved and is further mired into other forms of violence such as Muslim clan violence and the continuing war between the government and the NPA makes such an endeavor very challenging. This is specially so because of the United States' "war on terror" in the advent of the September 11, 2001 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York and the 2002 U.S. military transgression in Iraq. The United States has forged a Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with the Philippine government which allows the U.S. to engage in military exercise in Mindanao, particularly, in Basilan and Sulu where Moro communities are found. This is in relation to the U.S. perception that Mindanao could be a staging ground for Islamic terrorists because of the presence of Muslims. Former U.S. Charge d'Affaires Joseph Musollmeli has even declared Mindanao as the next "Afghanistan". Former members of the Left engaged in peace building, however, have remained undaunted and have continued to pursue peaceful means as a primary measure to end the Moro conflict.

Integrating ethnicity and identity in peace-building. Former members of the Left did not also only question the armed struggle as the primary means for peace but they also questioned the primacy of the class issue vis-à-vis other concerns such as gender, ethnicity, religion and identity. Such issues were viewed within the emergence of "new politics" which looked into concerns that cut across class. "New politics" issues were also given further credence with the collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Members of the Left began to look for alternative paradigms in dissecting the country's societal problems which questioned the primacy given to class concerns. Debates with regards to this was, however, suppressed under the Party's principle of "democratic centralism" which placed stress on the supremacy of the party. All "mass organizations", for example, are looked upon as "mechanisms for transmitting the Party's messages for the people" (Putzel 1992, 380). Because of this, a number of Party members blamed the leadership for not encouraging any form of debate from within, which intensified further during the advent of the 1986 People Power Revolution. This was also one of the major reasons why the CPP split. With the Party split, former members of the Left were now free to problematize concerns which were previously

submerged under the class issue particularly for those engaged in peace building in Muslim Mindanao.

This was most welcomed by members of the Moro insurgency movement who have been very much aware and sensitive of the absence of the CPP's concern for ethnicity. This may also partly explain why the Moro insurgency has carried out a separate armed struggle from that waged by the CPP-NPA-NDF. The ethnic dimension of the MNLF insurgency was also reinforced with the support given to it by the members of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Military and economic assistance extended was based on its fraternal ties as Muslim "brothers". Such an identification was institutionalized with the Tripoli Agreement which called for the establishment of an Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), a geographical division which highlighted the ethnic differences of the Moros from the Christians. The need to understand and comprehend Islam is thus at the core of peace-building initiatives of former members of the Left particularly with the growth of Islamic fundamentalism and the assault on the religion by the U.S. "war on terror". Former members of the Left, therefore, are conscious to also take into consideration the nuances in understanding the Moro ethnic issue which peace-building efforts should take into consideration particularly in the attempt to indigenize the paradigm to better understand the Muslim identity. For Samuel Tan, a scholar of Islam in the Philippines, such a necessity also comes at a time when Moro movements in Mindanao are also questioning the current paradigm of struggle and are also seeking new paradigms. "What surfaces is the need to indigenize the paradigm for understanding the struggle with emphasis on the importance of ethnic identity". Tan refers to an emerging paradigm as "political Islam" and for it to succeed in the Philippine, the *ummah* (the Muslim community) must derive essential rationale from the characteristics and realities of Filipino Muslim societies and not from borrowed cultural experiences (Tan 1998: 196).

II. Alternative Views in Understanding Ethnicity

In its search for alternative views in understanding Moro ethnicity, former members of the Left re-examined the CPP's understanding of ethnic communities in the country. They note, for example, that the CPP in general has voiced out the need to recognize the right of ethnic groups to self-determination. As noted by Ricardo Reyes, former Secretary-General of the CPP Central Committee, the Party was for developing a "multi-cultural and multi-ethnic state" (Reyes, 2004). And for Ibarra Malonzo, former member of the Left movement, he viewed the CPP position as taking on a Leninist perspective, i.e., under the colonial setting, it takes into consideration ethnic and religious variables and that minorities have the right to secede (Malonzo: 2004). CPP official documents have affirmed this view as it has expressed its recognition of the ethnic issue, that is, it believes that there is a need for the Philippine government to accept that the country consists of "a population of pluralistic societies and it should rule it in such a manner as to accommodate the distinctiveness of each nationality" (*Solidarity* n.d.: 140-149). The CPP, however, adds that it is the task of the Party to orchestrate these ethnic groups towards common goals which comprehend such diversity" (*Solidarity*, n.d.: 140-149).

Indigenization of the paradigm on ethnic identity. For former members of the Left who have undertaken peace-building efforts in Muslim Mindanao, very much part of the process in their endeavor is, therefore, the need to problematize the Moro question and bring them closer to the aspirations of the Muslim communities. For some former members of the CPP, the role which the Party attributes to itself, that is to lead the Moro struggle, particularly through the armed struggle, seems to spell out the problem. As noted by Ed Quitariano, a former member of the CPP Mindanao Regional Committee, the CPP can never represent the Moro people or for that matter the MNLF (Quitoriano 2004). This is particularly so because the CPP leader Jose Ma. Sison rejects ethnicity as an issue because what is important is the class issue. The Moros do not see it this way (Tiu 2004). In conceptualizing their peace building efforts, therefore, members of the Left who have left the CPP are basically guided by two important issues which emerged in their debates within the Party. One is with regard to giving primacy to the Moro ethnicity and identity instead of submerging this within the national democratic revolution. The other concern is the strategy by which the Moro's could attain their goal, that is, through peaceful means such as through the peace talks and other peace building activities.

For some former Left members, they believe that the reason why the Moro committee and for that matter the Moro issues never gained primacy in the Party was the very little knowledge and appreciation for the Muslim culture. As noted by Ramon Lopez (not his real name), a former member of the CPP's Christians for National Liberation (CNL), compared to the Christian-Marxist dialogue which has been initiated within the Party which brought in unresolved issues, the dialogue on Islam had not even started. For Lopez, the Muslim question has always been looked upon as a political question with very little knowledge of the culture (Lopez 2004).

Julkipli Wadi, a Muslim who teaches at the Institute of Islamic Studies of the University of Philippines, shares a similar criticism on the way the Left has problematized the Moro question. For Wadi, the reasons of the CPP-NPA-NDF's ambivalence to the Moro struggle and vice versa are due to the following: First, the framework of rebellion, de-colonization and secession defines the Moro struggle. It is not an attempt to redefine the political and social structures. It is for reclaiming territories of the republic. Their demands are based on history and their political right to self-determination. Second, for the CPP, the struggle is meant to redefine the whole gamut of political and social structures. It is more long-term. Their claim is not anchored on history, but on the elimination of the bourgeoisie and the victory of the proletariat (Wadi, 2004). Macario Tiu, who was previously identified with the Left movement and teaches at the Ateneo de Davao University, agrees with Wadi that the historical context is important in theorizing the Moro ethnic question. The context which Tiu proposes is the creation of Mindanao as a colonial project. He observed that unlike the *lumads*, i.e., the indigenous peoples or IPs of Mindanao, who did not have the capacity to fight and who kept on moving from one place to another, the Moros had the capability to resist or refrain the Christian settlers from going into territories that they could call their own. For the Moros, the present-day Republic of the Philippines which includes Muslim Mindanao was a creation of colonialism and conquest, as a result of which the Moros became

dominated by Manila and subjected to a Christian-based majority culture. The struggle of the MNLF, to put it simply, is to liberate themselves and their lands from Manila's domination (Tiu 2004).

Put another way, the Moros maintain that they have a separate nationality and they are entitled to their own state. Thus, if one calls it an ethnic problem, one should take into consideration that the Moros also believe that they belong to different groups and the question which comes to fore is how does one situate this within the Bangsa Moro (Moro Nation). In this case, there is the issue of nationality (Lingga 2004). Despite this disagreement, what is agreed upon is the need to establish, as noted by Eliseo Mercado Jr., a former leading personality of the Left movement, that the Filipino identity and the Moro identity are two separate identities (Evangelista 2001: 60). Of interest, therefore, is how the Moro consciousness emerged. The "moro" word has originally been looked upon as derogatory. The interesting aspect, therefore, is how they were able to make the word "moro" acceptable (Espejo 2004).

The assertion of the Moro identity is also viewed as important in the implementation of development projects. As noted by Peter Gowing, "although the integration program of the government revolves around the philosophy that if the Muslims are provided with more roads, schools, health facilities etc. they will be 'integrated' that is resemble Christian Filipinos, he notes a particular concern, that is, while "Muslims do in fact want many of these things, they fear that the philosophy behind the integration program because it is really a philosophy of assimilation reflect a basic contempt for religious, cultural and historical factors upon which they anchor their psychological and social identity" (Galang 1986: 14).

Religion and identity. In relation to this, the Left movement has not also thoroughly problematized the problem of religion which for some is crucial in understanding the conflict in Mindanao. As noted, by Carmen Abubakar, Dean of the Institute of Islamic Studies, University of the Philippines, Diliman, "there is the reluctance to admit that religion constitutes a significant factor in the equation" (Abubakar 1992:40). Although the Left seems to be a step further than the Philippine government whose official statement is that "there is no religious war"... (Abubakar 1992: 40), the issue of religion, as seen even with the case of Christianity, has generally been placed as secondary concern and relegated to a supporting role to the national democratic revolution (Christians for National Liberation n.d.: 11-12). Such a position seems to be more questionable in the case of Islam as the label Muslim used to distinguish these people immediately calls attention to the fact that religion is the most important differentiating factor determining the 'us' from 'them' (Abubakar 1992: 40). Thus, for Muslim scholar Abraham Sakili, as religion has often been pointed to be the underlying factor in conditioning the "Mindanao problem," so too, must religion be looked into for ways to bring about a reconciliation between Muslims and Christians in the Philippines" (Sakili, 2001: 29).

III. Addressing the Ethnic Question Through Peace Building Strategies

For members of the Left who sought the path towards peace building rather than the armed struggle, they have formed alliances with other members of civil society who are involved in this endeavor. Among these alliances are the Coalition for Peace (CfP) and the Southeast Asian Conflict Network (SEACN). These alliances acknowledge that “the armed opposition groups share the conviction that in order to address the root causes of conflict, major societal change must take place.” That is, “a shift in the social order that will ensure equal access and opportunities for all so that the demands and needs of the marginal sectors are adequately met, their rights and cultural identity respected, and their welfare protected” (Evangelista 2001: 44).

The CfP and SEACN members further note that three issues are at the core of the Moro armed struggle and these are: self-determination (through autonomy or other form of self rule by the Moro people), preservation of identity and culture and social justices (correct/redress for injustice done to the Moro people in the past) (Evangelista 2001: 45). Independence as a goal of the armed struggle is, therefore, seen by the CfP and SEACN members as an articulation of the Moro identity and the preservation of Islam as their way of life (“independence is to live a Muslim, to die a Muslim”), but it may also be defined in terms of equal access, participation and representation in government (Evangelista 2001: 45). This seems to be the framework for guiding civil society peace building in the Muslim areas in Mindanao.

The openness of the MNLF and the MILF to peace talks encouraged the CfP and SEACN to go into a paradigm shift which is to “look at the peaceful stalemate of conflict so that the concept of stakeholders is expanded beyond the principle following the armed conflict” (Evangelista 2001:47). “Mindanao-based partners of the CfP have formed the *Mindanao Peace Advocates Conference (MPAC)* to respond more directly to their peace issues as tri-people – Muslim, Christian and *lumad* (indigenous people)” (Tanada 2001: 15). Another loose forum of peace advocates representing a broad constituency of organizations and political formations (CfP plus), and including the churches, that came to be known as the *Multi-Sectoral Peace Advocates (MPSA)* was later able to present proposals to the Government’s cabinet security cluster and to the NDF (Tanada 2001: 150).

Another perspective to the peace talks is presented by the Institute for International Dialogues (IID), an NGO involved in the Mindanao peace campaign and some of whose founders as well as members were former members of the Left. The IID basically rejects focusing the peace negotiations on the government and the armed groups which it views as putting the premium on violence. That is, “they only listen to you when you have a gun, when you have the military capability”. This puts in a disadvantage the *lumads* who are not armed (Arnado 2001: 45). For Elizabeth de Castro, who was once with the Left movement and who is currently Director of the Program on Psycho-Social Trauma of the Center for Integrative and Development Studies, University of the Philippines (UP-CIDS PST Program), peace has to be defined in psycho-social terms as

well. That is, peace has to be analyzed from the perspective of the individual, and not mainly from an institutional, coalition or community-based perspective. Concern, therefore, is placed on “internal” peace whereby the basic needs of a person, such as water, food, health and sanitation, are satisfied (de Castro 2004).

A. Identity-building Through the Bottom-up Strategy

Quitoriano, who is currently conducting development work in Muslim areas in Mindanao through his NGO Guava Inc., has attempted to address these related questions. Quitoriano noted that what has changed in the strategy is linking up with the grassroots instead of the top officials of the revolutionary movements as was done previously. In engaging the former, primacy is given to the urgent “bread-and-butter” issues, such as where does one get his/her next meal. This is opposed to dealing with the latter where the agenda is “political”, that is, how can power be attained (Quitoriano 2004). Thus, the strategy is to give emphasis on the individual who seems to get lost when the national democratic revolutionary paradigm is adopted. Another form of project which addresses the individual needs is micro-financing for livelihood projects such as the setting up of mini-stores. This is a project engaged in by Malonzo’s Kasangan Foundation. The Foundation would lend money to a group the members of which would be liable for the group’s debts. Malonzo said that they were one of the first to set up such a project in Lanao del Norte (Malonzo 2004).

The need to emphasize that the communities and the people are the ones to decide what they want to do is also the overall guiding principle of the Mindanao People’s Caucus and the Mindanao Peaceweavers coalition of peace networks which includes seven Bangsa Moro groups⁴. What these civil society groups would like to emphasize is that they are independent, non partisan and they have no political agenda (Miclal 2004). The focus seems to be land and ancestral domains as well as the cultural domination of the majority, the issue of poverty and multinational corporations. IID, which is a member of the Mindanao People’s Caucus, therefore, sees itself as a facilitator with no agenda. What it also tries to do is to present alternatives. Hence, there is a transparency in the process with the community deciding what is best for them and what will not hurt others. IID tries to provide options and at the same time makes the people realize their own self-identity as stakeholders and that there should not be an exclusion of the poor (Miclal 2004)⁵.

⁴The Mindanao Peaceweavers network was launched in October 4, 2003 at the Notre Dame University, Cotabato City, to support and foster the peace process in the Philippines. The network includes the Agong peace coalition, the Mindanao People Peace Movers (MPPM), the Maguindanao People’s Caucus, the Peace Advocates of Zamboanga, Mindanao Peace Advocates Confederation (MPAC); and, solidarity groups from Manila, e.g. the Mindanao Solidarity Network (Ramirez 2004). The focus of the network’s task appears to be lobbying for an effective ceasefire mechanism. No doubt there already exist local and international monitoring teams. The network is particularly interested in trying to influence these monitoring teams to ensure that the ceasefire can be implemented on the ground (Ramirez 2004).

⁵The NGO stresses that it is “more or less focusing on putting more weight in the grassroots issue”, that is, how it could be of help “as instruments ... in really transmitting the message, ideas and ideals of grassroots

Another example of identity-building is the teaching peace module of de Castro's UP-CIDS PST Program in Pikit, Cotabato. She points out that this is an intervention in the area where they seek to introduce changes in the curriculum in order to introduce dialogues between the Muslims and the Christians. The dialogue includes concerns such as livelihood and social life issues. These modules are for both the teachers and the students and these have brought together Christian and Muslim children. A problem which the Program aims to address is the refusal of Christians to go into Muslim areas where there is conflict and vice-versa. Calling it a Peace Caravan, the Program has linked up with Notre Dame University in Cotabato City and they go from school to school. Through the peace activities, the children, both Muslims and Christians are introduced to games that they can play together. They also talk, pray and eat together. For de Castro, this ushers in an atmosphere of security and safety and of trust which are important elements of peace. The Gaston Ortigas Peace Institute has also initiated a project on children with focus on child soldiers. Their aim is to engage rebel groups concerning this issue as part of the peace process (Lubang 2004).

The bottom-up strategy also seeks to address the economic issues which confronts the Muslim communities. For Quitariano, much of the official economic development projects, for example, the BIMP-EAGA⁶ which seeks to promote investments and trade in that region, largely benefit the upper class. Furthermore, such initiatives only involve the clan leaders engaged in business. Some would even look at the BIMP-EAGA as having displaced communities. Other equally or more important economic concerns which touch the grassroot Muslim communities like agrarian reform and linking this with the ethnic issue remain unresolved. In relation to this, Quitariano also notes that some development projects like those sponsored by the Japan for International Cooperation and Assistance (JICA) focus mainly on infrastructure development, like building farm-to-market roads and even toilets for the Muslim communities. Although he agrees that such infrastructure building benefits the community over the long-term, there is also the need to address the immediate needs of the local communities like helping them to develop products for sale in the market in the short term. The needs at the moment, Quitariano points out, are indeed very basic, like having enough to eat (Quitoriano 2004).

B. Developing a Culture of Peace

Related to all of these is the creation of an environment conducive for peace building not only in Muslim areas but in the whole of Mindanao. There is a consensus that peace building has to be wholistic, i.e., it does not only concern itself with the Moro conflict but also other manifestations of violence in Mindanao. These can include issues like movements against anti-summary killings which is part of the movement for restorative rights⁷ (Arce 2004). Other issues include the movement against the

leadership to the top hierarchy". It is also working on "lateral divisions among the grassroots leaderships" (Prieto 2001: 47).

⁶ The BIMP-EAGA refers to the Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines East Asia Growth Area.

⁷On June 5, 2004, a coalition of NGOs and people's organizations (POs) established the *Mamamayan Tutol Sa Bitay* (People Against Death by Hanging), i.e., the movement for the restoration of justice. This is

demolition of squatters which is spearheaded by SANLAKAS, a political movement led by former members of the CPP-NPA-NDF and the Task Force Detainees, which is a human rights group associated with the mainstream Left. SANLAKAS has also joined the citizens movement against the death penalty (Arce 2004). For Gus Micalat, who is the IID Executive Director, the ones who are affected by the war between the government and the MNLF are the ordinary people. IID would want to reclaim that peace which people enjoyed in the past and use advocacy for this (Micalat 2004). A culture of peace is also promoted through activities like the Peace Caravans which kicked off in November 25, 2004. This was to launch the Mindanao peace week. Presentations were made on the different peace initiatives of NGOs and civil society organizations. The purpose of the caravan was to celebrate for peace. It was also a way of telling people of the dream of creating real peace zones to consolidate that peace (Cantolloper 2004).

Invariably developing a culture of peace leads us to the question of education. SANLAKAS, for example, practices this education for peace by informing people what their human rights are (Arce 2004). The Institute for Bangsa Moro Studies in Cotabato City has also initiated a human rights program. According to Abhoud Syed Lingga, the Institute's Director and spokesperson of the MILF, their lectures would include illegal arrest and salvaging and even how to deal with bombings (Lingga 2004). Education also comes through the media particularly in the way the Moro conflict is depicted. As pointed out by Edwin Espejo, a journalist of the *Sun Star*⁸ and who is identified with the Left movement, when he joined the newspaper, the word "extremist" was always appended to the Muslim. What they did was to take out the word "extremist" and he does not also use the word "Tausug" (an ethnic group among the Muslims) or "Muslim". In this way, he wanted the news not to have a slant (Espejo 2004). The newspaper, however, is also not hesitant to take a stance like when former President Joseph Estrada declared an all-out war against the Moros. When this happened, the editorial of the *Sun Star* emphasized that it was against the war which has always been its position. It also highlighted the refugees who fled to Cotabato and the newspaper stressed that everyone would be a loser (Espejo 2004).

Mindanao Cross, a newspaper published by the Oblates of Notre Dame University in Cotabato City⁹ has also always highlighted the promotion of life and peace with preferential option for the poor. In relation to this, Guillermo Hagad, editor-in-chief of *Mindanao Cross* pointed out that even though the newspaper knows that what sells are reports on armed clashes, his newspaper does not like this approach. If they have to report on armed clashes, what *Mindanao Cross* would like to emphasize are the causes of this. And if they have to report on the peace talks, what they would like is for the news to reach the stakeholders. Hagad pointed out that they are fortunate to have linkages with radio stations which enables them to access interviews in problem areas and more

a human rights movement which includes the Task Force Detainees (TFD) and BAYAN-MUNA, a political movement associated with the CPP-NPA-NDF which are all Mindanao-wide (Arce 2004).

⁸*Sun Star* is a local newspaper based in General Santos City, Mindanao where Muslim communities could be found but are not the majority.

⁹The population of Cotabato City is fifty percent Christians and fifty percent Muslims.

importantly, deepen their report by putting in the background of the problem (Hagad 2004).

Education to develop a peace culture can also come about through formal education. Such is the example of Sultan Kudarat Islamic Academy (SKIA), a school which was established by Lourdes Mastura and her husband former Congressman Michael Mastura. The Masturas were formerly teachers at the Notre Dame University, Cotabato City.¹⁰ Unlike the other schools, both private and public, it teaches Islam. Thus, the SKIA attends to both the spiritual and intellectual needs of students because for Lourdes Mastura it is concerned that without proper religious instruction, the younger generation of Muslims will lose faith. For the Masturas, this is their contribution to peaceful development in war-torn Mindanao (Vitug 1998). The Notre Dame University in Cotabato City also initiated A.B, M.A. and PhD Programs in Peace and Development Studies because of the realization that amidst them was war and there was a need to address this conflict. The University also began to integrate peace education into the curriculum of the different disciplines (Cantoloper 2004). A Peace Center was also established at the Notre Dame University (NDU) when its then President Fr. Eliseo “Jun” Mercado, who is closely associated with the mainstream Left and is a confidant of Nur Misuari, became actively involved in peace negotiations between the MNLF and the government because he was accepted by both sides. The Peace Center became Fr. Mercado’s support unit in the peace negotiations. In 1997-1998, the Center was tasked to be the monitoring body for the early stages of peace negotiations between the MILF and the government. They formed part of the secretariat which was based at the Notre Dame University (Ramirez 2004).

IV. The Politico-Economic Dimension of Peace Building

The discussion of ethnicity and identity-building as well as the development of a culture of peace is very much woven with the politico-economic dimension of peace building efforts, i.e., the *realpolitik* of the solutions to the Moro conflict. One of the more important consideration for peace building is the political dispensation. For Gus Miatlat, who was formerly involved with the Left movement and is now Executive Director of the IID, ever since the 1986 People Power Revolution, the democratic space which emerged has made it conducive for people to work for change. For him, the energies of people can be characterized as “earnest and genuine” and what has gone is the politics of polarization. What he sees is a situation whereby it is no longer the state versus the people but more of an issue of self-determination. Added to this is that the policy makers are both tired of war and are open to engagement and dialogue (Miatlat 2004).

¹⁰Michael Mastura was formerly President of the Notre Dame University in Cotabato City.

A. Muslim Representation in National Politics

A key to a successful engagement on the Moro conflict is to identify officers in the military who are able to appreciate the conflict from a historical perspective. For *Sun Star* journalist Espejo, the key military men here are those who are in the mid-levels, i.e., the middle officers and who are the ones exposed to the Muslim-Christian conflict. He seems to be optimistic that among the younger generation, there seems to be a change in perspective when it comes to the Moro struggle. This was unlike their counterparts in the 1970s when there were a lot of human rights violations (Espejo 2004)¹¹. Because of the perception that it is Malacanang Palace who gives the orders to the military, the more important concern is the assurance of Muslim representation at the national level. There is a view that the national policy for Mindanao is being set by non-Muslim personalities (Lingga 2004). Furthermore, the national positions for Muslims are dependent on those who are appointed by Malacanang Palace. Lingga sees this as class politics. A solution for him is to have a referendum where people will choose who they would want to represent them. This will also solve the problem of the Muslim masses who are not represented by the current Muslim leader. For example, the MILF, the MNLF and the royal families all have their own constituencies. What this ultimately boils down to is a struggle that is directed towards the national government. A number of Moros are saying this because the solution they see is the creation of an independent state (Abhoud Syed Lingga 2004).

For representation, some former Left leaders, like former CPP Secretary-General Ricardo Reyes, look at electoral politics as addressing the lack of national representation of Muslims. This is one reason he points out for linking local Muslim politics to national politics. AKBAYAN, his party-list party attempted to support Muslim candidates to Congress during the 2004 national elections. An example was the party's endorsement of the MILF's Anak Mindanao (AMIN) party-list party which won one seat in the Philippine Congress (Reyes 2004). For Lingga, however, it is very difficult to bring about changes in Mindanao through electoral politics. For one thing, he notes that many of the Congressmen do not know their provinces. What is also ideal is for the Muslim Congressmen to be united but this seems to be quite difficult at the moment. Furthermore, to run for elections is also expensive. This is also true for the party-list system, i.e., a small party-list party cannot run without money (Lingga 2004).

¹¹One military official who Espejo believes is open to ideas is General Alexander Yan. For him General Yan has a good grasp of what is going on because he looks at all angles of the war. This is unlike General Angelo Reyes, former Chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, who is perceived as a stereotype of what a military person is. He was the one who advised former President Joseph Estrada to go for an all-out-war in Mindanao (Espejo 2004).

B. Resolving Local Politics and Clan Wars

Another issue which challenges the peace builders are the clan wars. As noted by Quitariano, the fruits of development work can easily get wiped out with just one clan war which destroys the sources of livelihood of people, like ravaging their homes and killing their animals, e.g. pigs and carabaos (Quitoriano 2004). Lingga agrees with this view that clan wars affect society. The main causes of clan wars for him are political struggles, resources and family problems (Lingga 2004). This is linked with the cultural identity of the Muslim. The concept of land ownership is feudal, i.e., it is tied to the landownership of the datu. That is why there will always be politics among the Muslims (Espejo 2004).

One way of resolving clan wars is to have an improvised justice system. A major problem for this is the *Rido* which is the manner in which the Moros settle their family feuds or extract vengeance, also known as violent vendettas, for a wrong committed against a member of a clan. Muslim communities are perceived to look at the *Rido* as a mechanism for resolving conflict but for others, it is more of the problem rather than a solution.¹² This is because there are no avenues for redressing injustice but through *Rido*. Moreover, the judicial system, especially in the rural areas, is not working (Lingga 2004). Another solution proposed is for the clans to come together and develop a policy environment to determine the rules of engagement among themselves. Closely associated with this is the need of the communities as well as the individuals to know their rights. For example, when clan wars erupt, everyone gets involved and affected even if the dispute is just between two individuals belonging to two different clans (Quitoriano 2004).

To resolve *Rido* or the clan wars, the peace builders are also advocating that the underlying socio-economic and political problems be looked into, at both the local and national levels. In looking, for example, at what is the accepted economic rearrangement in Mindanao, Quitariano notes that his NGO would have to consider bigger political and economic issues like agrarian reform and political issues such as federalism. Quitariano also points out that ownership in the Muslim communities is still clan based and the elders generally decide. Malonzo agrees with this as he points out that one major obstacle to the development projects are the clan wars in Mindanao and the fight for political leadership among the Muslims, particularly on how to get hold of the state largesse. For Malonzo, the state is not strong enough to disarm the clan “warriors”. For him, the clan wars were one issue which the Left failed to address, altogether (Malonzo 2004). Others, however, like former CPP Central Committee leader Benjamin de Vera, believe that it is not religion which is the issue but “tribalhood”. In that regard, some observers have highlighted the fact that the Moro insurgency is divided – on the one

¹²According to Mindanao scholar Patricio N. Abinales, *Rido* is popularly viewed as uniquely Muslim and secondly, is viewed as intrinsic to the Islamic tradition. Abinales argues, however, that this is not the case, i.e., there is nothing in Filipino Islam that regards *Rido* as innate in Filipino Islam. Moreover, that violence is not inherent in the philosophy and practice of Filipino Islam. For Abinales, *Rido* is “an invented tradition” borrowing from the phrase of Eric Hobsbawm (Abinales 2004, 10).

hand, there is the MNLF which is associated with the clans in Jolo, on the other hand there is the MILF which is associated with the clans in Maguindanao (de Vera 2004).¹³

Indeed, the persistence of clan wars have highlighted that the Moros are not a monolithic bloc.¹⁴ This is acknowledged by Lecie Arce SANLAKAS coordinator in Davao. She notes that there exists several Muslim tribes which are different from one another (Arce 2004). The view is shared by de Vera, who believes that the Filipino will always be divided as they have always been since the Spanish period (Benjamin de Vera 2004). As also noted by Lingga, the MNLF was not able to get the greater sector of the Moro people, particularly the *datus* which felt alienated by the MNLF principles. That is, it did not emphasize too much the Islamic principles which the *datus* found pertinent in carrying out a struggle. This was corrected by the MILF which accommodated the concerns of the *datus* (Lingga 2004). Nur Misuari, the founder of the MNLF, did not come from the *datu* class, i.e., he is not of royal blood, and is a Tausug whereas the other Muslim leaders are either Maguindanao or Maranao (Espejo 2004).¹⁵

C. Tri-People's Concern for Peace and Development

The framework of ethnicity also promotes the tri-people's perspective of the Moro people composed of Christians, Muslims, and *lumads* (Wadi 2005). Thus, for NGOs involved in peace building, one cannot separate the Moro question from the plight of the *lumads* either. This is also because the issue of tribalhood also includes the Moros' fight with the *lumads*. In their relationship with the Muslims, the *lumads* were kidnapped by the Maguindanaoans even before the Spanish came to the Philippines in the 16th century. Furthermore, the *datus* did not want to lend land to the *lumads*. There are also areas like Sultan Kudarat where different tribes exists, i.e., Moros and *lumads* live close to one another, thereby becoming another potential flashpoint. A third kind of conflict situation is in the Moro areas where *lumads* stay and although the latter are not told to leave, they would have to follow the laws of the Moros. Moreover, the Christian settlers, also look lowly on the *lumads* and even exploit them¹⁶ (Somoza 2004). It is not surprising,

¹³To look into more peaceful ways by which to settle clan wars, a research study was sponsored by The ASIA Foundation and was carried out by Notre Dame University, Cotabato City together with the Institute for Bangsa Moro Studies, Ateneo de Davao University, and Ateneo de Zamboanga (Cantolloper 2004, Lingga 2004).

¹⁴Since its inception in 1968, the MNLF succeeded in uniting the three leaders of the three major clans, i.e., Nur Misuari who is a Tausug, Hashim Salamat who is a Maguindanaoan and Dimas Pundato who is a Maranao. For Muslim scholar Rufa C. Guiam, the major reason for the split among the three leaders came when Marcos sowed intrigue by spreading rumors that Misuari received money from the government during the negotiation for the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement. The other two Muslim leaders, therefore, perceived Misuari as guilty of corruption.

¹⁵As pointed out by Malonzo, a limitation in the leadership of Misuari is that from the point of view of Muslim royalty he is a "commoner" and thus is perceived as incapable of leading the Muslims (Malonzo 2004)

¹⁶Like the Moros, the *lumads* were also displaced from their lands by the Christian settlers and the transnational corporations and government entities but unlike the Moros, they did not have the arms to fight for their rights. "The Mindanao *lumads* were caught between depending on their ties with the Armed

therefore, that there is a history of war between the Moros and the *lumads*. In Kulaman, Sultan Kudarat, for example, the relationship between the Moros and the Manobos indigenous peoples (IPs) has been marred by *Ridos*. Unlike for the Moros, the sultanate is not part of the political or cultural tradition of the Manobos. Moreover, there were many in the *lumad*'s tribes who were enslaved by the Moros. It is this issue of slavery that underscores the hatred of the Manobos for the Moros.

As for the Manobos who work on the land of the Moros, there is a tribute system which the *lumads* do not agree with. There is also the issue of the ancestral domains of the IPs being taken over by the Moros. One resort of the Manobos is to go to war with the Moros but because they do not have the arms and the number unlike the latter, the Manobos are forced to leave their area and go to a place where they will not be dominated by the Moros (Somoza 2004). To resolve the conflict between the Moros and the *lumads*, the Tri-People's Concern for Peace, Progress and Development of Mindanao or TRICOM¹⁷ believes that one has to take into consideration not only the interests of the Moros and the Christians settlers but those of the *lumads* as well. This is only when genuine peace and development can be attained (Somoza 2004).

TRICOM works closely with the Alternative Forum for Research in Mindanao (AFRIM), an NGO involved in research and advocacy with focus on transnational incursions in Mindanao which has resulted in land problems caused by the expansion of plantations. Although its advocacy work is mainly on peasants and farm workers, the ushering in of the peace talks has brought in the integration of Moro and *lumad* concerns into their work. Moreover, AFRIM's development paradigm, unlike that of the Manila government's, also highlight the issue of peace. The major concern is that it is important that the ordinary person is involved in the peace process and one cannot leave it to the warring parties. For AFRIM, the involvement of the private sector is also important (de la Rosa 2004).

A similar position is maintained by the Advocacy and Training Associate Center for the Advancement and Strengthening of Community Rights, Inc. (CADCO) which is concerned with community property rights (CPR). This involves bestowing/claiming rights for the fisherfolks. These include coastal communities as well as sanctuaries in mangrove areas. In their fisherfolk organizations, CADCO deals with Moro fisherfolks and to a lesser extent the *lumads*. The NGO pointed out that instead of including ethnicity in their framework, they decided to focus on cultural sensitivity. In their

Forces of the Philippines (AFP) or the Christian settlers. Poverty has also driven them to mercenary duties. However, in the 1980s, significant *lumad* participation in the struggle had found its way in the communist movement in Mindanao after realizing that Manila has no policy for them except to take over their lands in favor of multinationals. The *lumads* were effectively neutralized by settlers that they now constitute a negative geographical entity" (Datu Norodin Alonto Lucman 2000).

¹⁷TRICOM is working through the Indigenous People's Apostolate of the Church. The areas are in Southern Mindanao. Its Executive Director Bibeth Somoza used to be with the Task Force Detainees from 1984-1991. In her present work, Somoza said that they carry on joint activities with the mainstream left.

partnership with political organizations (POs)¹⁸, the NGO deliberately chose Moro POs. Personally, the CADCO organizers, majority of whom have their roots in the progressive movement, are conscious of where they are coming from. One for example is Muslim while another one is from the Visayas. What is important to them is that the approach to fisherfolk cooperative organizing is participatory which brings in the principles of accountability and the right to self-determination (Lopez et.al. 2004).

CADCO, however, does recognize the difficult challenges posed by ethnic differences in their fisherfolk development program. For example, CADCO, which organizes cooperatives, runs the organization in a democratic way, i.e., everyone is equal. For them, however, the problem in having Moro members is that the Moros have a hierarchy. The clan hierarchy enters into the cooperative organizing. The Tausugs, for example, want to impose what they want on the non-Tausugs. That is, they would want to run the cooperative in the way the Moro community is run. In other words, the feudal way of running things enters the picture. Because of this, the cooperative ended its partnership with them. There are situations also whereby Christians would have difficulties in joining a Moro cooperative which was what they experienced in Glan in Saranggani Province (Lopez et.al. 2004). There were several times too that CADCO had to deal with ethnic wars which had actually escalated from a localized problem involving *lumads* and Moros, or when as a result of a personal quarrel, a particular *lumad* killed a Moro.¹⁹ When it happens in areas which are considered for rest and recreation, i.e., liberated zones, CADCO just asks the warring factions to leave so as not be affected by the warring parties. But the CADCO NGO workers do recognize that the clan conflicts do affect the communities (Lopez et.al. 2004). The Mindanao Peaceweavers have also looked into the sources of these ethnic wars. Consequently, in the peace negotiations between the government and the MILF, they have pressed for the inclusion of issues such as ancestral domain. Of consideration too is the conflicting interpretation of ancestral domain from the perspective of the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) and the MILF. Because of this, the Peaceweavers want the peace talks not to be limited between the government and the MILF but to include the *lumads* as well (Ramirez 2004).

These NGO efforts are supported by members of the Muslim community. As pointed out by Muslim scholar Wadi, although the Islamist discourse of politics in the "Moro struggle is a religio-political thought which articulates new thrust, vision, goal and strategy of Moro struggle for self-determination on the basis of political ideal of Islam" and is therefore open to negotiation and peace process, it also "tries to maintain a balance between conformist political ideal of Islam and the current reality in Mindanao by recognizing as well the right of Christians and *lumads*. It is thus open to negotiation and peace process" (Wadi 2005).

¹⁸People's organizations (POs) are non-governmental organizations whose members are the same as the recipient beneficiaries.

¹⁹Sometimes this escalates into a clan war but usually at the ground level.

D. Development Assistance

For NGOs, clan wars are very much a result of the need for people's survival. The reality is that the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) has "the highest poverty incidence among the country's 15 regions, with 62.5% of its population considered poor. It has also the lowest per capita gross regional domestic product in the country and the second lowest average annual family income" (Anave 1999: B-19). For Macapado Muslim, Chancellor of Mindanao State University, General Santos City, ARMM would never be able to catch up if they do not have the same budget as the other regions. What is needed are points of intervention to bring about development. This includes for example, establishing ARMM as a key player in international trade and the enhancement of the collective economic capacity-building in the communities (Muslim 2004).

Another problem hindering peace building is that of corruption. At the moment, there are still no funds reaching the Muslim communities and there is the suspicion that a big chunk of the money has gone to corruption at the level of the ARMM local government offices and the national government. Another view is that the emergency livelihood assistance given to the MNLF communities have been used by certain government functionaries to enrich themselves (Muslim 2004). This perception is also shared by Butch Cantolloper, Program Officer of the Peace Center of the Notre Dame University who noted that the perception is that the money does not go to the intended beneficiaries (Cantolloper 2004). Suggestions to counteract corruption include the need to map out the official development assistance (ODA) with regards to the hundreds of billions of dollars which came from the Middle East for the ARMM region. What has to be established is what has been appropriated for the Moro communities and what has benefited them (Muslim 2004 and Lingga 2004). Another is to look at corruption in the NGOs which have been given money for development assistance for Muslim areas in Mindanao (Cantolloper 2004). This all has to be done because of the perception that the Moros are corrupt (Muslim 2004). Moreover, if these issues are not resolved, development assistance will be viewed merely as palliatives for the Moro communities and will not prepare the country for the bigger questions affecting the Moro insurgency (Lingga 2004). For development to succeed, however, there is a need for the stakeholders to be part of the process. One way of ensuring their participation for Billy de la Rosa, Executive Director of AFRIM and a former member of the left movement, is to link the Muslim land issue to the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA), particularly to the Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) principle as stipulated by the IPRA. Under the notion of the FPIC, no development can be undertaken in the ancestral lands until the people concerned have been informed adequately about the project and consent to it. What is important here, however, is to organize the people (de la Rosa 2004).

E. The Issue of Secession

The political structure by which development assistance is to take place is also of debate particularly when the issue of ethnicity is considered. One political solution which has always been in the forefront of the ethnic debate is secession. For Tiu,

secession is a solution to address the need of the Moros to assert their identity. He noted that the current boundaries were arbitrarily set-up during the colonial period whereby the Spaniards deliberately placed non-Muslim communities within Muslim communities. There are, for example, Ilonggos (people from the Visayas) found in the Muslim areas of Midsayap, Cotabato (Tiu 2004, Espejo 2004). Another important ingredient for secession to succeed is the need to bring about a consensus among the different Moro groups together with the Christians who belong in the geographical areas where the Muslim communities are. A broad spectrum, therefore, has to be established which includes for example, members of the MILF, the MNLF as well as the congressmen from Mindanao who will represent the affected Christian communities (Lingga 2004). What is important in all this is that whatever geographical boundary is drawn for the Moros, there should be a re-conceptualization of the notions of national sovereignty, citizenship and even liberalism, i.e., democratic rights. This is one way by which the Moros can preserve their identity. The approach by which this should operate in is under a multi-cultural setting where national identity and tribal ethnic culture are the building blocks. Thus, the government has to be multi-culturalist, i.e., recognize that the cultural divisions which exist are strengths and not weaknesses (Muslim 2004).

Conclusion

For members of the Left, particularly those who have left the CPP-NPA-NDF a major critique of the manner in which the Party problematized the Moro question was the absence of any understanding and appreciation of the Moro's demands for maintaining a separate ethnic and religious identity and a measure of autonomy from Manila. Instead, the Moro question was problematized within the framework of the national democratic revolution and particularly the class struggle. Furthermore, the strategy by which to address the Moro conflict was through the armed struggle. This may have been understandable in the 1970s under the repressive martial law regime but with the ushering in of a democratic dispensation after the 1986 People Power revolution, debates arose with regard to the position of the CPP-NPA-NDF. The concern basically centered on how to highlight the issue of Moro ethnicity and identity through peaceful means. One of the suggestions was to look at the Moro issue within a historical context and therein appreciate the Moros' demands for self-determination. This includes their right not to be submerged under a dominant culture. Closely related to this is comprehending religion as crucial to understanding the conflict in Mindanao particularly as a means for reconciling Muslims and Christians in the Philippines.

To attain this, civil society groups have formed several coalitions and networks for their peace building efforts. The emphasis has been to listen to people at the grassroots level and more importantly, not only the Moros and the Christians but also the *lumads* or the indigenous peoples of Mindanao who are affected by the armed conflict. Focus is placed on identity-building through a bottom-up strategy. The bottom-up strategy also seeks to address the economic issues confronting the Moro communities. Civil society groups also realize that the success of these efforts will only come about with the development of an environment conducive for peace. Thus, peace building efforts focus not only on the Moro conflict but also on other conflicts which sow violence

in Mindanao. One way by which this is pursued is through informal as well as formal education. The former includes the teaching of human rights to affected communities and the role of media in giving an objective perspective of the causes of the armed conflict while the latter has integrated peace education and Islamic courses within the universities' curricula.

Identity-building is also related to the politico-economic dimensions of peace building. This has included the call for Muslim representation in national politics as well as the need to resolve clan wars. What emerges here is that peace building should take into consideration the multi-ethnic character of the Moro communities as well as their relationship with non-Muslim communities such as the Christians and *lumads*. Thus, the emergence of the tri-people's concern for peace and development to peace building. Closely related to the resolution of this conflict is the need for development assistance to make sure that it reaches its intended beneficiaries. Efforts have also called for looking into the political structure that will allow the Moros a measure of political autonomy and to assert their identity. In this regard, there continues a debate on secession. Although these efforts may seem like small steps in resolving the overwhelming problem of peace in Mindanao, one can only be assured that the relentless emergence of such peace building efforts, no matter how small they are, have not erased whatever hope and optimism is left in lessening ethnic violence and conflict in Philippine society. Moreover, there seems to be no stopping the impetus for peace building among former members of the Left movement who have taken advantage of new paradigms and strategies in confronting the Moro question in a period of democratization.

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