

## Moro national liberation

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Moro nationalism refers to the ideology or sentiment held by people who self-consciously and deliberately identify themselves as “Moros” as opposed to “Filipinos,” believe in and appeal to a history and culture distinct from that of the rest of the Philippines, and consequently demand independence or greater autonomy from the Philippine state.

“Moro” identity was initially articulated by and designated for Muslims, who currently make up about 4 percent of the Philippine population, most of them in what is now the southwestern Philippines. Coming from three major and ten minor ethnolinguistic groups, they invoke Islam as the unifying collective marker to distinguish themselves from “Filipinos,” where a majority of the population is Christian.

Moro nationalism has been embraced and advanced by a people who believe themselves to have been illegally and unjustly incorporated into what became the Philippines without their consent, whose lands and resources have been encroached upon and exploited by migrants, multinational corporations, and other outsiders as sponsored or allowed by the Philippine state, whose culture and traditions have been threatened by this state’s assimilationist and centralizing policies, and who have become marginalized and dispossessed minorities within the Philippines and within the territory they consider to be their homeland.

### The Colonial Legacy

Prior to the formation and consolidation of the Philippines, the area that would eventually encompass its territory included various communities and settlements of diverse cultures and social and political organizations that were culturally and economically part of precolonial Southeast Asia (Abinales & Amoroso 2005). Among these were the sultanates in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago whose peoples, as in other areas elsewhere in the region, had earlier been converted to Islam.

When the Spanish colonizers arrived in the sixteenth century, they managed to consolidate

their rule and convert locals to Christianity only in the northern and central parts of what would become the Philippines. For more than 300 years, the communities in the southern areas successfully managed to fend off the Spanish, maintain their sovereignty, their cultural and religious practices, and their control over their lands and resources (Majul 1999; Abinales & Amoroso 2005). Moro nationalists appeal to their history and see their modern struggle for independence as a continuation of this resistance and as proof of their historic difference from the Christianized Filipinos from the north. It has been argued, however, that those who fought the Spanish in various instances during that period did not as of yet conceive of themselves as belonging to one collective political entity. Though most professed Islam, the Muslims at that time were divided by ethnolinguistic and political divisions and were oftentimes in bitter internecine conflict (McKenna 2000). A “Moro nation” had not yet emerged.

It was only at the twilight of Spanish colonization in the late nineteenth century that the Spanish managed to make inroads into the unpacified areas in the south. By the time Filipino revolutionaries in the north were on the verge of expelling them, however, the Spanish still did not exercise as much sovereignty in the south as they had in the north. Despite this, when the Spanish sold the Philippines to the United States for \$20 million in 1897, they also handed over control over the southern areas to the Americans. Filipinos, having just declared independence from Spain and formed a republic, resisted the new colonizers but were vanquished. Had Filipino revolutionaries and Muslims agreed to form a common front against Spain and the Americans – as had in fact been proposed by the former but rejected by Muslim leaders (Majul 1999) – and had they succeeded in defeating the colonizers, the Filipinos and the Muslims could conceivably have come to an arrangement different from that ultimately decided by the new colonizers.

After pacifying the country, the Americans proceeded to establish a colonial state, administered with Filipinos in powerful but subordinate roles. For a time, the Americans governed the Muslims separately from those in the north; some even entertained the idea of separating the provinces inhabited by Muslims from the rest of the colony. American settlers who had begun

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cultivating land in these areas supported such separation in the belief that the south should be “white man’s country” (Abinales 2000). Colonial rulers encouraged the development of a collective Muslim identity and it was in this effort, it has been argued, that the beginnings of a Moro nationalism that transcended ethno-linguistic barriers first took root (McKenna 2000). Filipinos in power, however, insisted on integrating the Muslims within the Philippines (Abinales 2000).

Muslims, for their part, resisted the Americans sporadically if fiercely; hobbled and internally divided under occupation, Muslim leaders eventually came to an accommodation with American rule. Encouraged by the Americans’ apparent openness to the idea of separation and increasingly self-conscious of the pan-Muslim identity that the Americans themselves inculcated, Muslims accepted the new order on the assurance – or in the hope – that the Americans would not force them to be part of a new Philippine state to which they promised to give independence (Abinales 2000). In various instances, some Muslim leaders reiterated their demand to have their own state, or else to be part of US territory rather than of the Philippines (Che Man 1990). They were rejected. As Americans and Filipinos decided their fate, the Muslims were not included in the discussion and decision-making (Abinales 2000). Ultimately, the Americans, with the approval of Filipinos and a few Muslim leaders in power, decided to include the Muslims and their territories in the newly independent Philippine state that came into being in 1946.

### Dispossession

Claiming all unregistered lands as subject to the ownership and control of the state, the Philippine government continued the process started during colonization of parcelling out lands in the south to foreign and Filipino-owned corporations as well as to migrants from the north. As much as 90 percent of all lands in the south, considered “ancestral domains” by Muslims and other indigenous people who lived in the area, was considered “public” and, therefore, up to the state to allocate as it deemed fit (Che Man 1990; May 1992; Tan 1995; Abinales 2000; Ahmad 2000a; Gutierrez & Borras 2004).

By that time, the Filipino elites who dominated the state, many of them coming from powerful

landed families, were facing growing unrest from landless peasants in the north. An uprising fueled by rural misery and discontent was gaining strength, posing the most serious internal challenge to the political order. Faced with this explosive situation, the Philippine government accelerated resettlement initiatives and enacted laws that offered land in the south to settlers as well as to northern and foreign business interests. Seen not only as a solution to the problem of landlessness in the north, the resettlement programs were also conceived as a way to “civilize” the Muslims and the indigenous people in the south (May 1992).

Tens of thousands of poor, landless, mostly Christian families took the offer, driven less by government prodding than by desperation. The middle classes and bureaucrats looking for opportunities also joined. So did wealthy elites and capitalists, lured by the untapped agricultural, timber, and mining wealth (Tan 1995; Gutierrez & Borras 2004). By the early 1960s, as many as 3,200 migrants were arriving in Mindanao each week, dramatically shifting the demographic balance. In Koronadal Valley, one area that saw the biggest influx of migrants, to cite an example, the Christian population rose from 18 in 1939 to 30,000 in 1960 (May 1992). It was the largest movement of people in Philippine history, believed to be the most important social change in the country after the war (Abinales 2000).

In the ensuing competition for limited land, the laws that were supposed to govern the registration of lands worked against the Muslims. Imposed by the north and implemented by bureaucrats from the north, they served as instruments to perpetrate and legitimize what a 1963 Philippine Senate report described as “landgrabbing” (Tan 1995). Under one law, for example, settlers were allowed to apply for up to 24 hectares of land while non-Christians could apply for only 10. In other instances, settlers were reserved 16 hectares, while the locals were given only 8 (Tan 1995; Gutierrez & Borras 2004). Huge tracts of lands had earlier during American colonization been given to corporations and individuals for plantations of export crops such as pineapple, rubber, and coconut, for logging, and for mining; more were awarded after independence (Che Man 1990).

Uninformed of the intricacies of the laws issued by the north, impeded by the tedious bureaucratic procedures, unable to pay fees, or

in defiance of what could have been seen as foreign, illegitimate edicts from an unrecognized authority, Muslims were, for their part, unable or unwilling to register for land. When land disputes arose, bureaucrats in many cases were at best unresponsive to the Muslims or were inclined to rule in favor of settlers. The best lands often ended up in the hands of Christian settlers (McKenna 2000: 117); Muslim plots were small (Che Man 1990). By 1972, it is estimated that only 30 percent of the Muslims had land registered in their name, reduced to 17 percent by 1982 (Tan 1995). But it was not the landless settlers who took most of the lands: like the Muslims and the indigenous people, many Christian settlers remained poor and landless (Tadem 1992; Ahmad 2000a; Abinales 2000). By the late 1980s, it was the export-oriented plantations, multinational corporations, and logging concessionaires that controlled more than half of Mindanao's lands (cited in Collier 1992). Lands owned by wealthy families became the basis for the rise of new, powerful political families.

While the opening of the south provided a safety valve that undermined the burgeoning communist movement (Abinales 2000), allowed the landowning elites in the north to hold on to their lands, and opened up economic opportunities for capitalists, the Muslims and the indigenous people were not only dispossessed of their ancestral domain, they also became a minority in what they considered their homeland (Gutierrez & Borras 2004). In 1918, Muslims accounted for 49 percent of the population in Mindanao. By 1970, they stood at only 19 percent of the count (Tan 1995). That they have become a minority in their own claimed homeland has been described as a kind of "low-intensity ethnic cleansing" (Gutierrez 2000).

### Marginalization

Relative to its land area and population, a disproportionate portion of the income and wealth derived from natural resources contributing to the Philippine economy came from the south: At one point, it was estimated that Mindanao provided half of the resources being exported by the country, with 14 out of the top 20 dollar-earning commodities coming from the region. Coconut products, for example, were at one point the Philippines' most important export commodity; half of the total land area planted

to them were to be found in Mindanao. Over half of commercial forest lands from which timber, another important commodity, comes, were likewise in the region. The seas in the south accounted for an estimated half of the country's total commercial catch. As much as 90 percent of total fruit exports were also from the south (Tadem 1992; Tan 1995; Ahmad 2000a).

As shown by economic and social indicators that have consistently rated the provinces in the south, especially those where Muslims account for the majority, as among the poorest and most miserable, the wealth from the extracted resources did not accrue to the Muslims (Tadem 1992). Profits from businesses in the region flowed back to capitalists from outside; what Muslims as well as Christian settlers earned came from compensation for their labor (Tan 1995). At the same time, with the commons such as the lands as well as the seas increasingly enclosed, Muslims and others lost access to resources for their subsistence. A 1985 study showed that the incidence of poverty was higher in the south than the national average (Tadem 1992). Recent measures show not only that Muslims are among the poorest in the country, they also have the shortest life expectancy, the lowest adult literacy rates, and the least access to education, health, electricity, transportation, water, and sanitation (Gutierrez & Borras 2004).

In its effort to construct a Filipino nation, the Philippine state, with the help of Filipino nationalists, implemented policies that were seen as undermining Muslim cultural values, institutions, and practices (Brown 1988). A national language, based on one of the languages in the north, was officially adopted and used as the medium of instruction in public schools all over the country, including in the Muslim regions. The educational system was thought of as having been designed to bring children away from Islam (Majul 1985). Under a political system which formally adopted secularism, or the separation of religion from the state, Christian missionaries were allowed to establish schools and churches in the south but the state itself did not deliberately set out to convert Muslims. Official Philippine history and discourse were seen as prioritizing those of the north while marginalizing that of Muslims. Northern Filipino revolutionaries, for instance, were glorified in the official version of the Filipino struggle against Spanish and American colonialism, even as the

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Moros' protracted and mostly successful resistance went unrecognized. Though the Philippines itself officially invoked communal differences as an intrinsic part of Filipino nationhood (Abinales 2000) and its policies affected all the ethnolinguistic groups, and even though the state's cultural policies were arguably less aggressive and assimilationist than those adopted by other states, Muslims perceived themselves as being culturally under siege.

#### **Armed Resistance**

While Muslim grievances had been welling up for some time, it was not until the late 1960s that Moro nationalism, as a self-conscious collective identity with a mass constituency, emerged and armed resistance against the state began.

By then, land disputes in the fast-filling frontier were escalating (Abinales & Amoroso 2005). Christian gangs attacked and killed Muslim farmers and set their homes on fire in various incidents. Muslims struck back. The clashes were perceived as ethnic conflicts and consequently heightened communal divisions. A review of the cases of violence, however, showed that they were mostly class-based: between ordinary Christian settlers and Muslim elites, ordinary Muslims against Christian elites, or elites of either religion set upon each other (McKenna 2000). The Philippine military and police as well as politicians from among the settlers, however, were perceived as being on the side of the Christians and were accused of organizing gangs and militias that committed atrocities against Muslims (Che Man 1990; May 1992; Ahmad 2000b).

In this period, a new generation of young educated Muslims had begun articulating ideas of Moro nationhood and self-determination. Immersed in Manila, where nationalism and left-wing ideas were by then becoming more and more influential, or in Cairo, where Arab nationalism, communism, and Islamism competed for influence, the young Moros put forth radical proposals departing from those advocated by traditional Muslim elites: neither compromise with the Philippine state nor a return to the old aristocratic sultanates. Castigating the traditional elites for their cooperation with the Philippine state, this new generation of self-professed Moros gained growing influence and an expanding following (Gutierrez 2000).

It happened that around this time as well, attempts by the Philippine state to centralize power reached their apogee in the dictatorship of President Ferdinand Marcos. In seeking to concentrate power in the state, Marcos's authoritarianism undermined the traditional Muslim elites and local strongmen on whom the state had relied to control the south. Having come to an accommodation with the state in exchange for the political and economic benefits their status within it accorded them, these elites' and strongmen's authority was undermined and, consequently, their capacity to keep the lid on Muslim discontent weakened. Cut off from their sources of power, with their standing in Muslim communities contested by the new activists, but still seeking to employ the threat of secession to extract leverage from the state, some of the traditional elites turned against the state (Abinales 2000; McKenna 2000).

Together, the new generation of politicized Moros along with sections of the old elite began organizing new political formations and organizations calling for a Moro republic independent from the Philippines. In 1972, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was formed. Sparked by a series of atrocities against Muslims, Marcos's declaration of martial law, and the government's attempt to confiscate arms, armed resistance against the Philippines erupted.

At that time, Marcos's authoritarian government was flush with increasing amounts of military assistance from the United States, given in exchange for Marcos's assurance to keep important US military bases in the country. Facing the most serious military challenge to the state since the Huks in the 1950s, Marcos unleashed the full force of the Philippine military against the Moros. The Moros, for their part, took arms and received training and political support from Libya, Malaysia, and other Muslim-majority countries. Though motivated by various grievances – the idea of Moro nationhood just one of them (McKenna 2000) – Muslims universally supported and fought on the side of the Moro nationalists (Ahmad 2000a). Though loose, disorganized, and with no combat experience, the MNLF managed to unify Moros and to mobilize up to 30,000 fighters under its banner (Che Man 1990; McKenna 2000).

At the height of the war from 1972 to 1976, an estimated 10,000 to 60,000 were killed. Between 200,000 to as many as a million were

displaced (May 1992; Mercado 1992; Abinales & Amoroso 2005). In the end, it was a stalemate. Both sides were pressured by the mediating party, the Organization of Islamic Countries, to reach a negotiated solution to the war: the MNLF gave up its demand for its own independent state while Marcos agreed, on paper, to grant autonomy to the Moros on his terms (Noble 1980).

In the first of similar failed agreements in the future, Marcos would interpret and implement the agreement on his own terms without giving meaningful autonomy to the Moros, while the MNLF would subsequently denounce the agreement. Fighting resumed after 1977, punctuated by various rounds of negotiations and the signing of more peace agreements that would likewise subsequently collapse. The intensity of the fighting during the 1970s, however, has not to date been matched. Since then, the Moro movement has evolved.

### The Politics of Independence

Moro nationalism was conceived as an anti-colonial struggle against what was perceived as an illegitimate and oppressive authority. Like many anti-colonial struggles however, the Moro movements, at the outset, were also internally divided primarily along class and ideological lines. It was along these lines that they split and fragmented after the war, shattering the united front that for a time allowed the Muslims to fight the Philippine military to a stalemate and force the Philippine government to the negotiating table.

On one side were the founding stalwarts of the MNLF whose politics was of a secular, if left-leaning, nationalism characteristic of many national liberation movements that swept the world after World War II. The aim behind the struggle for a Moro nation, the MNLF's manifesto stated, was the establishment of a "democratic system of government which shall never allow or tolerate any form of exploitation and oppression of any human being by another or of one nation by another" (quoted in Che Man 1990).

One of the founders of the MNLF and its eventual figurehead, Nur Misuari, did not come from the traditional or wealthy Muslim families and was reported to have once been a member of a group linked with the Communist Party of the Philippines. Misuari was, in fact, subsequently accused by one of his rivals, eventual

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) founder Hashim Salamat, of moving the MNLF toward "Marxist-Maoist orientations" (Che Man 1990). This was denied by Misuari's followers and the MNLF was said to hold the view that communism was antithetical to Islam, a cornerstone of Moro nationalism (Noble 1980; Che Man 1990). Not until 1982 would an openly leftist organization be formed: the Moro Revolutionary Organization, which was allied with the Communist Party of the Philippines but which affirmed the Moros' option to secede from the Philippine state (Che Man 1990). For either ideological or practical reasons, the MNLF's model was said to have been that of "Libyan socialism" (Tan 1995), whose proponent, Muammar al-Qaddafi, also happened to be the most powerful foreign patron of the Moros. Reflecting its orientation and contradictions, the MNLF was also supported by the Arab socialist regime of Syria but also by the shah of Iran (Che Man 1990).

As with many national liberation movements, the MNLF has had to struggle with the need to bring together the broadest possible unity among members believed to be part of the "nation" while dealing with the competing class interests and uneven power relations among them. At first, in fact, some of the key leaders of the MNLF sought to distance the movement from the traditional elites who were perceived to have betrayed their cause in collaborating with the Philippine state for their own interests. Left out in the cold by Marcos, some of these elites joined the movement with the aim of controlling and moving it away from its demands for a transformation of Moro society.

Should the war be won, these traditional elites could expect to be the new elites of a newly independent nation, replacing the Filipino elites from the north. Even if it didn't, the threat of secession was a powerful leverage to demand more power from the center. The MNLF welcomed some of them into the movement and made use of the economic and political power they offered. But as the war drew to a stalemate, they were also among the first to split from the movement, founding their own rival and more conservative organizations. Enticed by Marcos's offers of powerful and lucrative government posts and repelled by Misuari's left-leaning rhetoric, virtually all of the traditional elites had walked away from the movement by 1980 (Che Man 1990; McKenna 2000).

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Another group that broke away from the MNLF were the religious and conservative Moros who were opposed not only to Misuari's allegedly leftist inclinations but to his secularism as well. As in other political movements in Muslim countries, one source of enduring cleavage that has gained more salience among the Moro movements through the years has been the question of the role of Islam. The Moro nationalist movements have commonly appealed to Islam as a defining identity, mobilizing ideology, and source of legitimation (Che Man 1990; Mercado 1992). Indeed, it is Islam that binds the various ethnolinguistic groups that are considered as belonging to the Moro nation (Gutierrez 2000). But while the MNLF manifesto stated its commitment to the "preservation and growth of Islamic culture among our people," it did not call for the establishment of an Islamic state nor was its vision of a new nation based on Islamic theology. Founded in 1984 by Salamat and his allies in order to move the Moro movement toward a more Islamic, less secular, more conservative orientation (Che Man 1990), the MILF has since grown to be the most powerful armed resistance group in Mindanao (Liow 2006).

Though the MILF is evidently more religious in its rhetoric than the MNLF, whether it is determined to establish an "Islamic state" is unclear, its position on this question has been inconsistent, and its specific vision of the shape this Islamic state would take remains vague (Abinales & Amoroso 2005). It is believed that the MILF's ideologues have not as of yet thought through the specific contours of their post-independence state and the MILF's former leader himself has signified that the question can be decided on later (Liow 2006). Even among MILF's rank-and-file fighters and high-ranking officials, there are questions as to what extent the official religious views of the leadership are shared; many see their struggle less as a war for an Islamic state than as a war for national liberation (Vitug & Gloria, 2000; Wright-Neville 2004).

Rather than a pan-Islamist movement, the MILF remains primarily a nationalist movement concerned with gaining its own independent state, or else more political autonomy from the Philippines. Like the MNLF, the MILF accepts the compatibility of Islam with the existence of the nation-state system, contrary to the view of other Islamists advocating a global pan-Islamic movement. Unlike the Abu Sayyaf,

which also initially emerged as a breakaway group from the MNLF after it signed a peace agreement with the government, or the Jemaah Islamiyah, an organization thought to have members in various parts of Southeast Asia, the MILF's agenda does not go beyond the Moros' relations with the Philippine state (Liow 2006).

### Weaknesses

Over 30 years since its emergence, Moro nationalism has so far failed to achieve its stated goal of securing an independent state or greater autonomy for Moros.

Once vowing never to "agree to any form of settlement short of . . . total freedom and independence," the MNLF has entered into a series of peace agreements with the government. All of them have so far collapsed. The Philippine government had consistently refused to enter the notion of seeing its territory reduced. Their own power threatened, politicians and powerful Filipino political families from among the settlers in Mindanao had opposed and diluted measures aimed at giving more political power to Moros.

As the plebiscites creating the autonomous regions for the Moros reflected the demographic changes caused by migration, the territory that was eventually allocated for Moro autonomous rule turned out to be smaller than what had been demanded. Of the autonomy that was granted, Muslims were given only curtailed powers over resources, revenues, or legislation. With the limited power they were permitted and their decision to enter into alliances with traditional Filipino politicians, the Moro leadership's record in office had been blotted by accusations of inefficiency, patronage, and corruption. Despite the peace agreements and the arrangements they put in place, Moros remain among the poorest in the Philippines and continue to be dispossessed of land and resources. The once universal support for the MNLF had dwindled and had given way to widespread disillusionment and disenchantment.

The MILF had likewise entered into protracted negotiations with the government. But the talks have so far foundered on the question of Moro control over their claimed ancestral domain and its resources. Even if a peace agreement is eventually concluded, there is no assurance that it will not meet the same fate as those with the MNLF. The Abu Sayyaf, for its

part, has not only dissolved into factions – with some identified more with criminality and banditry than with secessionism – all of which remain small, isolated, and with little popular support. Meanwhile, southern Mindanao remains among the most militarized places in the country, with on-and-off but frequent military operations against Moro rebels and fighters and numerous abuses against civilians.

Apart from class, ideological, as well as ethnolinguistic cleavages which have made the Moro movement vulnerable to the Philippine government's divide-and-rule strategies, other factors may account for its failure to achieve its goals.

Part of the explanation has to be accounted for by the Moros' dependence on external assistance for material and political support. Assistance from Libya, Malaysia, and others was driven by their own geopolitical and internal domestic interests and these did not always necessarily converge with those of the Moros. Once Libya and Malaysia reached an accommodation with the Philippine government, Moros found that they had little choice but to follow their patron's demands. When Malaysia decided to stop giving sanctuary to Moros and to cut off arms supplies to the Moro fighters, the Moros' military capacity weakened. But because the Moro leaders prioritized mobilizing external support – with the Moro leadership more often abroad than at home during the fighting – alternative sources of support could not be mobilized internally.

Perhaps a more fundamental weakness speaks to the limits of identity politics in struggles for self-determination. As proven by divisions among the groups and classes designated as comprising the Moro nation, collective Moro identity as a bond for collective action has proven to be tenuous (Abinales 2000). At the same time, it has proven to be a vulnerable basis for articulating grievances and demanding change. Faced with demands for greater recognition of Moro cultural and religious practices, the Philippine state has often readily consented to giving such concessions even as it held off giving in to more fundamental demands for greater control over lands and resources. This allowed the Philippine state to project itself as a benevolent authority that was able to attend to the needs of all Filipinos regardless of their religion and ethnicity even as it perpetuated the economic marginalization of Muslims. Marcos, for example, ordered the building of more mosques, declared Muslim

holidays as legal holidays, established Islamic cultural institutions, codified Muslim laws, allowed the use of Arabic for teaching, and so on (Che Man 1990). And yet, it was telling that the autonomy agreement that temporarily put an end to the fighting in 1977 singled out control over Mindanao's mines and mineral resources as among those powers not to be given to the Moro autonomous government.

The Moros had also found that collective identity and the notion of a shared and distinct history are not something that they alone could invoke. Moro identity has had to face and respond to the sharpening of the collective identities of other peoples living within the area claimed by the Moros as their homeland. Starting in the mid-1970s, the non-Muslim and non-Christian indigenous people in Mindanao also began asserting their own identity and claims. Some organized their own resistance groups to protect themselves from the onslaught of migration or to fight for the restoration of their ancestral lands (May 1992; Rodil 1992). In some areas, their claims to their own ancestral domains conflict with those of the Moros. With new generations from settler families being born in Mindanao, another identity – a "Mindanaoan" collective embracing those who claim to have roots in the region, including the descendants of those who migrated from elsewhere – has also recently emerged. Invoking this new identity, some have, like the Moros, also called for independence or for their own state in a federal system. Apart from these, there has been a rise in so-called "tri-people" movements that seek to bring together people with different identities – Moros, indigenous peoples, and Christian settlers – on socioeconomic and political issues, as well as on the question of self-determination.

These other identities and their corresponding political projects have challenged the Moros' claim to a nation founded on a "Moro" identity. In the process, the construction of such an identity has been evolving. For some, this identity is defined by but not limited to Islam; in other words, it appears to be more of a cultural than an exclusively religious identity. Reflecting this, the MNLF has since indicated that the term "Moro" also includes Christians and other non-Muslim indigenous people who inhabit the territory they claim as their homeland and who choose to be part of the Moro nation (Gutierrez 2000). Though the MILF has also taken this

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position, it is unclear whether non-Muslims would be given rights over lands they consider their ancestral domains (Liow 2006).

### Prospects

Despite its failure to achieve its objectives, Moro nationalism remains resonant. In fact, as a reference for an identity, “Moro” has gained more traction through the years: more people now identify themselves as “Moros,” in addition to or in place of “Filipino” than in the past (Wadi 2006). Helped in no small measure by continuing military offensives and abuses against Moros and by their relative misery compared to others, support for the goals of Moro nationalism remains widespread. Its armed component significantly degraded and assistance from external supporters diminished, the Moro movements, particularly that of the MILF, have since shifted to mass mobilization and building institutions in an attempt to consolidate and expand their internal sources of power.

In spite of its failure, Moro nationalism’s achievements in bringing attention to the Moros’ marginalization and in mobilizing Moros to attempt to change their condition and status cannot be underestimated. But while the Moro nationalist movements, as anti-colonial struggles, have challenged the Moros’ relations with the Philippine state, whether they would eventually lead to the transformation of Moro society is another question altogether.

At the outset, the Moro vision for a new nation did not advance specific plans for overturning the concentration of wealth and power within Moro society. While Misuari and Salamat had both advocated the abolition of precolonial traditional institutions and structures, they have since implicitly accepted and retained their existence (McKenna 2000). Neither the MNLF nor the MILF have had concrete proposals on whether and how to allocate lands claimed as the Muslims’ ancestral domain or how to distribute the gains from their natural resources. The land issue was neither raised nor resolved during the MNLF’s peace negotiations with the government (Gutierrez & Borrás 2004). Even when they assumed limited power as part of the autonomous government established as a result of the peace agreements, addressing issues of social justice was not among the priorities. In fact, Misuari and the MNLF leadership later chose

to join a coalition led by the conservative Philippine ruling party that included among its ranks many Filipino elites and politicians opposed to progressive reforms. That the new Moro elites had only set out to replace the Filipino elites in oppressing Muslims – that they are more “counter-elites” than “revolutionaries” – has been a standing apprehension.

So far, Moro nationalists have only sought to prove that the emancipation of Moros within Moro society is not possible within the context of Moro subordination within the Philippines. That independence or autonomy could subsequently lead to Moro emancipation within Moro society remains, depending on where one stands, both a threat and a promise.

SEE ALSO: Huk Rebellion, 1946–1954; Qadaffi, Muammar al- (b. 1942)

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