

# Conflict between the Moro Liberation Fronts (MIM-MNLF-MILF) and the Government in Historical Perspective

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I have to be very specific that the conflict we are addressing is not an internal conflict. It is a conflict between the Moro people, Bangsamoro, and the Government in historical perspective. We can never understand the conflict if we extricate it out of history. We have to be rooted in history to really appreciate what the problem is.

TWO POLITICAL POSITIONS IN CONFLICT	
MNLF	GRP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bangsamoros, not Filipinos</li> <li>• Sulu, Maguindanao sultanates, Pat a Pongampong ko Ranao</li> <li>• Territory: Mindanao-Sulu-Palawan</li> <li>• Integrated into Philippines without plebiscitary consent</li> <li>• To establish a Bangsamoro Republic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One Filipino nation/ people</li> <li>• One Republic of the Philippines</li> <li>• Territory: Luzon-Visayas-Mindanao</li> <li>• Dismemberment of Republic</li> <li>• Threat to national sovereignty</li> </ul>

Let me start with this. What is the conflict all about? If we look at the left side, they say that they are Bangsamoro, not Filipino. What kind of political entity are they? They used to be the Sulu and Maguindanao Sultanates, two sultanates. What is a sultanate to us in our modern understanding? It is actually a state, with all the four elements of a state: people, territory, government, and sovereignty. Pat a Pongampong ko Ranao is there because it was always a state but never got to be; but it is cited by the Bangsamoro leaders as a political entity in itself.

How about the territory? Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) are all claiming the same thing, except that in the case of the MILF,

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they are claiming a lesser area for their territory. They say that they have been integrated in the Philippines without their plebiscitary consent. What they are saying is that when you are talking about democracy, you have to ask. They maintain that they were not Filipinos and they became Filipinos without being asked and that is a violation of a fundamental right. So what do they wish to do? They want to establish a Bangsamoro Republic.

Now if you look at the right column, the Government of the Philippines (GRP) says that we are one Filipino nation, one people, one Republic of the Philippines, with our territories covering Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. So, this aspiration about wanting to establish the Bangsamoro Republic is a dismemberment of the Republic and a threat to the national sovereignty.

The claim to a Bangsamoro Republic was not exactly a static position. The Moro Liberation Fronts were just stating a historical conclusion. While they are saying that their territory in Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan were independent, the MNLF agreed to accept autonomy within the integrity of national territory and under the sovereignty of the Republic of the Philippines. The MILF earlier wanted an Islamic state but have so far modified it into an associative relationship with the Philippine government. They say it is midway between autonomy and a federal state. They are claiming a political territory roughly equivalent to 3,978 barangays in Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. It is very small compared to what the MNLF had asserted.

The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) has been involved in the attempt to settle the problem. In the first place, the MNLF succeeded in getting the attention and support of some OIC countries, by virtue of their advocacy and publicity. The OIC became the natural intermediary between the MILF and the GRP. However, the OIC has taken the position that this is a domestic problem internal to the Philippines and must be resolved internally. What is internal to the Philippines? We have a Republic governed by a Constitution which gives the GRP an instrument that could be used in its peace negotiations with the MNLF. The debate today though is what is the Constitution.

The fundamental premise of the Bangsamoro claim basically is that the Sultanate of Sulu has been there since 1450 and the Sultanate of Maguindanao since 1690, including Pat a Pongampong ko Ranao. As of 1898, at the time of the signing of the Treaty of Paris, the sultanates were still there. Perhaps the status may be deemed *de facto*, if we try to impose our modern standards, but the point is they were still states. On the other hand, the Filipino grew within the colonial period. So what do we have?

In 1898, we had the Philippine declaration of independence. At the time of the Treaty of Paris, if we look at our history, if we include the Moros in our history, we actually had three states in existence. Now, the Americans

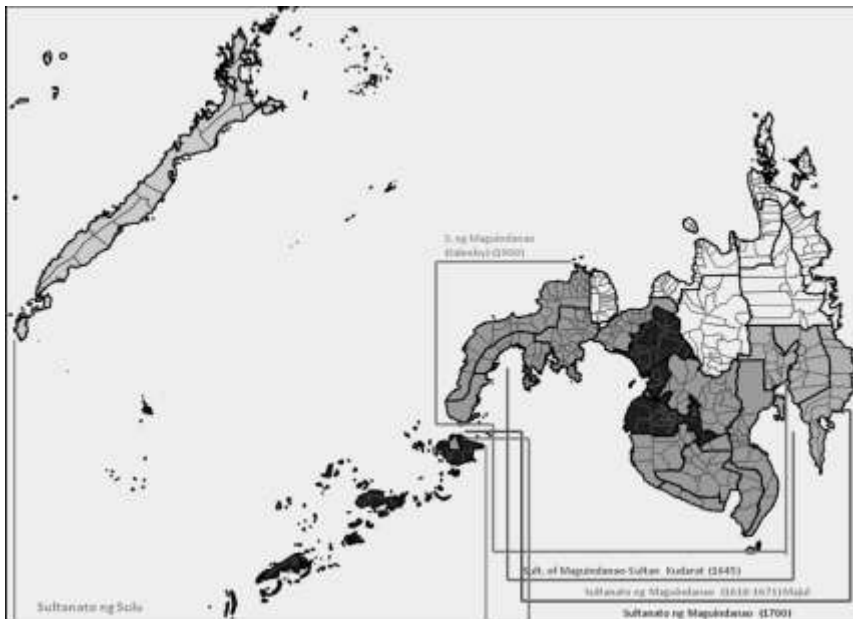
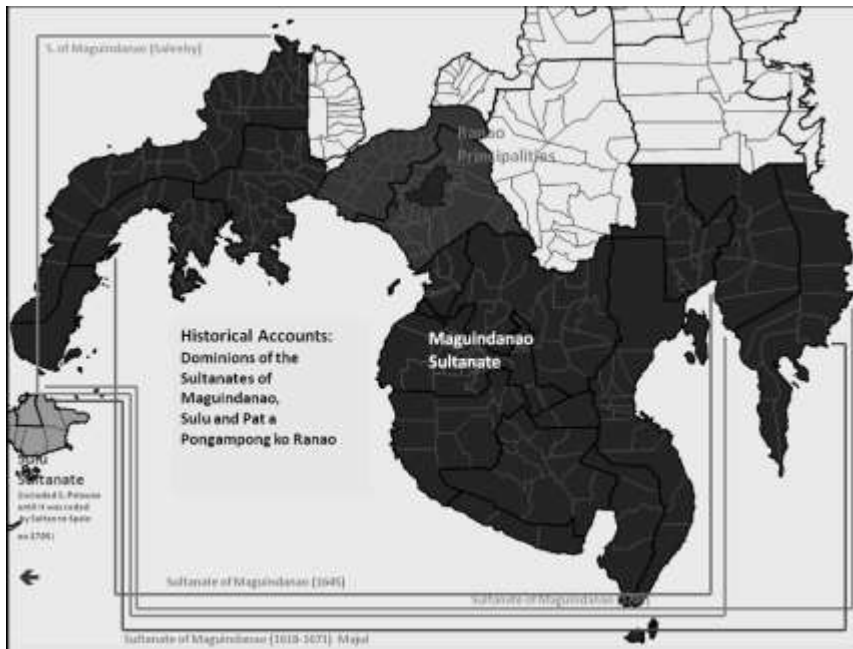
insisted that actually we did not have any nations here. What we had were tribes fighting one another, and that became their excuse for staying and creating another dimension to the problem.

The Spanish-American war resulted with Spain ceding everything, the independent Philippines, the two sultanates, and the Pat a Pongampong ko Ranao, to the United States (U.S.). The U.S. incidentally was aware of this, but they decided to take the position that there were no nations here, thus denying the existence of any state. One may have questions about the legitimacy of the transaction but this became moot with the success of American arms. First we have the Filipino-American war. Incidentally, many of our historians are talking only about Filipino-American war without referring to the Moro-American War. There should be a Moro-American war because we were not all Filipinos at the time of the Filipino-American war. We lost, and that is how we all became Filipinos.

We lost and did not give our plebiscitary consent. Was anyone asked by the Spaniards or the Americans? Were the Filipinos asked? Were the Moros asked? I was telling my mom, did you complain that you were never asked? And this became a good excuse for us to negotiate. None of us were asked whether we wanted to be Filipinos or not or whether we wanted to be one republic or not.

But then in 1946, only one republic was recognized by the U.S. The problem with the 1946 independence was that it was premised on the Philippine Commonwealth, which included the Muslims. There were some Muslims in the Constitutional Convention. In other words, there were Muslims who gave consent, and this became the reason of everybody, Filipino politicians and the Americans, in integrating them into the Philippines. This issue is very complicated.

Allow me to locate the Sulu and Maguinadano Sultanates. In the maps below, the dark gray is the Maguinadanao sultanate at its peak, the white area is Pat a Pongampong ko Ranao. The next map is combined Maguindanao and Sulu. If you look at Sulu, Sulu is from Dapitan to Palawan. The case of Zamboanga City is controversial. At the time, the Sultan of Maguindanao was then powerful, Zamboanga City was included in the Sultanate. Up to now, Zamboanga City has always been the bone of contention. I do not know why. So look at Davao, Cotabato, Lanao, Zamboanga, Sulu archipelago, and Palawan. That is the entirety of the Moro domains we are talking about.

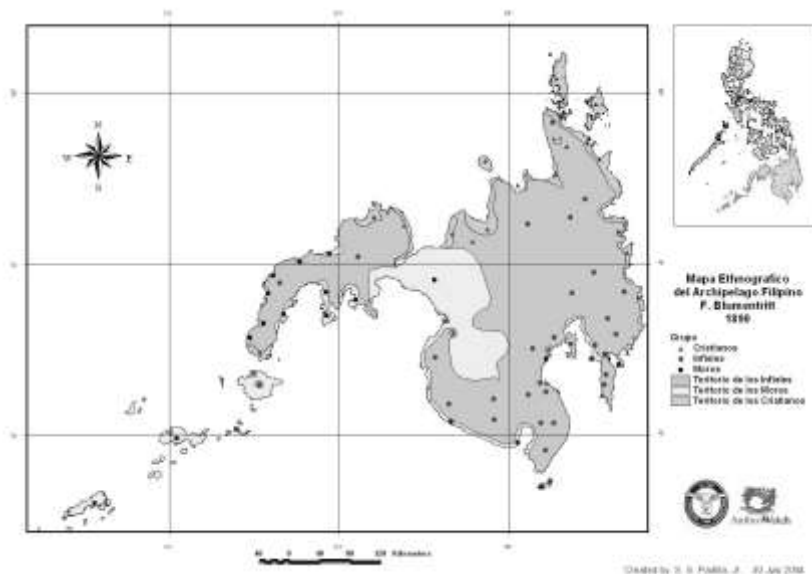


Now, one aspect of the problem, which we often take for granted, is the psychological part. And I think we need the help of psychologists and guidance counselors in the peace process. I am serious, because we are

talking here about killings. There is bad blood between Christians and Muslims in Mindanao. After 333 years of fighting, Spaniards using Filipinos to fight Muslims and Muslims retaliating by attacking Filipino communities, we are talking here about thousands of captives having become slaves on both sides. With this kind of an environment, what do we have? We have inherited the bad energy. We need physics teachers also in the peace process because they can tell us that the bad energy created in the Spanish period has not been destroyed because energy is indestructible. We can only transform it. Speaking of triggers, in recent memory, the triggers were Moro pirates during the Spanish period, Muslim Mindanao in 1988 and in 1996, and the MOA-AD in 2008. These became trigger words. Labelling in the context of the Mindanao problem has contributed to the build-up of this energy. For example, Christians were civilized, non-Christians were not civilized.

It is important to note that the Americans recognized the territorial control of the sultanate of Pat a Pongampong ko Ranao. This is the reason why they created the special province called Moro province.

The marginalization of Moro land settlement through the public land laws is instructive. First, the American said all land grants made by traditional leaders are declared null and void if done without government consent. Consent again. Next, they introduced the public land law. This map, shown below, was made by Ferdinand Blumentritt based on Jesuit documents of Mindanao. The light gray in the center is Muslim, dark gray is Lumads, and the coastal areas are converted Christians. These were not imported Christians from the North — these were converts.



During the implementation of the early land law, homesteaders, like my family, received 16 hectares in 1903. There was no provision for non-Christians. Under the 1919 Public Land Law, homesteaders received 24 hectares, and finally there was a provision for 10 hectares for non-Christians. It went down to four hectares under the 1936 law while homesteaders received 16 hectares.

Let us look at the case of Cotabato. Cotabato is the heart of the MILF. I am talking here about the five provinces. What happened? In 1918, there were 20 towns which were majority Moro, five with majority Lumad, and no town with majority settlers. By 1970, 38 towns were majority settlers, none were majority Lumad, and only 10 were majority Moro. The movement of population organized by the colonial government and continued by the GRP started in 1930. From 1930 until 1970 — it took less than 30 years to marginalize the Bangsamoro and the Lumads and to put the Christians as the new majority.

This is the story of marginalization in Cotabato, but this is also the entire story of marginalization in Mindanao, and that is the problem we are trying to solve. They are saying they have lost their territory, their homes, their social space, and now they are demanding self-determination, within their own ancestral domain.

The least of our problems, if you ask me, and I am now speaking not as Vice-Chair on behalf of the GRP panel negotiating with the MNLF/MILF, is not the Constitution. Our problem is at the level of feelings. In Tagalog, it is very graphic. But the point is, what happens when two people become close? We say *nagkalapit ang loob*. What happens when there is conflict? *Nagkasira ang loob*. How do you handle *nagkasira ng loob*? *Paglapitin ang loob* and then *pagkalapit ng loob*. We Filipinos and the Moros operate at the level of feelings all the time. What happens when *nagkalapit ng loob*? You know that the other will die for you and consider his or her property as yours.

This can be seen in the process itself. I remember we listened during the early part of the negotiations to Nur Misuari for one and a half hours of history and then after a few months, he told the same story but this time for 45 minutes only. Again he told the same story but for only 30 minutes. He was telling the same story but he was able to extricate himself out of that emotional context. As listeners, we made an agreement in the GRP panel never to respond in kind to a display of emotion. Sometimes, when the GRP Panel feels very bored and angry because some of the historical data have been twisted, it is an occasion which gives rise to the *pagkasamaan ng loob*. One can go out to the hall, hit the wall, but never show a bad face. In other words, listen. Now the first search for common ground is at the level of feelings — that is why we talk about mutual trust and confidence building measures. It is in the legal aspects that we have problems and seek clarifications.

Finally, in the end, the creation of a common vision is accomplished at the level of feelings. Then we decide on the kind of legal arrangement and political settlement we need in order to accomplish this common vision. This, in my view, is the important element that we need to consider in the peace process in Mindanao.

One final note, one has bad feelings when you are offended. What will remove the bad feelings? Justice to me is when the bad feelings have been removed. So to my mind, our political settlement is primarily, and should be primarily accomplished on the level of feelings, and thereafter, we look into the legality to formulate the proper political settlement.