

Autonomy for the Moro People: Its Implications on the Tribal Filipinos and the Christian Population in Mindanao

B. R. RODIL


Introduction

This discussion on Moro autonomy is by its very nature restrictive. To my mind, Moro right to self-determination includes the freedom to decide whether or not to remain as an integral part of the Philippine Republic. If their decision is to separate and form an independent state, they are perfectly within their right to do so. Being only a form of self-determination, our topic is premised on certain very fundamental assumptions, among them, that the Moro people have reached an agreement among themselves to accept the status of autonomy, and that an accord has been arrived at between them and the Philippine government to this effect, leaving only specific details to be threshed out. Such an assumption of course is doubtful at this point. The recent decision of the Constitutional Commission to grant autonomy to the people of the Cordillera and the Moro must be seen as tentative — at least until we have heard from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro National Liberation Front - Reformist Group (MNLF-RG).

This leaves us with nothing but the Tripoli Agreement as the only basis for our discussion. The problem is we have never experienced the spirit and provisions of the accord. President Marcos saw to that. And the Marcos autonomy was anything but autonomous.

Our discussion will therefore be exploratory. We shall proceed as follows:

- A. What is the Moro right to self-determination?
- B. What is Moro autonomy?
- C. Working out solutions to strengthen unity and uphold equality in the autonomy.

 B.R. RODIL, a professor of History at MSU-IIT, has done studies on Mindanao history since the early 1970s. His article is a slightly revised edition of the lecture delivered at the Panel Discussion Series on the Moro People's Right to Self-Determination, Romulo Hall, Asian Center, UP, Diliman, Quezon City, August 19, 1986, jointly sponsored by the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, the Muslim-Christian Desk, NCCP-PACT, and the AdHoc Committee for Mindanao Concerns - UP Kutang Bato.

What Is the Moro Right to Self-determination?

Moro right to self-determination has been subject to a lot of misinterpretation especially among the Christians of Mindanao. Not only is the concept new to their ears; it has also jolted them from a long state of complacency, or better still, from a state of psychological security which, unknown to many of them, is premised on the *correctness* of colonial policies.

We have to go back to history to really appreciate the legitimacy of the Moro right to self-determination.

Brief Historical Background

The Moro people's struggle for self-determination against foreign domination dates back to 1565 and has continued since then to the present. Which gives us a total of 421 years until this year.

They were not part of the Filipino nation when the latter became an independent reality in 1898. Remaining unconquered throughout the Spanish colonial regime, the Moro people could not possibly identify themselves as Filipinos. For the Filipino nation was the product of the struggle of that segment of the archipelago's population which was conquered.

With the entry of American imperialism into the Philippine scene, all peoples of the archipelago were conquered and became subjects of the American colonial regime. And this became the excuse for the new colonizers to assimilate the Moro people into the colonial body politic.

Aside from continuing armed resistance, the leaders of the Moro people repeatedly petitioned the American government that they be treated as a people distinct from the Filipino people. They wanted no part in the Filipino independence movement. But the American presidents to whom the petitions were addressed paid no heed.

The continuing American domination after 1946 which transformed the Philippine colony into a neo-colony saw to the perpetuation of the American colonial policies, though in a more subtle form, that is, through the local ruling elite subservient to U.S. interests. The Moro people remained an integral part of the Filipino nation. Their national oppression, started in the American colonial regime, continues.

Soon they were to make their demands felt again. In 1961, Congressman Ombra Amilbansa of Sulu filed a bill at the now defunct House of Representatives seeking the separation of the Sulu archipelago from the Philippine Republic. It fell on deaf ears.

In 1968, the Muslim (later renamed Mindanao) Independence Movement was established and made public its objective to seek the formation of

an Islamic State out of Moroland or a large portion of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan with a large concentration of Muslim inhabitants. The formal organization soon disappeared but the idea flourished.

In 1972, barely two months after the declaration of martial rule, the Moro National Liberation Front-Bangsa Moro Army (MNLF-BMA) hit the news with well coordinated armed attacks against several (government) military detachments in Sulu, Cotabato and Lanao. Before long there was a full-scale war in Moroland.

The intention of the MNLF was unmistakable. Its ultimate goal was the complete liberation and independence of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan — its claimed national homeland — through armed struggle. It bannered the Bangsa Moro concept. What it wanted was no less than a Bangsa Moro Republik. The basis of this new phase of struggle is summarized in the first two paragraphs of its April 28, 1974 Manifesto:

"We, the five million oppressed Bangsa Moro people, wishing to free ourselves from the terror, oppression and tyranny of Filipino colonialism which has caused us untold sufferings and miseries by criminally usurping our land, by threatening Islam through wholesale destruction and desecration of its places of workship and its Holy Book, and murdering our innocent brothers, sisters and folks in a genocidal campaign of terrifying magnitude;

"Aspiring to have the sole prerogative of defining and charting our national destiny in accordance with our own free will in order to ensure our future and that of our children...."

The cost has indeed been terrifying. In just four years from November 1972 to December 1976, *The Journal Al-Alam Al-Islam* (January 1977) has estimated between 35,000 to 60,000 Moro deaths, between 31,000 to 54,000 injured, and between 260,000 to 350,000 displaced.

Under pressure from the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), the MNLF leadership signed the Tripoli Agreement with the representatives of the Philippine government on December 23, 1976, radically modifying its original demand of independence to autonomy within the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippine Republic. From the original claimed territory of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan, the area of autonomy was reduced to mere 13 provinces.

The evil machinations of the Marcos regime soon forced MNLF Central Committee Chairman Nur Misuari to revert to the original separatist stand; this has not changed to this date. Meanwhile, two other revolutionary groups, the MILF lead by Hashim Salamat and the MNLF-RG headed by Dimas Pundato, continue to call for the full implementation of the spirit and

letter of the agreement.

And late last week, the Constitutional Commission has reached the decision to grant autonomous status to the peoples of the Cordillera and Moroland.

The Basis of the Moro Right to Self-Determination

Moro right to self-determination stands on sound historical grounds. Viewed from the reality that the Moro people have a common history of struggle against foreign domination, a common territory, a common identity rooted in their racial origin and belief in Islam, and a common political aspiration accentuated presently by their acknowledgement of themselves as belonging to what they now call Bangsa Moro or Moro nation, there is no reason to doubt the reality of their nationhood. Right to self-determination as a people springs from nationhood.

The matter of right, if I may stress it, is not debatable. What is debatable or negotiable is how this right may be expressed. We have pointed out earlier that right to self-determination includes the right of choice, the freedom to decide among themselves what form of self-determination is acceptable to them: independence or autonomy? The latter comes in various forms: federal autonomy, regional autonomy or local autonomy. There is of course the inevitable question of territorial claim, the particularities of which may not be so easy to resolve.

Before we proceed, it may be well to clarify *who* are the Moro people. In the definition of the MNLF, the Moro people includes the 13 Muslim ethnolinguistic groups in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan, the Lumadnon or the more than twenty tribal groups in the same territory, and the indigenous Christian population. In the Tripoli Agreement, they are only the 13 Muslim ethno-linguistic groups. For our purposes here, we stick to the Tripoli Agreement's definition.

The Moro right to self-determination finds ample support in various international documents and organizations.

Chapter I, Article 2 of the United Nations Charter provides that in order for nations to develop friendly relations, the relationship must be based "on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples." Chapter IX, Section A of the same document adds that the same principle is necessary for "the creation of conditions of stability and well-being," themselves indispensable "for peaceful and friendly relations among nations."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is silent about self-determination of nations, but its Article 21 stresses that "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of the government."

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is even more explicit. Article I, Section 1 states: "All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."

By facilitating the negotiations between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front and by according the MNLF observer status and accepting it as the sole representative of the Moro people within its ranks, the Organization of Islamic Conference actually recognizes the right to self-determination of the Moro people. The OIC's insistence that the problem in the Philippines is a domestic one detracts little from this recognition. The Permanent People's Tribunal, too, came forward with the same recognition by the mere act of hearing the side of the MNLF during its 1980 Session on the Philippines in Belgium and by giving judgement to the Moro people as a separate and distinct case from that of the Filipino people. I realize of course that the recognition accorded by these organizations may have no binding effect under international law.

What Is Moro Autonomy?

We first came across the phrase "Moro autonomy" in the Tripoli Agreement. Although the phrase in the document was "autonomy for the Muslims in the southern Philippines," the media and the people of Mindanao interchangeably spoke of "Moro autonomy."

"Autonomy" generically means "self-government" but because the Tripoli Agreement explicitly states "within the territorial integrity and the national sovereignty" of the Philippine Republic, the meaning is automatically modified to mean merely "a certain degree" of self-government. The unfortunate thing about the agreement is that almost all the substantive provisions were "to be discussed later." We are thus left wondering what "autonomy" means in the concrete. It is in order to mention here that between the signing of the agreement and the scheduled plebiscite of April 17, 1977 public officials within the 13 provinces of the autonomy were at a loss on how to interpret the concept of autonomy itself.

The Marcos version of the autonomy merely emphasized what it was not, for it was anything but autonomous. What added clarification to the concept were the proposed presidential decree designed by the MNLF as well as the statement made for themselves by the Cordillera People's Alliance for Self-determination. At least these two documents tried to put into concrete terms what they thought autonomy should be in their respective areas.

We therefore have very little by way of a concrete basis from which to draw our analysis in today's discussion. But since most of us are familiar

with the Tripoli Agreement, we might as well use this as our point of departure.

The Tripoli Agreement

Although Nur Misuari calls it a compromise solution which he accepted at first and rejected later in reaction to Marcos' machinations, the Tripoli Agreement stands as the only document containing the Philippine government's recognition of the Moro right to self-determination. Until ratified, the Constitutional Commission's grant of autonomy to the Moro and Cordillera peoples remains as a mere proposal.

Let us make a quick survey of the salient points of the document.

It provides for the establishment of autonomy within the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippine Republic, encompassing the 13 provinces of Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, North Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, South Cotabato, Davao del Sur and Palawan.

Immediately after the signing of the agreement, a ceasefire was to take effect, its implementation to be supervised by a joint government-MNLF committee with assistance from the Quadripartite Ministerial Commission. Some specific activities to be supervised were the grant of complete amnesty in the autonomy, the release of all political prisoners, the return of all refugees, and the freedom of movement in meetings.

The following items were provided for but marked "to be discussed later":

- a. joining the Moro forces with the Armed Forces of the Philippines;
- b. relationship between the Autonomy-established schools with the general educational system;
- c. relationship between the administration of the Autonomy and the Central administrative system;
- d. relationship between the financial and economic system of the Autonomy with the central financial and economic system;
- e. representation and participation of the Autonomy in the central government;
- f. relationship between the Special Regional Security Forces and the central security forces of the government;
- g. membership in the legislative assembly of the Autonomy, and
- h. share of the Autonomy in the revenues from mines and mineral resources.

Only two of the substantive provisions need no retouching: the one on foreign policy and the other on the setting up of courts and the implemen-

tation of the Shari'ah or Islamic Laws.

Also provided for was the creation of a mixed committee composed of Philippine government-MNLF representatives whose task was "to study in detail the points left for discussion." This was to meet in Tripoli from February 5 to not later than March 3, 1977. The product of their talks would then be initialed at Jeddah in the first week of March and finally signed in Manila by the very same people who had earlier affixed their signatures to the agreement.

Then, immediately after the signing in Manila, a Provisional Government for the autonomy shall be established to handle the preparation for the election of members to the Legislative Assembly of the Autonomy. Until a regular government is formed by the elected Legislative Assembly, this Provisional Government shall administer the affairs of the Autonomy.

The last provision states that the Central Government "shall take all necessary constitutional processes for the implementation of the entire agreement."

A mixed committee was indeed formed and talks proceeded as scheduled but ended in a deadlock. President Marcos then sent the First Lady to Libya to break the impasse. The result of that trip was the so-called three-point agreement dated March 18, 1977, between President Marcos and Muammar Khaddafi, as follows, and may be construed as an integral part of the Tripoli Agreement:

- a. A decision to be issued by the President of the Republic declaring autonomy in the 13 areas defined by the Tripoli agreement.
- b. A provisional government for the autonomy to be formed by a decision issued by the President of the Republic in which the concerned parties from the Moro National Liberation Front and the inhabitants of the areas of autonomy may take part.
- c. This provisional government will hold a referendum in the areas of autonomy concerning the administrative arrangements within the areas of autonomy in accordance with Article XI (3) of the Philippine Constitution (1973) and this means that people be asked to organize themselves administratively within the areas of autonomy.

Significance of the Tripoli Agreement for Our Discussion

The Moro people seem divided on what to do with the Tripoli accord now that President Marcos, the other party to the agreement, has fallen in disgrace.

On the one hand, the MNLF-RG, the MILF and various other sectors of the Moro population continue to demand for the full implementation of the

document's letter and spirit. On the other, the MNLF has been consistent in its rejection following Marcos' own subversion of the same.

Indeed, the document that had been hailed in the media and by many people as the end of the war in the south did come to a sad ending for the Moro people. The unitary autonomy became Regions 9 and 12; the 13 provinces were reduced to 10, and the Lupong Tagapagpaganap and the Batasang Pampook functioned merely as the extension of the Office of the President, with no real powers of their own to speak of.

But this experience and document still carry some value to us. For one, it teaches us one signal lesson: never trust the enemy. Never trust U.S. imperialism. Never trust in a regime that exists to serve the basic interests of imperialism. The elimination of imperialism is a pre-requisite to the attainment of genuine Moro self-determination.

For another, we realize that some items in the substantive provisions are so basic that should there be another document on Moro autonomy, matters touching on mines and mineral resources, education, economy, administration, autonomous powers, representation, Moro armed forces, the Shari'ah and the judiciary are expected again to re-appear, though perhaps in more concrete and explicit forms.

Finally, we cannot overlook the fact that the MNLF-Bangsa Moro Army was able to force a vicious enemy like the U.S.-supported Marcos dictatorial regime to the negotiating table and sign a document which for the first time recognizes the Moro right to self-determination. The ending in the Tripoli episode did not favor the Moro people, true, but still it marked a new stage in the Moro struggle for self-determination. The MNLF's decision to revert to independence, moreover, announces their determination and steadfastness in the struggle — not to accept anything less than genuine, acceptable self-determination which will ensure ultimate justice to the Moro people.

The Implication of Moro Autonomy on the Lumadnon and the Christian Population within the Autonomy

When we speak of implication, we are normally referring to the imaginable effects, both short term and long term, of Moro autonomy on the Lumadnon and Christian populations within the area of autonomy. I say imaginable because the letter and spirit of the Tripoli Agreement were never really implemented, and so, we have no real experience to speak of.

If in the future, the Moro people will once again find autonomy acceptable to them, there are a few things we should keep in mind, at least for now, to guide us in our discussion. First, Moro autonomy will be designed

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principally for the 13 ethno-linguistic groups of the Muslims; second, the characteristic features of this autonomy will be Islamic; third, we can expect the Moro people to maintain a position of dominance; fourth, the territory involved might still be the 13 provinces specified in the Tripoli Agreement, if not more; fifth, the Moro, Lumadnon and Christian populations are not evenly distributed within the autonomy; sixth, there are existing contradictions among the three major segments of the population which are deeply rooted historically; and seventh, the neo-colonial structure has to this day remained intact and may continue to be so for sometime to come.

For lack of time, we cannot do justice to all these points which rightly deserve to be scrutinized. Let me just limit myself to four major items: the general population balance in the thirteen provinces; the question of political participation among the three major segments of the population; the issue of land; and neo-colonialism.

The Balance of Population in the Thirteen Provinces

In showing the population balance of the area of autonomy, I shall confine myself to the figures of the 1970 census which presumably was used by the negotiators of the Tripoli Agreement. Let me warn you, however, that these figures are highly controversial.

In the thirteen provinces of Palawan, Tawi-tawi, Sulu, Basilan, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, North Cotabato, South Cotabato and Davao del Sur, the total Moro population is 31.79 percent, the Lumadnon 5.72 percent and the Christian approximately 60.00 percent.

Five provinces have a Moro majority: Sulu and Tawi-Tawi 95.15 percent; Basilan 61.9 percent; Lanao del Sur 91.38 percent, and Maguindanao 64.11 percent.

If we wish to expand the territory with Moro majority further, we can go down to the level of municipalities. Here we see that there are 72 municipalities from a total of 174 in nine provinces which have a Moro majority, as follows:

North Cotabato	1 / 14
Maguindanao	9 / 14
Lanao del Norte	7 / 21
Lanao del Sur	29 / 30
Zamboanga Norte	2 / 20
Zamboanga Sur (including Basilan)	1 / 33
Sulu (& Tawi-Tawi)	22 / 22
Palawan	1 / 20
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TOTAL	72 / 174

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If we include those municipalities with Moro population of between ten to forty-nine percent, the seventy-two towns and nine provinces can still be increased to 113 towns from a total of 211 in thirteen provinces, excluding Davao del Sur but including Davao Oriental, as follows:

North Cotabato	7 / 14
South Cotabato	2 / 16
Maguindanao	12 / 14
Sultan Kudarat	8 / 11
Lanao del Norte	15 / 21
Lanao del Sur	30 / 30
Zamboanga del Sur (including Basilan)	9 / 33
Zamboanga del Norte	3 / 20
Sulu & Tawi-Tawi	22 / 22
Palawan	4 / 20
Davao Oriental	1 / 11
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TOTAL	113 / 212

Let us now see the population concentration of the Lumadnon. At least twelve of these Lumadnon tribes are native inhabitants of the area of the autonomy: Tagbanua and Batak in Palawan; Subanun in the Zamboanga peninsula; Higaunon in Iligan City, Lanao del Norte; Manobo, Tiruray, B'laan; Ubo, and T'boli in the four Cotabato provinces of North and South Cotabato, Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat; Tagakaolo and Bagobo and B'laan in Davao del Sur. They are located in a total of nine provinces, as follows:

Palawan	4.20 %
Sulu & Tawi-Tawi	—
Basilan	—
Zamboanga Sur	4.93 %
Zamboanga Norte	10.66 %
Lanao Norte	0.28 %
Lanao Sur	—
North Cotabato	5.04 %
Maguindanao	5.88 %
Sultan Kudarat	5.99 %
South Cotabato	9.43 %
Davao del Sur	19.44 %

The provinces of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Basilan and Lanao del Sur do not have any indigenous non-Muslim tribes.

Notice that if we are to lay these figures in a single map, say, indicating the Lumadnon and the Moro with specific colors, we can readily perceive overlaps among the various colors. Adding the Christian population into the map would further clutter up the scene. Already, with the overlapping colors, I am hoping that we can all imagine how such a population situation would be reflected in the political life of the autonomy.

The Question of Political Voice in the Moro Autonomy

If we concede the right to self-determination of the Moro people, are we equally prepared to grant the same right to the Christian population and to the Lumadnon — in equal terms? If our answer to this question is in the positive, and I presume it is, then we must be prepared to see various states of dominance by other population groups in the autonomy, not just Moro dominance. Will this arrangement be acceptable to the Moro people? I am actually leading to manifesting the inherent contradiction that is bound to arise where three groups of people, each with its own right to self-determination, inhabit the same territory. If the scenario is difficult to visualize, in theory, perhaps it ought to be more difficult in the concrete.

Let us retrace our steps and imagine a skeletal repetition of the "autonomous" experience we had under the Marcos regime. The first thing we can expect to be created is a provisional government tasked with the immediate problem of establishing the regular government of the autonomy. At that time, the composition of the provisional government included representatives from the MNLF and the inhabitants of the areas of the autonomy. How will the composition of the provisional government be decided this time? I believe this to be a fundamental question because, in the past, no political voice was explicitly given to the Lumadnon. They were in effect disenfranchised.

Presumably, too, a referendum will precede the establishment of a regular executive body and legislative assembly. I submit that a referendum in the area of autonomy at this point in time, when relations among the three major segments of the population are extra-sensitive and volatile, can be both very dangerous and very wrong. Each population group has its own vested interests and deeply rooted sentiments about the others. To have recourse to a game of numbers, which is what a referendum is all about, will result in serious damage to the vested interests of the numerically small and in the legitimized trampling of basic rights. I believe it is high time we explore other means of arriving at decisions other than referenda, at least in the area of autonomy.

Then we come to the composition of the legislative assembly and the executive body. How much representation will be allowed to each group, and on what basis?

In the judiciary, whose laws will prevail in the resolution of conflicts involving persons of at least two groups?

These questions are to be taken seriously because, already there are surfacing more and more expressions of resistance even to the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement. And even if we discount the possibility that the agreement will ever be implemented, there is now the provision in the new constitution which grants autonomy to the Moro people and the people of the Cordillera and that "the creation of the autonomous region shall be approved in a plebiscite by the majority of voters of the constituent units."

Let us hope that with more discussions like this, answers to seemingly insurmountable questions will emerge piece by piece.

The Issue of Land

Claim to ancestral land is a central issue in the Moro struggle for self-determination. No nation or people can exist without a territory. This has been made clear in the documents published by the leaders of the MNLF and the MILF.

Now, if we go back to our population figures, there is bound to be some conflict here. The Christian population need not worry too much because they do not have ancestral claims, at least those who came from the north. What they have are proprietary rights which the MNLF said would be respected. What we can really worry about is the probable conflict over ancestral claims between the Lumadnon and the Moro people; there are no clear boundaries between them.

Unlike the Moro people, the Lumadnon are a relatively scattered people at this point in time, and it is for this reason that in their Lumad-Mindanao Convention in June 1986 in North Cotabato, they decided to organize themselves into one single group all over Mindanao. There are also some representatives from Palawan.

Though they believe that they, too, have a right to self-determination and a rightful claim over their ancestral lands, they are likewise keenly aware of their inherent weaknesses: unarmed, lacking in education, lacking in tribal homogeneity, relatively dispersed, and each tribe tends to look after its own.

It was exactly weaknesses like these which rendered them vulnerable to massive dislocation and displacement in the past.

Now, since there are at least three property systems in existence in the

area of autonomy, that is, the state system, that of the Lumadnon and that of the Moro people, which of them shall be used in resolving the issue of ancestral land claims, likewise the conflict between ancestral and proprietary claims?

Like the issue of political representation, the problem of land has historically been a ticklish one, and is bound to remain so with the prevalence of Christian chauvinism and the corresponding Lumadnon and Moro responses to it.

Tackling the Dominant Neo-Colonial Structure

Neo-colonialism in the Philippines means that we are far from sovereign in our own land. We continue to be subject to the dictates of U.S. imperialism.

The Bataan Nuclear Plant, the American Military Bases, IMF-World Bank dictates, import liberalization, the stranglehold of the dollar in the nation's financial system, multinational corporations, oil drilling operations in the seas of Sulu and Palawan, large-scale fishing in the seas of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan, American monopoly over the Philippine pineapple and banana industries, American control in our mining industry, rubber, oil, paper, pharmaceuticals, American interference in our political life, American military supplies like Armalites and ammunitions, planes, tanks and helicopters, unequal treaties, and many others — these are only some of the manifestations of how American imperialism has exercised control over the content and direction of our national life.

The tentacles of imperialism, with active assistance from the local politico-economic ruling elite, are spread far and wide in the entire archipelago. No one can claim exemption from it. Not even the clothesless among the poorest among us.

Barrio children who go to school and therefore buy paper, pencil, ballpen, clothes and other little things are victims of imperialism. Whenever barrio people wash their clothes with soap, some imperialist manufacturer gets rich. Their very state of poverty is the product of imperialist stranglehold over Philippine economy.

The seeds of American imperialist control in this country have been sown long ago in the time of U.S. colonial period. One need only remember the words of Paul V. McNutt, the American High Commissioner in the Philippines. He said in 1945: "Politically we brought the islands through progressive steps to the verge of independence. Economically we brought the islands through progressive steps to almost complete dependence upon our markets. On the one hand we sought to sever the ties; on the other we chained them ever closer to us."

The unequal treaties which have tied the country to the United States up

to this time have actually made a mockery of the so-called granting of independence in 1946. The stranglehold tightened over the years since then and increasingly so during the Marcos dictatorial regime.

The resettlement program of the American colonial regime which brought thousands of Christian families to Mindanao and subsequently led to the dislocation of thousands of Moros and Lumadnon from their ancestral lands was a colonial policy designed to open the rich lands of Mindanao to American penetration.

The progressive marginalization of the Lumadnon and the Moro people in Mindanao was the product of American colonial policies which were subsequently adopted and continued by the succession of Philippine administrations, thus perpetuating the now institutionalized national oppression and exploitation of these two peoples.

In the entire archipelago, in short, the problem of neo-colonial predominance is the problem of all peoples. It stands as the main stumbling block to the attainment of genuine self-determination, whether local, regional or national. The same situation is being experienced by the peoples of Third World countries.

Still, we must not overlook an equally pervasive reality in our midst. The deeply ingrained presence of Christian or majority chauvinism which afflicts the Christian population colors or blurs their relationship with the Lumadnon and the Moro people. The latter naturally respond with their own brand of chauvinism. Between the two chauvinisms, however, majority chauvinism is principal and must be combatted more vigorously; it has historically functioned to aggravate the already serious problems faced by the peoples of Mindanao.

Working Out Solutions to Strengthen Unity and Uphold Equality in the Autonomy

Again, assuming that the Moro people have agreed among themselves to accept autonomy within the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of the Philippine Republic, we can assume further that they are also desirous of unity and equality with the other two major segments of the population of the autonomy.

There is a need at this point to clarify the historical origins and damaging effects of Christian chauvinism. It is, first of all, that sentiment of arrogance and discrimination exhibited by the Christian population towards both Moro and Lumadnon. It is premised on the imagined superiority of the Christian over the others.

Implanted and nurtured in the 333 years of Moro-Spanish war, it started

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with the Spaniards' simplistic view of the world: that the world is made up of two forces, the forces of good and the forces of evil. The good are with God, and the evil with the Devil. The Christians are with good and God, and the non-Christians are with evil and the Devil. It is the duty of every Christian to combat and eliminate the forces of evil. And since the Catholic religion is the only true faith, everything else is false. Islam logically belongs to the forces of evil and must be combatted.

This is why in the *moro-moro*, that form of drama which was popularized by the Spaniards and which always had Christians as the main protagonists, the Muslims always lost in the end, either dead or converted. The spirit of the Christian sense of superiority is colored by religion.

American colonizers encouraged such sentiments by the simple act of categorizing the peoples of the Philippines at that time as either *civilized* or *uncivilized*. The civilized were the Christians or Filipinos, and the uncivilized were the Moros and the wild tribes. The racist-colored concept of "civilization" became an added dimension to Christian chauvinism.

While the American colonial officials kept themselves safely at the top of the social scale, colonial policies were designed to glorify the Christians over the others, such that the eventual assimilation of the Moros and the so-called wild tribes into the "civilized Filipinos" became a specific objective of American rule. Although the economic motive was clear enough for easy scrutiny, the resettlement of thousands of Christian families into Mindanao was an integral part of this process of assimilation. The policy of assimilation is a complete disregard of the right to self-determination of peoples, just as colonialism inherently is.

Already marginalized as a result of the Spanish colonial policies, the Moro people and the Lumadnon were further shunted aside. In fact, this process was institutionalized during the American colonial period. By 1957, all the Philippine government had to do, as it did, was to formalize their status as "cultural minorities" with the creation of the Commission of National Integration.

The damaging effects of Christian Chauvinism may be gleaned from one letter sent by an Ilaga *Kumander* to certain Moro datus in 1971. It says in part:

"If the Muslims in the Philippines are poor and backward it is because of their wrong religion and ideology, Islam. You will understand the meaning of what I am saying by just seeing the difference in progress between a Christian Filipino and Muslim Filipino.

"And this holds true with regard to their communities. The entire nation would have been united, peaceful and progressive were it not for the mistake of the Muslims in resisting the implantation of the Cross in

Mindanao at the same time of the arrival of the Spaniards. You and your people should not compound your grievous historical mistake by clinging on to the religion that has brought poverty, ignorance and darkness to you and your communities."

The Ilaga *Kumander's* views may represent, for some, an extreme one. Not quite so. It is in fact quite common among the Christians in the provinces of Cotabato, Lanao and Zamboanga, so common that the Ilaga movement and doctrine, anti-Muslim that it is, had no trouble spreading and finding support among a great number of people. When one recalls the indiscriminate bloody confrontations between Muslims and Christians in 1971, he should have no difficulty imagining the extent that Christian chauvinism can be stretched in the concrete.

Similar discriminatory views have been expressed with regard to the Lumadnon. These have, not so discreetly, found their way into school textbooks and state legislations and project implementations of both the government and the private sector.

Some Bright Spots in the Contemporary Scene

Widespread opposition to the tyranny of the U.S.-supported Marcos regime had actually revolutionized relations among the various peoples of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan.

On the part of the Moro people, the MNLF-led armed struggle for Moro self-determination brought about a broad acceptance of the Bangsa Moro concept both among the Moro people, the Lumadnon and the Christians. It also eroded much of the inter-ethnic differences that often tarnished relations among at least the Tausug, Magindanao and Maranao, the three most numerous of the Moro ethno-linguistic groups.

Among the Lumadnon, the decision by representatives of various tribes at the Lumad-Mindanao Convention in North Cotabato in June 1986 to unite as one in tackling their common problems represents one great leap from their divided situation in 1972. Lumad or Tribal Filipino Desks proliferated in the various dioceses and prelatures of the Catholic church in Mindanao, and in different Protestant denominations.

There is much talk now about recognizing and respecting the rights to self-determination of the Moro people and the Lumadnon. Among the Christians, people's organizations of every creed and political color blossomed almost everywhere in Mindanao. Participative democracy became almost a battle cry. Truth to tell, people's power has long been a reality. Christian chauvinism, especially among those directly involved with Moro

or Lumadnon concerns, is fast disappearing.

Numerous concerted mass actions and projects involving people from each of the three major segments of Mindanao's population have been witnessed. The seeds of unity and equality through common struggle have been planted and have flourished.

The numerous researches and studies on Mindanao and its peoples, public forums and small group discussions on the basic problems confronting these peoples, the surfacing of hitherto unknown or ambiguous issues — these were all products or part and parcel of the entire process of awakening.

A social revolution has been born and has bloomed, never before witnessed in the history of the Philippines in general and of Mindanao in particular.

The cost has been high, a naked testimony to the vicious character of the U.S.-supported Marcos dictatorship, but the basic problems of Mindanao and of the Philippines are far from resolved.

The neo-colonial structure, propped up by the combined forces of U.S. imperialism and the local politico-economic elite, is very much intact; Christian or majority chauvinism is still pervasive; the national oppression and exploitation of the Lumadnon and the Moro peoples continues; the genuine freedom and sovereignty of all the peoples of the country is still in question; the rights to self-determination of the Lumadnon and the Moro peoples remain to be fulfilled; and the unity and equality of all peoples of the country is still a dream.

The attainment of our dreams lies in our own hands. And with people's power, what forces of oppression and exploitation can long stand in the way?

Postscript

A Bangsa Moro Congress was held by the MNLF at Maimbung, Sulu on September 2-5, 1986. On September 3, at a press conference at the Congress site, Nur Misuari, Chairman of the MNLF Central Committee, declared, among others:

- a. On the Philippine territory. There is no question of dismemberment. The Bangsa Moro ancestral homeland has never been a part of the Philippines. Bangsa Moro's membership in the Filipino nation was imposed by the Americans in conspiracy with the Filipino leaders in

1946. The Bangsa Moro has been a sovereign and independent nation before this.
- b. On the MNLF's stand. Misuari's mandate as chairman of the MNLF is to pursue the final liberation and independence of the Bangsa Moro Republik.
 - c. On the Bangsa Moro homeland. Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan, including air and sea.
 - d. On the autonomy approved by the Constitutional Commission. The Concom has no mandate over the Bangsa Moro homeland. It will only preempt President Aquino's and his decision. He wants to exercise maximum flexibility in the peace dialogue to pave the way for negotiation under the auspices of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).
 - e. On the Tripoli Agreement. It has been pronounced by Marcos as null and void and the MNLF has no choice but to void it, too.
 - f. On the Bangsa Moro government. The Bangsa Moro Republik will be made up of autonomous federated states. In areas with Christian majority, they establish their own law-making body and govern according to their own rules. Same with the indigenous peoples (Lumadnon), consistent with their own culture and tradition. On a national scale, everybody will be represented on an equal basis.
 - g. On the census of the population to determine who is majority or minority. The basis of the Bangsa Moro struggle is the assumption that "this land belongs to our people." Not amenable to a referendum on the eventual agreement between President Aquino and the MNLF.
 - h. On the existence of the MNLF-RG and the MILF. Dimas Pundato of the MNLF-RG has re-affirmed his commitment to his leadership and to the MNLF before he came to Jolo. Salamat of the MILF is a puppet of Marcos; he does not belong to the MNLF.

At a meeting with President Cory Aquino on September 5, Misuari agreed to "support the continued cessation of hostilities." Substantive negotiations will be carried out in the future under the auspices of the OIC. Misuari has designated MNLF Brig. Gen. Abdul Sahrin, Chief of Military Intelligence of the Bangsa Moro Armed Forces to represent the MNLF on military matters and Ustadz Sharif Jain Jali his civilian coordinator; President Aquino has designated Maj. Gen. Jose Magno, New AFP Southcom commander for military matters and Agapito "Butz" Aquino as her civilian coordinator.

After the Congress, "Misuari will resume consultation with leaders in other provinces under this favorable situation."

THE MINDANAO FORUM

The Philippine Daily Inquirer, 12 September 1986, reported President Aquino to have said in a TV program that "she had the support of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) when she offered autonomy to Mindanao Muslims as opposed to the demand of the Moro National Liberation Front to establish a separate state.

"She said that before meeting with MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari in Jolo last week," the OIC assured me that they have been able to impose on Misuari that they will not support any secession move'."