

Peace Reconciliation: In the Context and Realities of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

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Abstract

After more than five decades of peace talks, the Philippine government has granted its Muslim population an autonomous government known as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). As observed, the biggest obstacle in the Bangsamoro peace process is no longer whether the parties can reach an agreement, but whether that agreement can really bring sustainable peace and development. To find workable solutions to the problems of the country's minoritized Muslims, the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) must look beyond their narrow group interests. To accomplish this, it must prioritize programs and initiate sufficient interventions that will sincerely address reconciliation and distributive justice, which is a prerequisite for conflict transformation and an essential component of long-term peacebuilding. However, now that the new government headed by Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. and with less than three years remaining of BARMM's transition, the government raises skepticism and even doubts, if there will be a tangible output by 2025. This study will look at previous efforts in post-conflict reconstruction and will delve into key issues and challenges in the Bangsamoro peace process that can stymie peacebuilding. Finally, to suggest pragmatic studies and interventions that could strengthen BARMM's peacebuilding efforts. This research relied solely on qualitative data gathered from reliable and authentic books, journals, and first-hand sources such as Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD).

Keywords: Bangsamoro; Moro Islamic Liberation Front; Moro National Liberation Front; Post-reconstruction; Reconciliation.

1. Introduction

The word Peacebuilding is often used in Peace Studies literature with the agenda of promoting pacifism and resolving violent conflict [1]. Unfortunately, conflicts are always imbued with violence especially when negotiations have failed. Like many ethnic minorities around the globe, the Bangsamoro people have to resort to armed struggle for 54 years to defend their land and rights.

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Which eventually lead to the crafting of Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) that gave birth to the creation of Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) on 26 of July 2018. This allowed BARMM to deconstruct and dismantle and merging of institutions to establish parliamentary system of governance within a unitary presidential republic. The post-conflict reconstruction has three main component dubbed as “normalization” the first one deals with security, the second is socio-economic development and last is the transitional justice. Moreover, Peace Process has become an important part of post-conflict particularly in the Bangsamoro Region in recent years. As according to Brouneus, nearly all conflicts today are intrastate, former enemies, perpetrators and victims, must continue living side by side after the conflict [2]. Yet, attitudes and behaviors do not change at the moment of a declaration of peace. Since coexistence is necessary, the need for distributive justice and reconciliation is profound because it is essential towards conflict transformation.

In the case of the Bangsamoro struggle in their right to self-determination, it has become a crucial reference of the Peace Processes in the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao. Of the 59 armed conflicts that have ended in the last 30 years, 44 concluded with peace agreements [3]. The social, academic, and institutional capacities to analyze these processes and strengthen peacebuilding policies have thrived in parallel [4]. However, no peace process has been implemented without peculiarities. For this reason, peace process between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Philippine government have learned from previous experiences of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). While transforming the peace process to a more justifiable peace development, it has also contributed to the international experience of sustainable peacebuilding. Currently, the Bangsamoro peace process is being used as reference with considerable interest to other countries affected by internal conflicts such as Myanmar, Thailand, and Turkey [5].

2. Methodology

This study's data is derived from archives and oral accounts of events such as Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). As a result, the qualitative research approach was the best fit for data interpretation. The researchers' first action was to conduct library research. These libraries contained necessary and reliable books that were both primary and secondary sources, however, data from reliable websites was also used in this study.

3. Peace Reconciliation

In the peace process, to reach common ground, it is imperative that the parties explore all options for a political arrangement that can accommodate their conflicting interests. They must get out of the independence-autonomy track that has constricted previous peace processes and explore different models and political structures that have worked well in settling secessionist conflicts in other parts of the world. However, there must be also a recognition of injustices towards the Bangsamoro people, with this, both parties can come up with sustainable conflict transformation that addresses historical, socio-economic, cultural, and political reconciliation.

Seen from an academic point of view, reconciliation is anything but a conceptualized tool for peace building. Hence, central to our analysis are rational issue of justice, specifically what have come to be called transitional

justice. Political theory, especially theories of justice, often discuss transitional justice as necessary step toward what Will Kymlicka and Bashir called, “established societies [6].” This means that much of the political work done before and during the transition to independence is largely overlooked or discussed in terms of intervention.

With this regard, we cannot legitimately speak of justice unless political, historical, social, and cultural reconciliation are stable. Political and social trust is present, and institutions are working to not merely represent the people but also help them to find self-cohesion by providing a space for direct participation and intervention in the peace process.

4. Historical Reconciliation

This paper indulged the idea that reconciliation is not a mere composition of aspects, but has a distinct meaning and contribution in itself, to the nature of peace processes. As a goal, it is important to identify the type of reconciliation that is relevant for protracted armed conflicts like the case of the Bangsamoro struggle. Through this, we deal with those individuals and groups who have to come to grips with prejudices, memories, and who have had to grow up in divided communities, due to past grievances and divisions.

4.1 Historical injustice towards Bangsamoro People

The reestablishment of relationships can, however, only happen if the injustices and the pain that they caused in people are given a salve. This is mainly achieved through a sustainable and transformative peacebuilding effort such as reparation, livelihood, assistance in rebuilding houses, provision of scholarships and education for the orphans of war and vulnerable children, health services, compensation for farm animals lost and for the relatives who died in the violence and also especially the recognition from the government that human rights violations and massacres towards the Bangsamoro people was happened. Beyond reparation, the Philippine government and MILF should also create the conditions in which people can live without fear and where distinct identities, culture, and human rights are respected. These entail political and economic transformations beyond that of relations between neighbors and ethnic groups. As according to Castillo, these actions summarize justice, the delivery of which would allow people to move on and let go of the past that is to not let it structure their present actions and relationships anymore. This, in turn, paves the way for reconciliation and the reimagining of the other as an ethical being [7].

Furthermore, most studies of the Mindanao conflict highlight the injustices and grievances against the colonial and post-colonial Philippine state, tracing the roots of violence to the historical resistance of the Bangsamoro people to foreign colonizers who ruled Mindanao bringing with them the Christian settlers and businessmen from Luzon and Visayas, and the transnational companies that grabbed the lands farmed and owned by the Bangsamoro people and the indigenous people [8]. The massacres, extermination, and illegal land grabbing was facilitated by the American colonizers who imposed set of property rights institutions based on the colonial system of titling, transfer, and sale of land over the Bangsamoro traditional system of communal ownership and stewardship of property [9]. In addition, economic exclusion was also committed by the Philippine government

towards the Bangsamoro people as we have seen in their poor economic condition in the present.

The current basis for resistance remains anchored to this historical injustices and discrimination, despite the shift in the economic balance of power, the changes in local political authority, and the assimilation of the Bangsamoro into the Philippine body politics. They resonate in the proposition that a solution to the historical injustices such as massacres, legal land grabbing, and economic exclusion perpetrated against the Bangsamoro is to be found in their right to self-determination, which is critical to achieving peace and development, and is best addressed through the recognition of their ancestral homeland.

Further, exclusion from benefits of national economic growth and disadvantaged towards the Bangsamoro people also have not improved during the periods of economic growth that the country as a whole has enjoyed over the past decades. As the Philippines recovered from the 1997 Asian crisis and its GDP grew at an average of 4 percent, most of the Mindanao regions recovered except for four of five provinces within the ARMM, which remain at the bottom of the ten low-growth provinces in the country in terms of real per capita income [10].

Before the inauguration of BARMM in 2019, this lone autonomous region had a profound effect on the human development indicators. The economic and social conditions in Bangsamoro region lag behind other provinces and regions, evidenced by its poor record in terms of employment, poverty, and health (Table 1). Absolute poverty in ARMM is 45 percent, compared to the national average of 36 percent. Unemployment is five times higher than the national average. Meanwhile, expected life at birth (ELB) in ARMM is only 52 years, in comparison to the national average of 71 years for the Philippines. In addition, infant mortality is higher in ARMM, where 55 infants die per thousand compared to 49 for the rest of the country [11].

Table 1: Human Development Indicators: ARMM.

Province/ Country	ELB	Poverty	Infant Mortality (per 1000 live births)	Percentage of Unemployed
ARMM	52 years	45%	55 infants	56%
Philippines	71 years	36%	49 infants	10%

As according to Snyder, the unsustainable nature of ARMM’s economic growth, coupled with the region’s exclusion from the benefits of national growth, make a durable peace more difficult to achieve [12]. Studies have shown how the type of economic growth that is directly caused by the massive infusion of aid and reconstruction expenditures, or by the exploitation of both lootable resources in post-conflict areas opens up new arenas of competition and conflict, and a rise in separatist or non-separatist violence [13].

4.2. Recognition of Massacres

The year 1971 exploded with armed violence among the civilian population, Moros versus Christians in Central

Mindanao, particularly in the provinces of Cotabato and Lanao. Christians were associated with Ilagas in both provinces. The Maguindanawns in the Cotabato area were associated with the Blackshirts, provincial security forces who were known for wearing black uniforms, while the Mranaws in the Lanao area were associated with the Barracudas, another paramilitary group. From January to December 1971, not a single day passed without a violent incident. Several massacres were perpetrated against Moro communities. One of these was the Tacub Massacre where a group of unarmed Moro voters were machine-gunned by government troops at a military checkpoint and mutilated by civilian bystanders in Lanao del Norte [14]. Another example was the Manili Massacre, in which Moro men, women and children who were gathered for a peace conference were slaughtered inside a mosque in the town of Carmen, Cotabato [15]. These massacres and atrocities towards the Bangsamoro people like the chopping off of the ears or decapitating them proliferate Bangsamoro memories of the 1970s. Many of them lost lands to Christian settlers. According to Castillo in his work, he said, "I had not met a Moro during my research who did not have a relative killed, searched, violated, terrorized or their house burned by the military or the Ilaga [16]." This is not surprising because the Bangsamoros who were alive during those days saw these acts of violence as an attack on their collective identity and their religion, a campaign by the Philippine government to eradicate Islam and Bangsamoros in the Philippines.

In 1972, the MNLF has been the frontliners in protecting the Muslim civilians. They declared their war of national liberation and their intention to establish the Bangsamoro Republic in the region that they claimed as their ancestral homeland, particularly the islands of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan [17]. Thus, from 1972 until 1976, war raged in Mindanao.

Moreover, the creation of the Ilaga and the declaration of Martial Law by President Ferdinand E. Marcos, however, created the conditions for the mass violence and social polarization. Bangsamoro people perceived themselves to have been victimized by the Ilaga, their supporters among the Christian settlers, and especially by the Philippine state primarily through its armed forces who sowed continued terror in their villages whether in times of war or in times of relative peace. It was common to hear stories of men running away whenever soldiers entered villages because they would have been taken, tortured or killed, an experience that only abated with the signing of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro in October 2012.

On the other hand, Christian settlers meanwhile also mirrored the narratives of the Moros. They feared for their lives against Moros who also armed themselves first through the Blackshirts in Cotabato, Barracuda in Lanao del Sur and Norte, and later through the MNLF and MILF. Several Ilonggo Christian families massacred by Moros and their continued sense of insecurity because of the presence of clan feuds (*Rido*) and what they see as injustices summarized in crimes like thefts and killings, etc. Furthermore, according to Barron, Engvall, & Morel, "as more than 150,000 have been estimated to have been killed in conflicts in Central and Western Mindanao over the past five decades [18]. And conflict has affected over 60% of Mindanao's cities and municipalities [19].

Furthermore, the Philippines must recognize the social injustices towards the Bangsamoros because this can help the healing process of the reconciliation between the MILF and the Philippine government. This recognition of massacre implies that the government is sincere to the peace process.

5. Political Reconciliation

In this section, it is essential to note that the crucial principle of a strong and useful conception of justice is reconciliation because it is only through reconciliation that we can begin to legitimately discuss Justice. And Justice can only be legitimately understood through reconciliation, hence reconciliation makes justice possible. According to Nordquist, political reconciliation is “a process where harm resulting from political violence, is repaired in such a way that trust again can be established between victims, perpetrators, and the society at large [20].” Few empirical studies have been made in the field of political reconciliation. According to Weinstein and Stover “Claims made of the relationship between for example truth, justice, peace, and reconciliation are in need of empirical backing [21].” Thus, this research is needed to define the challenges as well as the success connected with political reconciliation efforts in the Bangsamoro region. And in order to promote sustainable peacebuilding, we need informed decision-making that can strengthen reconciliation and avoid undermining insubstantial relations [22].

Consequently, most important effort of political reconciliation is to transform these relations through local community efforts that build trust and new social behaviors to replace the failed peace agreements which only maintain conflict through violent suppression which leads to the devastation of innocent civilians. Sometimes this is, or becomes, part of a strategy of the parties – the civilian population represents a target since it is seen as a resource for protection, as in guerilla strategy, or for material support for one side or the other. This is supported by Nordquist that the result of all this is that displacement, killing, and human suffering among civilians in armed conflicts, not among the military [23]. This is obviously the consequences in the peace process. Thus, this paper suggests that from this observation and given the general negative impact of the armed conflict, it is needless to say that if the hostilities affects everyone, then the peace process should affect everyone especially the grassroots or the common people.

Moreover, one of the peculiarities of the Bangsamoro peace process is that, reconciliation is not only between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) but also with its founding organization, the MNLF. As Nur Misuari accepted the provisions stipulated in the 1976 Tripoli Agreement and differences of political ideology within the organization, a new form of a revolutionary group emerged through the leadership of Aleem Salamat Hashim.

The creation of the MILF under Salamat Hashim when the latter began to separate from the MNLF of Nur Misuari as early as 1977. Some of the high ranking officials from the MNLF believed that the struggle of the movement is to gain an Islamic state not a mere autonomy. With this regards, they believed that Salamat Hashim is more worthy leader because he is an *‘alim* (Islamic scholar) whose devotion to the Islamic ideology and cause was untainted by secularist and foreign ideological influences since he finished his Islamic studies at Al-Azhar University, Egypt [24]. This particular background shaped Hashim to become an Islamic-oriented, while for Nur Misuari, he is usually referred to as secular-oriented for he finished his study in Political Science at the University of the Philippines.

These two leaders had also different goals, Nur Misuari’s goal was to liberate the Moro land from the yoke of

oppression with democracy type of governance. For Hashim, it is not only to liberate the Moro land and have freedom; rather what is more important is to have an Islamic state where Shari'ah can be the rule of the land. This is how the two leaders were identified based on their orientation and goal. For the leadership style, Misuari was said to have monopolized the decision making in the MNLF, while Hashim was following the consensus-type of decision making in the MILF [25]. With the demise of Salamat Hashim in 2003, the new leadership has gradually changed the main goal of the movement from aiming for independence to negotiated political settlement. With the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law in 2019 that abolished the former Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), a parliamentary form of government was formed through the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Furthermore, there are two observations one to be made in relation to the political reconciliation between the MNLF and MILF. The first is, that when it comes to peace processes in post-armed conflict, in particular after protracted hostilities, it is fair to say, that we do not only talk about a political process in the narrow sense of a process that depends solely on the actions from the Philippine government. It is a political processes in a manner that it encompass much broader layers of a society than is usually influenced by decisions taken by governmental structures. So for that reason, political reconciliation must be accomplished between the two leading Moro revolutionary groups. If the Bangsamoro government wants a long lasting peace in the region, then there must be peace within. According to Nordquist, if we have a wide definition of "peace", then it is not difficult to see how reconciliation can be part of a "peace process [26]." The other observation is that, as much as reconciliation depends on the free will of people to change their minds, its scope and pace will always be individually decided, it can never be commanded by a political decision. This means that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Moro National Liberation Front can provide space and opportunity for reconciliation to take place. In addition to this, it should always be remembered, that this is all about situations where many are deeply victimized and the aspiration of the Bangsamoro people into self-determination is the main reasons why the former and the latter must be reconciled.

6. Socio-Cultural Reconciliation

Diversity has often been described as both the beauty and the test of human civilization. By fostering inclusion, we can celebrate the uniqueness of every person and create and a more beautiful workplace, community, and world. Inclusion will create unity and give everyone a voice. Inclusion begins as we recognize, respect, and reconcile differences. With this regards, reconciliation means bringing different cultures into harmony in a way that allows all involved to work toward a common objective. This stage requires a great deal of empathy, but it is possible for anyone to master [27].

In my view on the other hand, the continuous resistance of the Bangsamoro people since the coming of the Spaniards, Americans, and Japanese in the Philippines has gradually assimilated into the culture of the Bangsamoro people. In the Bangsamoro context, we can understand the culture of resistance as a violent and non-violent act of the people against invaders or outside forces from colonizing them. This act of resistance has become an immediate psychological response to these external threats.

Also, this culture of resistance was instilled into the minds of the Bangsamoro which resulted also in the gradual development of a socio-cultural violence and culture of resistance which has been defined by Johan Galtung as any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form [28]. And this has now become the root of attitude cultural violence for them to prevent incursion from outsiders or from their enemies.

Moreover, the socio-cultural problem in the Bangsamoro region that is needed to be reconciled is the rampant cultural violence because of family feuding or '*Rido*'. According to Wilfredo Torres, *Rido* or Family feud is a term used by the Mranaw, Iranun, and Maguindanawn referring to clan conflict or violent reaction [29]. In addition, Moctar Matuan also defined a *Rido* as created when a "*Simok't*", which means a conflict between people results into death. When there is a death because of misunderstanding that is the time it becomes *Rido* because the element of retaliation or the desire to retaliate comes in. In addition, *Rido* also is characterized by a sporadic outburst of retaliatory violence between families and kinship groups, as well as between communities.

Furthermore, according to Macabuac-Ferolin & Constantino, *Rido* or clan feuding, has become the most important conflict issue facing the BARMM. *Rido* tends to interact with separatist conflict and other forms of armed violence, resulting in wider implications for conflict in Mindanao [30]. Internal displacement, loss of lives and livelihoods, destruction of property and the disruption of political and community life are among the impacts of *Rido* [31]. *Rido* instills and institutionalize fear, hatred, animosity, and revenge perpetuating violence and underdevelopment. Local governments suffer financial consequences as a result of *Rido*. A portion of their internal revenue allotment is allocated to paying blood debts and indemnities for lost lives and property damage to different parties.

Thus, Clan feuding is increasing in Mindanao. *Rido* includes recurring violent retaliation over perceived affronts or injustices [32]. Factions can be historical (geographic, ethnic, linguistic, insurgent); rivalries are often due to personal, family, clan, or political feuds. Conflicts can erupt over land dispute, marriage, elections, business deals, or personal grudges and often cut across and through families, clans, and insurgent groups [33].

In terms of the prevalence of *Rido* across the different provinces in Mindanao, Maguindanao saw the highest number of *Rido* incidents in 2014 [34]. The province was governed by the Ampatuan clan from 2001 until the 2009 Maguindanao massacre, which led to a power shift from the Ampatuan to the Mangudatu clan. Insecurity and poverty in the province reportedly increased under the Ampatuans [35]. Whether this trajectory has been reversed under the Mangudatu is unclear. However, the Maguindanao massacre continues to fuel retribution at the local level [36].

This is the reason why civilians are encouraged to possess firearms for their protection, and this become part of the culture [37]. This can be reflected in the SALW survey which presented the distribution of responses of the survey participants about gun ownership a part of culture and tradition. The table shows that majority of the respondents, two hundred thirty-one (231) or 38.5% responded "agree" which means that they believed that gun ownership is part of the Mranaw culture and tradition. One hundred eighty-four (184) or 30.6% "disagree" responded that they believed that gun ownership is not part of the Mranaw culture and tradition. This implied

that majority of the respondents believed that the possession of firearms became a part of their culture or tradition.

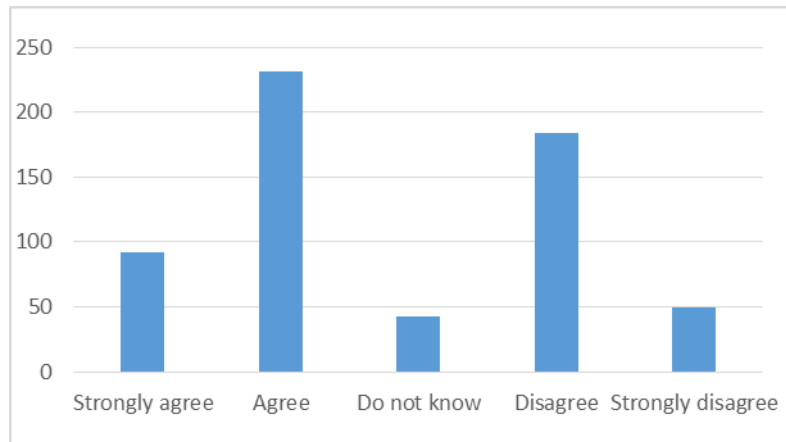


Figure 1: SALW Survey Result.

6.1. Inter-ethnic Dialogue

BARMM is dominated by Muslim ethnic groups such as Tausug, Mranaw, and Maguindanawn. These ethnic groups are also the largest Muslim groups in the country. The only difference is that Maguindanao is the largest Muslim group nationwide but it is only the third largest in BARMM. Tausug and Mranaw account for more than half (53.4% in 2010; 51.2% in 2000) of the BARMM population [38].

Consequently, the culture of dialogue is one of the main factors in the development of the new political entity in Mindanao, the so called BARMM. In general, the intercultural and interethnic dialogue is based on the principles of tolerance towards other religions, languages, cultures, political or other convictions; prevention of activities aimed at inciting interethnic and interfaith hatred; equality of rights and freedoms of citizens regardless of their nationality, attitudes towards politics and institutions of civil society [39]. With this, to avoid mistrust and calls for violence, there must be a need to build understanding and rapport among various ethnic groups in BARMM. In this peace and reconciliation stage of the Bangsamoro peace process, more attention is paid only to socio-economic and political stability with regards to the post-conflict reconstruction stage but it is also deemed important to discuss about the development on cultural, social, ethnic, and religious stability.

As far as the Bangsamoro peace process is concerned, dialogue is significant in these following reasons: Firstly, dialogue can contribute to the elimination or weakening of interethnic and interfaith conflicts, which will positively affect interethnic relations and socio-political stability, and also help obliterate ideological competition between ethnic groups such that among Mranaws, Maguindanawns, Tausogs, and other Moro and Non-Moro ethnic groups within in the BARMM. Secondly, the intercultural and inter-ethnic dialogue will help to unite the efforts of peoples of different faiths and ethnicity in the fight towards their right to self-determination. Lastly, the intercultural and interethnic dialogue will help the society to realize that it is inappropriate to search for real cause and solution of the conflict if only focused on socio-economic and political problems in the region.

With this, according to Nuñez, using data gathered through interviews with Muslims and Christians in Mindanao, she have found out that members of each group exhibited different perceptions of the causes of the Moro conflict. Muslim respondents cited the government's lack of fairness towards the Muslims as the main cause, while Christian respondents believed that the Mindanao conflict is rooted in the Muslims' desire to control and dominate Mindanao [40]. Similarly, intergroup differences regarding attributions of the Moro conflict were also discovered [41]. The desire for the normalization of relationships is imagined as a future when one can sleep well at night without fear that in the middle of their rest, they would need to evacuate, when one can leave their farm animals without worry of it being stolen, when one can go to their farms without fearing for their lives, when one can walk the streets and travel without anxiety of getting attacked, and a time without clan feuds. It is a time when they can concentrate on their livelihood and put their children in the school [42]. These are the "normal" in a *Teduray* woman's statement about transitional justice as "the abnormal becoming normal," that is when the situation of fear, anxiety, pain, and violence that has characterized people's everyday lives since the late 1960s would go back to what it was before the rupture, a notion shared by Moros and Christian settlers alike. For *Tedurays*, *Dulangan Manobo*, and the residents of *Nalapaan*, this peaceful co-existence hinges most importantly on *adat*, or respect for each other. A *Dulangan Manobo* said, "We want from the BARMM government to treat us equally with respect so that we will not be hurt. It shouldn't just be for Moros or Christians only [43]."

On the other hand, for *Tedurays*, the kinship between *Tabunaway* and *Mamalu* should be revisited and rekindled, but only in a genuine manner, not in a way that would endanger their distinct identity. A Timuay said of the process, "It should not just come from their (Moros) lips. They should be true, sincere. If they are sincere the results will be good." The *Tabunaway-Mamalu* folklore has been utilized by NGOs and the MILF in "kinship renewal" activities aimed at fostering a particular kind of relationship between *Tedurays* and Moros which are at times contested by *Tedurays* who claim that their distinct identity is being subsumed under the Bangsamoro identity.

6.2. Intra-faith Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue is difficult, first and foremost, not because it is dialogue among adherents of diverse religions, but because it occurs between human beings. When it comes to dialogue between Christians and Muslims, there is a specific history, real or perceived, which engenders feelings of resentment, hurt and pain on both sides [44]. In the case of the Philippines (Particularly in Luzon and Visayas), since it was colonized by the Spaniards, Bangsamoro fought with the colonizers for three hundred thirty three years (333). This resistance has resulted to the polarization between the minoritized Muslims and the Christians in the north.

In the case of Bangsamoro, there are several initiatives by various groups and individuals to create an interfaith dialogue activities and forums. Starting in the late 1970s to early 1980s, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) in Mindanao initiated inter-faith dialogue. This strategy was dubbed *Duyog Ramadhan* (literally 'accompanying Ramadhan'), carried out during the holy month of fasting among Muslims. Christians 'accompanied' or visited Muslim communities, and stayed with families for the entire month. While this was not explicitly building reconciliation skills, it was an insightful strategy for helping members of the majority

Christian Filipino population understand the logic behind the practice of Ramadhan. Understanding the faith of the 'other' was already a step toward a reconciliatory process. Unfortunately, this initiative was not sustained after the period of Martial Law (1972–81), although the UCCP has remained fairly active in inter-religious dialogue [45].

Since 1984 the Silsilah Movement based in Zamboanga City has offered a distinctive type of intra-faith dialogue. Italian missionary Fr. Sebastian D'Ambra, who founded the movement, was deployed in various municipalities in southern Philippines from the 1970s, at a time when several areas of Mindanao were virtual battlefields between the MNLF and Philippines military forces. Silsilah continues its dialogue efforts to this day, despite many drawbacks and threats of violence against key workers.

In addition, one of the notable intra-faith group was from the original Bishops-Ulamas Forum formed in 1996, composed of Catholic and Protestant bishops from Christian churches in Mindanao and Muslim Ulamas from the Ulamas League of the Philippines, this group has now transformed itself into the Bishops-Ulamas Conference (BUC), with a commitment to involve itself in peace - building and community development projects. This assembly emphasizes the activation of the faith dimension in the search for peace. From its modest beginnings in 1996, the BUC has inspired its members to put up their own interfaith local organizations in Davao, Cotabato and Zamboanga [46]. As a leading element in interreligious dialogue in Mindanao, the BUC plays an important role in promoting mutual respect and tolerance among Christians, Muslims and Lumad through discussion groups, training workshops, and celebration activities such as the Mindanao Week of Peace.

Moreover, although the Dansalan Research Center-Prelature of Marawi in Lanao del Sur has ceased operating as an institution that offered summer courses on Islam and Mindanao, similarly, the Franciscan Mission in Mindanao has also undertaken its own Franciscan dialogue program in Kidapawan City in Cotabato for the last ten years. This program, which integrates theory and community exposure on interfaith and intercultural dialogue, is designed for Franciscan priests, brothers, nuns, seminarians and lay workers.

In addition, there were other Moro groups such as the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Tabang Mindanaw, and also the newly inaugurated interfaith organization in the Mindanao State University, Marawi Campus called the Mindanao Interfaith Youth Circle (MIYC) which was founded by some faculty members from the History Department of the said university. This organization conducted a series of inter-religious dialogues and trainings aimed at a "culture of peace and formation".

These organizations was created to provide a venue and mechanism for the telling of hurts and biases such as what they do not like and like about the other, even telling stories that directly implicate specific persons [47]. The outcome was that it fostered better respect and understanding for each other's way of life, and as a consequence, a more peaceful everyday life. Intra-faith between the tri-people of Mindanao (Lumads, Bangsamoros, and Christians) was seen as a manifestation of the reestablishment of relationships that were broken by violence, betrayal, disrespect, and mistrust. Now, many are kin regardless of ethnicity and spiritual tradition. Once the understanding and reimagining of the other as an ethical being had been reestablished, the leaders encouraged their constituents to let go of the past because adhering to it, would prevent them from

engaging in their livelihood, from looking forward to their future. Thus, intra-faith Dialogue in BARMM must be strengthened since the present region has its Christian and Lumad populace. And this is also significant part of the peace process and reconciliation.

7. Post-Reconstruction

Problems in armed conflict areas are systematic and frequently involve poverty and shortages of food, water, shelter, and other necessities [48]. Little progress on healing can occur in the absence of attention to these needs, the fulfillment of which is necessary for the construction of peace [49].

With the signing of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) and the leadership of MILF, what is the condition of the people? How is development? How is decision making? How far BARMM can pass laws in the parliament? These questions are coming from the civilians who supported or did not supported the MILF in their fight to right to self-determination. While it is true that the inauguration of BARMM in 2019 has faced challenges like the COVID-19 Pandemic and thus asked extension from the Philippine government until 2025, where are we now?

Needless to say, armed conflict has negative impact towards the civilians. The long years of fighting between the Moro armed groups and the Philippine government from 1968 until the 2010 peace talk. The post-reconstruction in BARMM needs to go beyond the more traditional understanding of the term and should also talk into account the societal rebuilding that needs to take place.

Furthermore, the effective post-conflict reconstruction in BARMM may structure in this following frameworks: Firstly is that, establishment of a safe environment and development of stable security institutions must be given a paramount importance. When people, particularly in the grassroots, are asked what peace means to them, they typically refer to basic needs such as food on the table, education for their children, a means of livelihood and most importantly, is the sense of security [50]. In the normalization of BARMM under the Executive Order No. 79 which is implementing the annex on normalization stipulated in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). This normalization provides for a process to ensure human security in the Bangsamoro and enable the communities to achieve their desired quality of life through the pursuit of sustainable livelihood and political participation within a peaceful and deliberative society. Under normalization is the decommissioning of MILF forces and weapons. The MILF forces and weapons shall undergo a verification and decommissioning process to be conducted by the Independent Decommissioning Body (IDB) composed of three foreign experts, including the Chairperson, and four local experts agreed upon by the Philippine government and the MILF [51].

On the other hand, according to (Alonto & Yusoph, 2021), the decommissioning is not only to disarm the MILF combatants but also even the civilians. Because the effect of lack of security and visibility of police and military forces in the local communities is one of the main reasons why private civilians are forced to acquire weapons that leads proliferation. Possession of firearms are popular among the Moros because of the need for security. Since in this case, the state is unable to protect the civilians, the civilians find ways to protect themselves from other people. Not only from the soldiers but also from the thieves. Therefore, acquisition of loose firearms has

become morally legitimate for self-defense either from local threat like “*rido*” (family feud) or external. In addition, administrative justice is almost non-functional or very slow. This further justify the need to fend themselves from any form of violence that threatened their lives; especially Lanao del Sur placed second in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region Muslim in Mindanao (BARMM) with the highest crime incidents when index and non-index are combined as shown in the graph below. Index crimes are related to murder and homicide whilst non-index crime refers to violations of laws or ordinance.

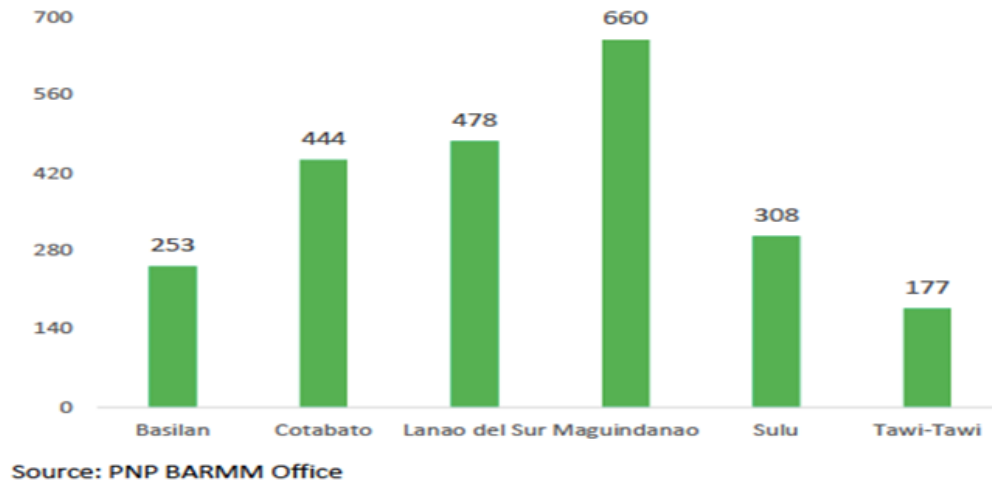


Figure 2: Crime Incident Index.

Thus, there must be substantive action on security development because this is a key element to the success of post-conflict reconstruction. Ensuring a secure community will enable the other processes in the reconstruction. Secondly, the local population and civil societies plays an important role in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the process, and that both the government and population support the process. As according to Saul, the popular involvement in decision-making is crucial for creating appropriate and effective reconstruction initiatives [52]. After all, the people that are affected have clearest understanding of what a situation needs. This then allows for the population to more fully experience the intended benefits of the reconstruction programs. Awareness can also help to prevent certain elements of the population who are against the reconstruction from disrupting it. However, in order for this to work in the long-term, the national government has to support reconstruction empowering the population in the BARMM. This means that the more a population has been directly involved in decision-making, the greater the awareness and understanding of the different components of the reconstruction there is.

Thirdly, investments and projects should match the needs of the population rather than the goals of the donor or the project. Historically and up through the 1990s, economic growth in Mindanao overall lagged far behind the country as a whole. Consequently, the level of economic output in the region is far below that of Luzon and Visayas, and poverty rates are much higher. Since the turn of the millennium, however, growth rates in the region have matched the high rates in the rest of the country, and poverty has started to come down. Growth has been buoyed by the performance of Davao City and its surrounding region. The glaring exception within

Mindanao has been the conflict-affected areas, which have seen little improvement since 2000. Across all indicators of service access and well-being, ARMM stands out as worse than Mindanao and worse than the Philippines overall (See the figure 3 below).

A secure environment and the backing of the local population and the government are preconditions for successful post-conflict reconstruction. One reason why there is a less and slow development in BARMM is the mismatching of programs. Reconstruction should address the needs of the locals, rather than the elites responsible for the conflict in the first place. The focus should be on rebuilding the social contract and not on consolidating elite power and wealth.

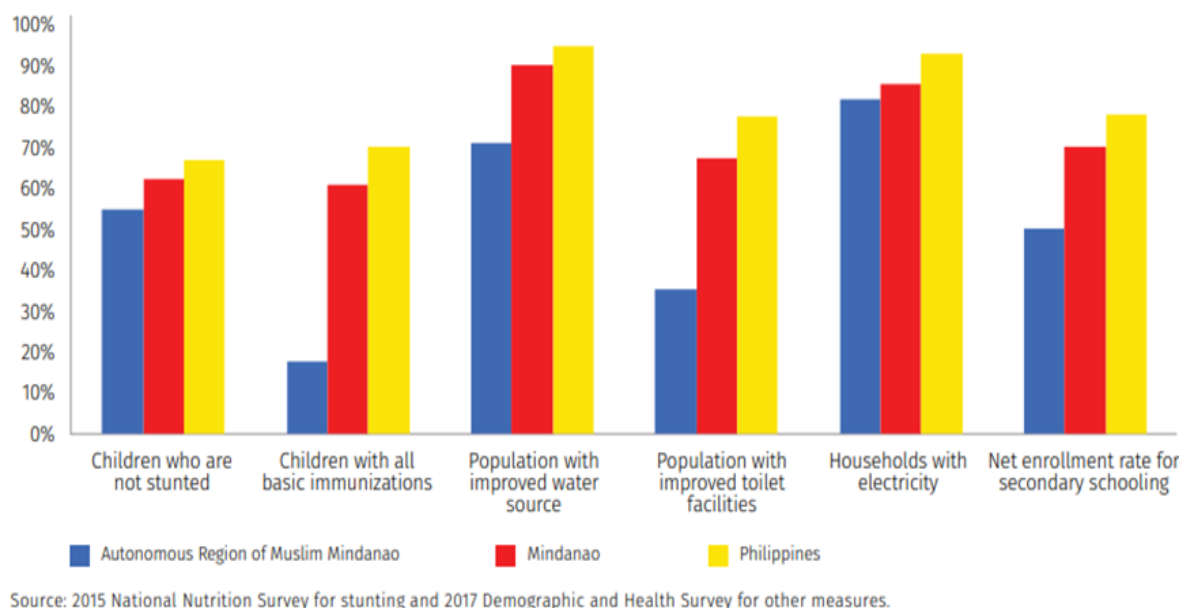


Figure 3: Socio-economic Indicators in the Philippines, Mindanao, and ARMM.

Fourthly, international actors should also remain flexible to the changing post-conflict dynamics and should not bring preconceived ideas of the reconstruction process with them. The role of international actors like Malaysia is deemed critical as it is not just an observer on the peace process but also a stakeholder which means they can be part of the reconstruction process by giving aid and supports to the BARMM.

And lastly, it is important to address the specific needs of women and youths in post-conflict reconstruction, as the transitional period can be utilized to improve the circumstances of women and youth sector. Thus, it is extremely important that women are also included in the decision-making process [53].

8. Conclusion

The researchers have concluded obviously that the reconciliation represents a process as well as a goal for that process. As a process, it refers to political, historical, socio-cultural components and it has in practice, the last decade, come to include acknowledgement of victims, truth telling, reparation, and justice. Moreover, another

important matter to stress is that, post-conflict society like that of the BARMM is no perfect. Discrimination, ethnocentrism, and even stereotyping often create division so deep that finding a way to settle on the differences among ethnic groups who contributed to the armed struggle seems near-impossible. If transitional justice can find ways to act as a means of political learning across ethnic groups (e.g. Mranaw, Maguindanawn, Tausog, etc.) or even political parties (MILF, MNLF, and other local parties), then there will be a foster trust and recognition, and if it can serve to breakdown harmful stereotypes, then this will be at least a small step forward meeting the challenges for transitional justice in divided societies like that of the Bangsamoro people.

In addition, the impact of Spanish-Moro wars has lasted even today. We have seen this through the years after the Philippine Independence from the Americans in 1946, the *Luzoncentric* mentality discriminates peoples coming from Mindanao. In turn, this engenders fear and suspicion of the other which needs to be acknowledged and hopefully, in the context of intra-faith dialogue, healed. This is to say also that reconciliation is an integral step—perhaps the first step—in the dialogical process. It also situates the dialogue as a spiritual event in which the justice, mercy and forgiveness of God are paramount. Human effort alone is inadequate; and the ongoing conversion of the dialogic partners become a focal point of the interreligious experience. Furthermore, it is important to note also that post-reconstruction is a long process and its success depends on the ability of the MILF leadership to understand the complications of the political environment, to coordinate projects in an effective manner, and involve a wide range of community stakeholders. The fate of the Bangsamoro peace process is now tied to the political will and priorities of the newly elected Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. The former President Rodrigo R. Duterte has made positive signs towards strengthening the process by signing the BOL. However, without a more holistic transformation of relationships damaged by violent conflict at all levels – among communities within Mindanao (e.g. 2017 Marawi Siege), between the Moro people and broader Philippines society, and between Mindanao society and the state – it is questionable how meaningful the reconciliation and sustainable peace can be for the BARMM and the questions that is always asked is, what is next?

Hence, reconstruction needs to be linked to political, historical, socio-cultural and economic development that matches local understanding and is compatible with local culture, and is focused on re-establishing sustainable development.

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